PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

**THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II**

SESSION 1994–95

COMPRISING PERIOD
23 January—3 February 1995

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THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 253**

FOURTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1994-95

House of Commons

Monday 23 January 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Occupational Pension Funds

1. **Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the total value of occupational pension funds in the United Kingdom.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. James Arbuthnot): In 1992, the estimated total value of occupational pension funds in the United Kingdom was well in excess of £400,000 million.

Mr. Redmond: Will the Minister confirm that the occupational pension scheme is the key pillar of pension schemes in Britain today? Is he aware, however, that half a million people will lose a total of £1 million as a direct result of Government advice to invest in the private sector? Will he give a guarantee that those who are affected will be notified so that they can claim the money due to them?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman gets his figures from. I had hoped that he would welcome my answer, which shows that the UK's funded personal pension provision is better than that of any other country in the European Union, but as he did not do so I shall say only that the basic pillar of our pension provision is the state retirement pension, which we shall continue to uprate in line with prices. This country's occupational pension provision is very good indeed.

Sir Donald Thompson: I warmly welcome my hon. Friend's first answer, but I remind him that occupational and private pensions have a sting in their tail. Often, having paid in for a generation, people have found that those pensions do not come up to expectations. Will he, therefore, regularly and rigorously review occupational and private pension schemes?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend will be aware of the Pensions Bill, the Second Reading of which the House of Lords will debate tomorrow and which will make pension provision more secure and more flexible. It offers more choice and greater opportunity to provide for equality in pensions. All that will be good news for pension provision in this country.

Mr. Ingram: Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond), does the Minister share the views expressed by the Independent Financial Advisers Association, as set out in today's edition of *The Independent*, which has taken court action to seek to avoid its duties and responsibilities to the 500,000 people who purchased personal pensions? Will the Minister give a guarantee, for which my hon. Friend asked, that all persons who have lost out due to the mis-selling of private pension schemes will be contacted and their schemes protected?

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the Securities and Investments Board. The Government have made it plain throughout that their view is that those who have suffered loss through the mis-selling of personal pensions should have redress, and that remains our position.

Child Support

2. Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to respond to the Social Security Select Committee's fifth report of Session 1993-94 on the operation of the Child Support Act 1991.

5. Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for further reform of the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Burt): The Government have kept the operation of the Child Support Act 1991 under review for some considerable time. We have considered very carefully the recent report of the Social Security Select Committee and representations from many sources. I am sure that the House will be delighted to hear that the Government have now decided what changes are necessary, on which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make a statement to the House within the hour.

Mr. Coombs: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. I appreciate his difficulties in providing me with the information that I should like before our right hon. Friend's statement at 3.30 pm, but will he assure me that the Government have taken due notice of the fact that, too often under the present system, neither the parent with care nor the absent parent is satisfied? In particular, will he reassure me that the Government have carefully considered the need to reflect the importance of clean-break settlements and travel-to-work costs in any decision that the House may take?

Mr. Burt: It is not possible, for reasons that, I suspect, my hon. Friend knows well, to go as far as he would like. I imagine, however, that quite a lot of my right hon. Friend's statement will meet his concerns.

The House should be under no illusion: the Child Support Act 1991 and the agency operate in a very difficult area between former partners and their children. It was never possible for the courts to satisfy all parties. We must all doubt whether it would be possible for any legislation to do that because of the circumstances involved. The Government and the House should seek to achieve a fair and balanced settlement of maintenance between the parties and a fair settlement for the taxpayer. I sincerely believe that my right hon. Friend's statement will reassure the House on those matters.

Incapacity Benefit

3. Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made in instituting medical tests for incapacity benefit.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. William Hague): The detailed provisions of the new tests of incapacity for work are set out in the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) (General) Regulations, which were laid before Parliament on 24 November. The regulations are subject to affirmative resolution, and will be debated by both Houses of Parliament.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I thank my hon. Friend for that information. Will he confirm that the medical test for incapacity is the most sophisticated of its type in the world and that it is designed to identify reduced ability to perform activities and most certainly not reduced likelihood to obtain a job? Does he agree that that offers great reassurance to general practitioners, carers and, above all, disabled people themselves?

Mr. Hague: Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. No one who is genuinely sick or disabled has anything to fear from the new test. Extensive development work and evaluations have shown that the test works as intended. Full preparations are now under way for its introduction later this year.

Ms Lynne: Is the Minister aware that a number of people have already been refused invalidity benefit and unemployment benefit? Will he reassure the House that, when incapacity benefit is introduced, those people will not fall through the net between the two benefits?

Mr. Hague: A decision that a person is capable of work applies to unemployment benefit or the jobseeker's allowance; one cannot have separate decisions for separate benefits. People who apply for unemployment benefit or the jobseeker's allowance must make themselves available for work and be actively seeking work, but within the limits of their physical or mental condition.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Is my hon. Friend aware of the welcome that has been given to the recognition in the arrangements for the transition to incapacity benefit that older people aged 58 and above deserve special consideration? May I therefore ask my hon. Friend to consider introducing a similarly sensitive recognition into the permanent arrangements for assessing eligibility? Will he consider whether it will really be necessary to put older claimants through the same hoops as younger claimants?

Mr. Hague: I welcome my hon. Friend's support for the transitional arrangements. He will understand that it will be very important to ensure that the new test is fairly applied, and is seen to be fairly applied, and that incapacity benefit is awarded fairly throughout the population. That must be uppermost in our minds.

Mr. Bradley: Can the Minister account for the huge discrepancy in the different estimates of the number of people likely to lose benefit because of the new incapacity medical test? In a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) in December 1994, it was estimated that 220,000 people would lose over the first two years. By January, according to the Secretary of State on Second Reading, the figure had risen to 285,000 over two years. Estimates in *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mirror* only last week showed that 200,000 would lose in the first year alone. Will the Minister come clean on how many people will fail the test and lose benefit? Is it not a hollow sham when the Minister claims that there will be no losers of benefit at the point of change between invalidity benefit and incapacity benefit?

Mr. Hague: No, the hon. Gentleman may have been confused by recent press comment, but that is because it is misinformed and certainly bears no relation to the figures published by the Government, which we stand by. In contrast to recent speculation, we expect that the majority of new applicants for the new benefit will be found to be incapable of work. However, we expect 55,000 additional cases a year out of 320,000 new claims to be found

capable. In the next two years, we expect 220,000 existing recipients to be found to be capable of work. Those figures will remain estimates until we see what happens over the coming years, but they are the best estimates available to us, and we stand by them.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my hon. Friend for his original answer and for his work on this matter. Does he agree that it is absolutely essential to have standardised tests that are seen to be fair and consistent?

Mr. Hague: Yes, my hon. Friend puts the point well. The new system will ensure the continuation of benefits for people who are sick and disabled, and it will do so in a way that is sustainable, affordable and fair and can be justified to the taxpayers who finance the social security system. That is the purpose of our reforms.

Habitual Residence Test

4. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many British citizens have to date been refused benefits because of the habitual residence test.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): One thousand six hundred and thirty-three British citizens have not satisfied the habitual residence test when claiming income support in the four months since 1 August.

Mr. Madden: Is it not extraordinary that, when the Secretary of State announced the scheme to the Conservative party conference, he did not admit that it would apply to British citizens, whereas Irish citizens are exempt from it? Is it not extraordinary—this has been admitted to me—that the Department made a mistake in applying the test to people seeking political asylum? An application for judicial review of the whole scheme has been made, so would it not be sensible to scrap the scheme before any more British citizens are denied benefits to which they are undoubtedly fully entitled?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken in saying that Irish citizens have a privileged position over and above citizens of the United Kingdom. It is perfectly reasonable that those who have made their lives elsewhere in the world who were originally British citizens or who can claim patrial citizenship should be subject to the test. Why should someone who has come over here on a backpacking holiday from Canada and who has two British grandparents have the right to top up their income on holiday with income support? No hon. Member would think that that is right.

The Department works on the basis of advice from the adjudicating officer. It is possible that he is changing his advice on the need to apply the test to those who are seeking asylum. That would considerably ease administration of the test.

Dr. Spink: As the habitual residence test enables this country to prevent backpackers from coming here on holiday and living off our benefits system, and thereby removing money from our benefits system on which vulnerable people rely and need, is it not extraordinary that Labour Members appear to care more for foreigners than for our own vulnerable constituents?

Mr. Lilley: I am sure that my hon. Friend reflects the views of 99.9 per cent. of people in this country. I should make it clear that we welcome backpackers from all countries, but we do not think it necessary to entice them with the offer of income support.

Incapacity Benefit

6. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department will withdraw the Social Security (Incapacity Benefit) (Transitional) Regulations 1974 and the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) General Regulations 1974.

Mr. Hague: No.

Mr. Miller: In the light of the criticism that the Department has received from the ombudsman in respect of the disability living allowance and the Child Support Agency, and in the light of concerns that have been expressed by several organisations representing people with disabilities, does not the Minister think that he should withdraw the regulations and reflect on them, or is the House expected to sit back and wait for a hat trick of disasters from the Department?

Mr. Hague: Great care has been taken to ensure that incapacity benefit is fairly and properly implemented. The training of Benefits Agency medical doctors is under way, departmental administrative procedures are being prepared carefully and I have every confidence that the necessary preparations are being made. The hon. Gentleman should reflect on the fact that great work went into the development of the medical test with an expert panel last year. The test was exhaustively tested on real cases by real doctors, and we are confident that it works as it was intended.

Mr. Waterson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that in the past 10 years, when the health of the nation generally has progressed steadily, the number of people in receipt of invalidity benefit has more than doubled to 1.5 million? Does not that show the absolute necessity of targeting payments on the people who really need them?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is right. The number of invalidity benefit claimants has risen from 740,000 in 1983 to more than 1.6 million today. During that time, GPs have often been put in an invidious position. It is right to reform the benefit, and right to do so in the way that we have proposed.

Bronchitis and Emphysema

7. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review the regulations on claims for benefit under the bronchitis and emphysema benefit scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: I am advised on the prescription of occupational diseases under the industrial injuries scheme by the independent Industrial Injuries Advisory Council. The council announced last week that it is undertaking a review of the present terms of prescription.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Minister join me in trying to influence the advisory body on two issues that involve the regulations on bronchitis and emphysema? The first is the X-ray, as a number of claimants who were rejected for benefit have, after death, been proved to have had pneumoconiosis. That system is unfair.

The second issue is the forced expiratory volume test, under which a claimant must prove a loss of a litre of breath into his lungs per second. People who are finding it difficult to breathe are being rejected for benefit because of the test, and I consider that to be callous and unfair. Will the Minister join me in pressing for the abolition of the X-ray from the procedure, and for a revision of the FEV test to make it more fair and equitable to claimants?

Mr. Hague: The council has a difficult job in ensuring that it proposes qualifying conditions to Ministers that ensure that benefit is paid to miners and ex-miners whose disability can most confidently be attributed to coal dust, rather than to other causes such as smoking. The council has now initiated a review of the qualifying conditions and evidence can be given to that review until 14 April. I strongly encourage the hon. Gentleman to ensure that he passes his evidence—including evidence about his constituents, about whom he has written to me—to the council so that it can take it fully into account before giving advice to Ministers.

Benefits

10. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to improve benefits to widows and the elderly.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Widows and pensioners will gain from the general uprating of benefits, in line with inflation, which will take effect in April.

Mr. Flynn: Will the Minister explain why the widow's payment, which was announced in 1985, has never been uprated by a single penny, despite the fact that it replaced a benefit that was increased in line with inflation every year? According to an answer that I received from the Minister, the widow's payment should now be £1,881, yet it is still only £1,000. It is despicable not to increase payments at any time, but why do the Government cheat widows at a time of bereavement?

Mr. Arbuthnot: Payment of the widow's payment is subject to a regular review by the Department. It must be borne in mind that we have finite resources, for which there are competing priorities. It is simply a question of concentrating help where it is most needed.

Mr. Hawkins: My hon. Friend will be aware that my constituency has the largest proportion of pensioners in the country. Will he confirm that, from April, the poorest pensioner couples will receive at least £100 a week and that, on top of that, their housing costs will be paid in full? Is not that a substantial measure of the Government's concern for the poorest of our elderly people?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is right and he confirms what I said in my answer. Even the poorest pensioners—the bottom 20 per cent. of income groups—have seen significant real increases of more than 10 per cent. in their incomes since 1979.

Mr. Flynn: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I give notice that, because of that atrocious reply—even by the standards of this Government—I intend to raise the subject on the Adjournment?

Habitual Residence Test

11. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have failed the habitual residence test since its introduction; how many of those decisions have been appealed against; and how many such appeals have been won.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): Provisional figures from the Benefits Agency show that 12,571 income support claimants have not satisfied the habitual residence test in the five months from 1 August 1994. Figures for housing benefit refusals are not available. Information on appeals is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Purchase: Given the cheap answer that we heard earlier to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), with the gallery playing and stereotyping of backpackers, and given the number of people affected by the regulations, is not it time that we were given an opportunity to debate the matter properly and thoroughly on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman should address that request to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. The Government are perfectly happy to defend the regulations at any opportunity.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the cost of housing benefit will be £10 billion this year and that, until he altered the regulations, rents of up to £350 a week had been claimed under housing benefit? May I therefore welcome the reforms that he has introduced?

Mr. Evans: Yes.

Mr. Corbyn: Before the Minister gets carried away with his verbosity, will his Department conduct an investigation into the plight of individuals and families, but particularly children, who have failed the habitual residence test? As a result of that failure, they lose housing benefit; as a result, some of them are evicted from housing; and, as a result, some of the children face being taken into care. Instead of considering the consequences of speeches made by the Secretary of State to the Tory party conference, as a way of playing to the gallery, will he consider the consequences of the test for the poor of this country?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman's indulgent rhetoric is a gross exaggeration. The Government obviously bear in mind and keep under review the operations of the test.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that, without the habitual residence test, British benefits would be available to any foreign scroungers who came to this country to finance their holidays? Does he believe that that is now Labour party policy?

Mr. Roger Evans: The last part of my hon. Friend's question is not for me to answer, but, on the first part, the point is very clear: are British taxpayers to be expected to pay benefits at current levels to anybody and everybody who comes within the confines of the United Kingdom? The Government have taken the view that there must be some sensible and reasonable limit.

Housing Benefit

12. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to place a cap on housing benefit for eligible tenants.

16. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about spending on housing benefit.

Mr. Roger Evans: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced measures to take effect from October 1995 in his uprating statement, which will limit housing benefit paid on private sector rents where they are above the average for the area.

Mr. Cohen: Is not Government policy on housing benefit a shambles, for which the Government look like making private tenants pay? The Government rely on the private sector for housing and have deregulated many private tenancies, but the Department of Social Security does not want to pick up the cost implications of that policy. If the Government are to change housing benefit, will they ensure that protection from eviction for tenants is included?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman's point is a gross exaggeration and, indeed, is simply untrue. To expect the British taxpayer to subsidise rents of several hundred pounds a week is simply unreasonable and would rightly cause public outrage. Even in the Greater London area, 95 per cent. of private sector rents are lower than £85 a week. The Government say that there must be some fair reciprocity between the burdens on taxpayers and the recipients. That is why there must be some cap based on the average rent for the area in which a person lives.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that housing benefit distorts the marketplace? Is he aware that, in my constituency, people may receive as much as £250 a week or £13,000 a year in benefits? Does not that cost taxpayers a lot of money and force up all rents in the private sector?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is no doubt whatever that there is an incentive to distort the market. That is why housing benefit has doubled in cost since 1988 and will cost £10 billion in 1994-95. It is fair and reasonable that the rents that my hon. Friend mentioned should not be wholly subsidised by taxpayers when they are out of line with average rents for the area.

Mr. Frank Field: To what extent is the escalating housing benefit budget caused by landlords pushing up rents or making fraudulent claims?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that such an estimate is extremely difficult to make. On the first of his two causations, when taxpayers write an open blank cheque, which is the danger with the existing system, there is obviously an incentive for some people to take advantage of it. The policy has been successful in terms of stimulating the private rented sector, which had been in the doldrums since 1919, when the Labour party interfered with the free market in private rents, but there must be some control for the benefit of the taxpayer, which is why we are limiting benefit to the average rent for the area.

Mr. Congdon: Despite my hon. Friend's figures for average rents in London, does he agree that housing benefit has been used to subsidise rents to the tune of up to £350 week? Does he agree that taxpayers will welcome the decision to cap housing benefit as it will represent better value for taxpayers and ensure that they do not subsidise luxury rents?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is right. The figures that he mentioned are generally believed to be far too high.

Ms Eagle: Will the Minister admit that that position has been caused by deregulation of the private rented sector, which his Government inaugurated in the first place? Private tenants are already being ripped off for below-standard accommodation in many instances. Instead of making them pay by possible eviction, why will not the Government regulate the private rented sector to save money for taxpayers, or, better still, have a proper housing policy so that we can house our people in affordable, decent homes?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Lady gives the game away if she really suggests that it is Labour party policy to re-impose some form of rent control in the private sector. *[Interruption.]* There is all the difference in the world between limiting a public subsidy and interfering with the free workings of the market. What the Government propose—

Mr. Battle: It is called subsidising landlords.

Mr. Evans: The elementary economic ignorance of Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen is palpable.

Income Support

14. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many persons were in receipt of income support (a) on 1 December 1992 and (b) on 1 December 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not available in the precise form requested. However, the total number of claimants as at November 1992 was 5.5 million and, as at February 1994, 5.8 million.

Mr. Dunn: Family credit benefits more than half a million working families by making it worth their while to work. Will my hon. Friend compare it with the minimum wage, which destroys jobs?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend makes two forceful points, and I respectfully agree with him.

Mr. Pike: If the Government accept and believe that income support is the absolute minimum that people need to live on, why is it that when people on income support need assistance from the social fund, they are given loans which the Government tell them that they have to pay back out of income support?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman has asked me questions on that topic before. He has not appreciated the basic point that income may be regular week after week under income support, whereas people's actual needs may vary from week to week, depending on their circumstances or needs. The system of loans offered under the social fund has been strikingly successful; it has helped five times as many people with loans, which are almost entirely repaid. That is more than we could hope for if we made simple grants.

Personal Pensions

15. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to improve the flexibility of personal pensions in retirement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: We propose to introduce two measures: age-related rebates, which will make appropriate personal pensions attractive across a wider age range; and more flexible use of personal pensions savings, which will allow personal pension holders to draw an income from their fund each year and defer annuity purchase until a time of their choosing up to the age of 75.

Mr. Duncan: I welcome those measures. Will my hon. Friend confirm that he has no intention of introducing the so-called minimum pension guarantee, as advocated by the Commission on Social Justice and the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)? Does he agree that a Government would never be able to deliver such a guarantee in 20 years' time? That proposal would stop people taking out flexible personal pensions, yet such pensions offer people the real guarantee of being able to provide for themselves in their old age.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is right. The Labour party's proposals amount to further means testing.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Is it not the case that, as well as making personal pensions more attractive, the Government are making the state earnings-related pension scheme less attractive by adjusting the outcome in the adjusted formula proposed in the Pensions Bill? People will still have to contribute the same amount of money to SERPS, but, eventually, they will receive £2.50 less as the outcome.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The amount is not £2.50 for every pensioner. As this is the first time that he has raised the subject, the hon. Gentleman has apparently only just discovered the change to the annualisation of SERPS, which was announced in June. That change is necessary to restore the original intention behind the SERPS calculation, which provided that SERPS should be uprated in line with earnings. For various technical reasons, SERPS has gone up even faster than earnings since 1979.

Disabled People

18. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures the Government are taking to help disabled people.

Mr. Hague: On 12 January, the Government introduced the Disability Discrimination Bill, which will outlaw discrimination against disabled people in employment and in access to goods and services. It will create a National Disability Council, which will be a powerful voice on matters relating to discrimination.

We have also announced a series of measures to combat discrimination against disabled people in transport and in education.

Mr. Hawkins: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will he join me in congratulating those organisations that worked so hard in consultation with the Government on their proposals, including Action for Better Access for the Disabled, which does valuable work in my constituency and in the surrounding area? Will he also confirm that the proposals contained in the Bill go much further than those contained in the consultation document?

Mr. Hague: Yes. I join my hon. Friend in congratulating those organisations—more than 1,000 of them—which responded to the Government's consultation document, which was published in July. Many of them asked us to do things which we have, in the light of those representations, decided to do—for example, to include financial services within the legal framework that we propose and to require alterations to be made to existing premises to end discrimination against disabled people.

Mr. Corbett: Does the Minister understand that the Bill is not mainly about services and benefits, important as they are, but about the civil rights of people with disabilities? Does he therefore agree that, although it is proposed to exclude firms with fewer than 20 employees from the need to implement the new employment rights, that threshold should be lowered over a defined period so that all job discrimination can be ended?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman must understand that 83 per cent. of employees work for firms with 20 or more employees, so the proposed new arrangements on employment law will cover the vast majority of the work force. Of course we must have regard to the difficulties that would confront small businesses in implementing complex new legislation. We must not get into a position whereby we drive small businesses out of business to help one part of the community; that is absolutely not the intention of the legislation. However, we shall cover the vast majority of the work force and make a lasting change in the way in which disabled people are treated.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend agree that, by proposing sensible, practical and fair measures, the Government's Bill will gain much wider acceptance than would be gained by proposals that have not been properly considered or consulted upon?

Mr. Hague: Yes. It is vital that we carry the whole country with us in ending discrimination against disabled people. It is not simply a matter of changing legislation and changing rules; it is also a question of changing attitudes and changing the psychology of millions of people throughout the country. That is why it is so important to carry people with us, as my hon. Friend says.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Science and Research

27. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his estimate of the total amount spent on science and research in the United Kingdom; and if he will list the proportions paid for by Government and by other sources of funding.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. David Hunt): Approximately £13,000 million, of which 35 per cent. is paid for by Government.

Mr. Bruce: I thank my right hon. Friend for that encouraging reply about the amount spent on research and development. Can he confirm that the Government proportion is greater than the average of our competitor nations, and that, unfortunately, the business proportion is slightly less than the average of our competitor nations?

What can he do to encourage businesses to realise that research and development is the cornerstone of their future prosperity?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend's assessment of the present position, but today's gross domestic product figures show that the UK is truly top of the premier league for growth in Europe, and we intend to stay there. The best way to ensure that we do so is to invest in the future, and to urge industry to do the same. Investing in the future means investing in research and development, and it is good news that industry's investment in R and D has increased, according to the latest figures, by 3 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Nigel Jones: Bearing in mind the fact that Britain invests less, as a proportion of GDP, than do our major competitors—France, Germany, Japan and the United States of America—what plans does the Chancellor have to help Britain do better?

Mr. Hunt: In comparison with other G7 countries, we do reasonably well, but of course we can do better. Our approach, through the technology foresight programme and through the forward look, following up the policies set out in the science White Paper, is to continue to urge the greatest possible investment in research and development, to set an example in Government, which we have done by ensuring that the science budget is now at record levels, and to maintain those record levels in the next financial year.

Mr. Rathbone: Will my right hon. Friend give us some idea of the way in which the Government give greater accent to developmental expenditure as opposed to pure research expenditure?

Mr. Hunt: Yes. We have increased the science budget by 32 per cent. in real terms in the past 15 years. My hon. Friend is right that we want an increasing emphasis on a partnership between the public sector and the private sector, especially to enable that basic research, which has always been fundamental in the United Kingdom to the strength of our science base, to be translated by proper investment, in partnership with the private sector, into the developmental stage. I completely agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Battle: The Minister spoke of us doing reasonably well in comparison with our competitors. Will the Minister then explain why, in spite of an overall budget cut in Japan recently, Japan's science and technology spending, through the Science and Technology Agency, was increased by 7 per cent., there was a 26 per cent. increase in funding of the human genome project and a 20.5 per cent. increase in the real world computing project, yet Britain continues to slip further behind, with overall real terms cuts in research and development this year? Does that not demonstrate that the Conservative Government only pay lip-service to science as an aid to wealth generation, and that, effectively, Ministers sit on the sidelines, while the science budget withers away?

Mr. Hunt: I am not often driven to say, "What a load of rubbish!"; I shall not be tempted to do so on this occasion. The hon. Gentleman, however, is not comparing like with like. We compare very favourably with investment in Japan. The hon. Gentleman talked about the science budget "wilting away". The science budget is at a record level in this financial year— [HON. MEMBERS: "Overall?"] I am quoting the hon. Gentleman; he said, "the science budget is wilting away." The science budget is at a record high level; it is up by 32 per cent. in real terms. I shall take the hon. Gentleman more seriously when he comes armed with the correct information.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Bearing in mind the amount spent on research and development in the United Kingdom and how it is spent, will my right hon. Friend think carefully, before he makes a visit to South Africa, about whether it would be appropriate for our Government to encourage, let alone assist, the South Africans to make a further major commitment to developing their arms industry? Surely that is not what we really wish for them or for the other countries that would suffer as a result.

Mr. Hunt: As my hon. Friend knows, we have devoted an increasing proportion of our research and development budget to civil research. I welcome the opportunity to go to South Africa and to encourage it to develop the sort of policies, which we have seen in the United Kingdom, that foster an ever-closer partnership between the public and private sectors. Similarly, I have recently been to other countries, seeking to set up important relationships between our leading scientists and theirs. I hope that my hon. Friend shares my wish to see that relationship grow stronger.

Research Council Funds

28. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of research council funds in 1993-94 was allocated to the 12 institutions which are the largest consumers of those funds.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. Robert G. Hughes): The amount allocated was £319 million, which is 50 per cent. of total grant awards.

Ms Jackson: What justification can there be for allocating half the research council funds to a mere handful of institutions? Is that not a return to the, surely discredited, binary system which favoured research-based over teaching-based institutions? What plans do the Government have to ensure that future research council funds will be more widely and evenly distributed?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Lady is utterly wrong. The awards are made on the basis of merit, which is something that I do not expect the Labour party particularly to understand. Awards are made on the basis of a full and fair external peer review, not political diktat. That is the way in which to do it and that is the way in which we shall continue to do it.

Mr. Fabricant: With the exciting news today that Britain may soon have the largest pharmaceutical company in the world, with the possible merger of Glaxo and Wellcome, can my hon. Friend tell us the extent to which the research councils, especially since the publication of the science White Paper, are being encouraged to co-operate with industry in research and development?

Mr. Hughes: We always encourage full co-operation. Indeed, through the technology foresight process, there has been unprecedented co-operation between business, academics and scientists. That is very much to be

welcomed. As my hon. Friend says, the strength of Britain's pharmaceutical industry and, indeed, of all our chemical industry is impressive. It is important that we should spread that drive and enthusiasm to the rest of our science and engineering industries.

Efficiency

29. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in what ways efficiencies in public services are being achieved.

Mr. David Hunt: Numerous.

Mr. Merchant: In the light of the success of the "Competing for Quality" programme and the recent report by the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, which stressed that the pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness in the civil service was never-ending, does my right hon. Friend agree that the programme should continue and that it is in the interests of the taxpayer that it should do so because it not only ensures that maximum benefit is returned from finite resources but ensures high-quality services at the same time?

Mr. Hunt: Yes, we shall certainly do everything that we can to redouble our efforts under that very important programme, the strategic importance of which was recognised in the recent report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. The programme is producing savings of more than £400 million per year against an outlay of £23 million per year, which is very good value for money.

Mr. McNamara: Given that, when the civil service was allowed to make in-house tenders it was successful in work to the value of 73 per cent., will the Minister lift his blanket objection to in-house tenders for all available work so that the civil service can make in-house bids? Does his savings account include the EDS contract and the Aldermaston atomic weapons agency establishment? Finally, are the more than 10,000 posts which are yet to be lost additional to, or included in, the losses that were announced by the Chancellor in his Budget statement?

Mr. Hunt: My reply to the hon. Gentleman is that I am satisfied with the present policy. Obviously, in-house tenders should be encouraged where appropriate and they should compete on an equal basis. We shall endeavour to ensure that that occurs, but in certain cases that is not possible.

When we have put out to open tender, it has been an extremely successful operation. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the detailed analysis that we produced on the day that we announced the very impressive results of the "Competing for Quality" programme, he will find the answers to the questions that he has raised.

Charter Marks

31. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many public service units have been awarded a charter mark to date.

Mr. David Hunt: Some 227.

Mr. Ottaway: Is my right hon. Friend aware that three of those public service units are located in the London borough of Croydon—the consumer advisory service, the environmental health department and the continuing education and training service? Does he agree that winning the mark is recognition of the high quality of those organisations and that members of the public should be encouraged to nominate those departments which provide services that deserve the charter mark?

Mr. Hunt: I join my hon. Friend in his pride over what has been achieved in his local area. As he will know, we have decided that, as the initiative for the honours system met with a warm public response with nominations for recognising suitable people, we would now like to open up the charter mark procedure to public nominations. We will announce the detail of how we propose to proceed in due course. I welcome my hon. Friend's support for that policy.

Mrs. Roche: Does the Secretary of State agree that the charter mark awarded to British Gas should be withdrawn immediately, given today's disgraceful news that it is considering charging £25 for home visits to elderly and disabled people?

Mr. Hunt: I am afraid that the hon. Lady is engaging in scaremongering. With regard to the second part of her question, I am very happy to make it clear that British Gas has confirmed today that there will be no service cuts to elderly, blind or disabled customers. I am also happy to confirm that the Government are determined that all suppliers of gas will have to offer special services for elderly, disabled or blind persons.

In relation to the first part of the question, I have received a letter from the Gas Consumers Council—which I have before me—dated 18 January. It says:

"we have faith in British Gas as a company that puts safety first and deservedly earned the Charter Mark, for past performance, in 1993".

The letter goes on to raise some current concerns. I am very happy to confirm that I will consider any specific concerns and seek to establish the facts before deciding on any further action.

Research Council Funds

32. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to announce the organisations which will be expected to apply for research council funds.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: As soon as possible.

Mrs. Campbell: When will the Minister honour his promise, made in the White Paper, that organisations other than universities and research council institutes will be eligible to apply for those funds? When he honours that promise, will he ensure that additional funds are transferred into research council budgets to cover the cost of the applications, or will university research funding be depleted yet again?

Mr. Hughes: As the whole House and the science community know, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor achieved stunning success in increasing the science budget. We will announce soon how that money will be used. We consulted widely on recommendations arising from the efficiency scrutiny of public sector research establishments and we will announce the outcome as soon as possible. It has not been possible to

do so yet because we agreed to include some representations that were made late—as I believe the House would have wanted us to do.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my hon. Friend consider the case of charitable organisations, particularly in the medical sector, that raise considerable amounts of money for research? I declare an interest in the National Asthma Campaign. Would my hon. Friend consider encouraging larger donations to research by adopting a formula whereby the Medical Research Council might back by a ratio of 2:1 or 3:1 the money raised by charities and spent specifically on research into the medical problems with which they are concerned?

Mr. Hughes: The money that comes from charities for scientific research and development is absolutely vital. We welcome it, as does the scientific community. It is important that the interrelationship between Government money, other money going into higher education institutions and funding from charities, as well as money from the private sector, is integrated and that there is no duplication. All should work together to achieve better results. I shall bear in mind my hon. Friend's remarks.

Citizens Charter

33. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what further plans he has to make the citizens charter justiciable.

Mr. David Hunt: The citizens charter has already raised the quality of public services right across the board. Where necessary, specific provisions set out in specific charters are backed by legislation.

Sir Thomas Arnold: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there would be greater confidence in the citizens charter if more remedies were available in the courts?

Mr. Hunt: I have great sympathy with my hon. Friend's point. As he probably knows, the citizens charter complaints task force is, as part of its work, examining fairness and independence in the public service complaints system. It published a discussion paper on fairness last September, and it will report to me this summer on the findings of the two-year review of public service handling of complaints. Perhaps we may hold further discussions when I receive that report.

Mr. O'Hara: Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that that is precisely the point? I do not decry the citizens charter. As a teacher in the old days, I used to give gold stars to my pupils, and merits may act as incentives to the organisations that win them. However, does the right hon. Gentleman not appreciate that, among the people whom I represent, the citizens charter has no credibility or currency? People are more concerned with the collapse of services that they see all around them, and the citizens charter is not an adequate substitute.

Mr. Hunt: It was clever of the hon. Gentleman to cover both extremes of view. I agree with members of the Opposition Front Bench that the citizens charter is here to stay, but I also agree with the hon. Gentleman that it must have credibility. There is a series of complaints procedures. It is important that public services not only handle complaints fairly but are seen to do so.

Foresight Programme

34. **Mr. Heald:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how the foresight programme is now developing.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: It is developing very well. The Government are grateful for the active support of business, academics and the wider science and technology communities. Reports on the progress will be published in the spring, and the 1995 forward look will outline the Government's initial responses.

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. Friend agree that Britain has established a lead in high-speed fibre optic networks, which will provide great opportunities for British commerce? Can he tell the House what is being done by the foresight policy panels to take that forward?

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Many aspects of work done in Britain are the envy of the rest of the world. First, some people say that we have 30 per cent. of all the fibre optic laid in the world. We also have the fastest broad-band communications system—the so-called SuperJANET system—linking many of our universities. We shall be making more use of it. As for the foresight panels, the communications panel has been giving us invaluable advice on how quickly to put in place broad-band services for United Kingdom schools. We want them linked up to the system, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education announced earlier this month.

Scientific Equipment

35. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what percentage of scientific equipment used in Government laboratories is manufactured in the United Kingdom.

Mr. David Hunt: I regret to inform the hon. Gentleman that the information that he has requested is not collected centrally in that form.

Mr. Miller: I thought that that might be the Minister's answer. He ought to keep his eyes open as he goes around Government laboratories. If he did, he would notice that a huge amount of sophisticated equipment which used to be manufactured in the United Kingdom is now imported. Does he agree that that reflects one of our problems—the fact that, although we have quite a powerful science base, our innovation is failing? What is he going to do about that?

Mr. Hunt: I want our manufacturers of scientific equipment to compete successfully right across the world. About 80 per cent. of this country's production of scientific equipment is for export—that is a high-quality export market. Instrumentation and control is a major export industry earner for Britain which produces a positive balance of payment. In the last year for which figures were available, 1992, that industry accounted for £2.1 billion. That is a success story which the hon. Gentleman ought to acknowledge.

Child Support

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): With your permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the White Paper, "Improving Child Support", which I am publishing today. The Child Support Act 1991 established the principle that parents are responsible for their children: both parents, even if they live apart. Taxpayers should pay only to the extent that parents cannot afford to do so. The whole House endorsed that principle, when it passed the Act, without a single dissenting vote. I reaffirm it today.

The whole House, however, has also had growing concerns about the practical application of that principle and the operations of the Child Support Agency. I responded rapidly to early concerns by introducing reforms last February. I promised then to keep the system under review, and I committed the Government to respond positively to the Social Security Select Committee's second report. In the light of that report and the experience of the first year and a half, I am persuaded that further significant change is required.

The proposals in the White Paper incorporate the majority of the Select Committee's recommendations, and in some cases they go further. Altogether, I believe that our proposals will enable the system to achieve its original purpose. They will make maintenance assessments fairer, improve the service offered by the agency and ensure that maintenance assessed becomes maintenance paid. I believe that that is what Parliament wants.

The major focus of criticism of the Child Support Act relates to past settlements of property or capital. Some of those criticisms are based on misconceptions. However much property was transferred, there never could be a clean break from one's children. Parents or the state always could return to court to seek increased child maintenance. Also, the current formula does indirectly reflect property transfers. None the less, it is true that the formula does not explicitly reflect the value of property or capital transfers that were intended to contribute to child maintenance. To establish how much of any past property settlement was in lieu of child maintenance is often very difficult. It involves the exercise of judgment and discretion.

To give the agency and appeal tribunals discretion to amend assessments to reflect past property settlements will require primary legislation. I therefore intend to bring in a Bill in the current Session. But primary legislation means that the new arrangements cannot be up and running before 1996-97, and I want to give some recognition now. So I propose, from this April, to introduce into the formula a broad-brush allowance for past property transfers. It will assume that half the equity belonged to each partner. Where the absent parent transferred more than £5,000 of his share of the equity, there will be set allowances in the formula for amounts falling in three broad bands. Any parents who find that the broad-brush allowance does not sufficiently reflect their property settlement may seek a departure from the formula under the new discretionary powers.

I also propose to allow strictly limited discretion to prevent hardship by taking account of some other expenses that are not in the formula. They will include high costs of visiting children, extra costs of supporting a disabled dependant, exceptional costs of caring for stepchildren and certain debts of the former relationship.

I also intend to make a number of amendments to the maintenance formula. First, I want to encourage people to continue working even where they have to travel long distances. Calculating actual travel costs would be burdensome for everyone. So instead, for parents who live more than 15 miles from their place of employment, I shall introduce a broad-brush allowance. An automatic calculation will avoid the need for detailed inquiries to be made about actual travel costs. If that works out much too high or too low, either parent will in due course be able to apply for a discretionary adjustment.

Secondly, I shall let absent parents who have a new partner or stepchildren deduct all their reasonable housing costs.

Thirdly, I shall put a ceiling on assessments of 30 per cent. of net income, or the minimum of £2.30 a week. So absent parents will be able to keep at least 70 per cent. of their net income after paying maintenance. Even those who are also paying off arrears will be allowed to keep at least two thirds of normal net income. That reassurance goes beyond anything recommended by the Select Committee on Social Security, and I am sure that it will be welcomed by the House.

Fourthly, the maximum amount payable under the formula can be very high, especially where there are several children. I intend to halve the maximum additional amount payable above basic maintenance.

In addition, to encourage absent parents to co-operate, where an absent parent provides basic information within four weeks, I shall defer the start of his maintenance liability for eight weeks.

Most of the measures that I have announced will make assessments fairer for absent parents. Indeed, no absent parent will now be able reasonably to refuse to pay his child maintenance. As a result, the measures will also help parents with care and their children by securing maintenance more speedily. Even where maintenance already being paid is reduced as a result of the changes, parents with care on income support will not lose money, as income support is adjusted immediately. However, awards of family credit and disability working allowance are set for six months. For those whose maintenance drops because of the changes, the Government will provide some compensation for the rest of the award period.

Some commentators have argued for maintenance to be disregarded in calculating income support. But that would make it much more difficult for a parent with care to improve her family's standard of living by returning to work. Instead, I propose that parents with care who are on income support or jobseeker's allowance will be able to build up a new maintenance credit of up to £5 a week. That will be paid as a lump sum when they leave benefit for work. It will give parents with care an increased interest in receiving maintenance and enhance their incentive to work.

The Child Support Agency has performed less well than I would wish, despite hard work by its staff. But the agency has already taken steps to improve its performance. In December, the agency announced two measures to help it to manage its outstanding cases. They involve deferring the take-on of parents with care on income support who have not asked or provided sufficient

information for the agency to pursue maintenance. All parents with care who continue on benefit will, in due course, be taken on by the agency, and there is no question of deferring action against unco-operative absent parents.

None the less, the policy changes announced today will impose further work on the agency. I do not want it to add unnecessarily to its backlog, but I want it to devote its resources to its current work load. Cases where there was a court order or maintenance agreement before April 1993, and the parent with care is not on benefit, were due to have access to the agency at the initiative of either parent from 1996. I propose to defer take-on of those cases. I shall ensure that they retain the right to use the courts and I shall also give them the right, for a fee, to use the agency's collection and enforcement service.

Some absent parents have suffered, through no fault of their own, from delays in making assessments, resulting in huge bills for arrears. In those cases, we shall not enforce more than six months' arrears, provided the absent parent agrees to pay them and to pay his on-going liability for maintenance. After a year, it will be clear whether the absent parent is meeting his obligation and if so, we shall compensate the parent with care for any financial loss. I have decided to stop charging fees and interest for two years from April 1995. After that, fees will be reintroduced and the interest charged replaced by a late payment penalty.

On Thursday, I intend to lay a set of minor technical amendments to regulations, which will further help the administration of the scheme. Many of the changes that I am announcing today will take effect from this April. The formula will change, interest payments will be abolished and fees will be suspended. The agency will be writing to all its clients about those changes, so there is no need for parents to contact the agency.

Primary legislation is needed to introduce discretion into the maintenance formula and for other changes including deferring take-on of non-benefit cases. Subject to the approval of Parliament, those changes will take effect during 1996-97. From April 1997, the new maintenance credit scheme and late payment penalties will start and fees will be reintroduced. None of those changes will apply retrospectively.

Legislation involving children, broken families and money will always arouse strong emotions. That is certainly the experience of Australia's Child Support Agency, even after six years of operation. The changes will improve our child support scheme for both parents. They will take account of property or capital settlements, give flexibility to prevent hard cases, allow for high travel-to-work costs, help absent parents with step-families, reduce the maximum level of maintenance and ensure that absent parents normally keep more than 70 per cent. of their net income after paying maintenance. Those changes should encourage and enable more absent parents to pay child maintenance regularly. As a result, they will give more parents with care and their children the chance of a better life and I commend them to the House.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): Does the Minister understand the relief that, at last, there is movement on his part, after years of inaction? Does he share my dismay, however, that the chaos and bitterness surrounding the Child Support Agency has seriously undermined the very principles that the system was brought into being to defend?

I recognise that the White Paper offers changes to a wide range of issues. Does the Minister agree that the test is the practical impact of the proposed reforms, and that it is in that light that the Opposition and the country will judge them?

We welcome the introduction of a discretion to depart from the over-rigid financial formula, in cases where there is real hardship. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept, however, that we shall want to study with particular care the grounds and the definition of additional expenses? If the changes do not attack the causes of discontent, the damage may well be fatal.

Why did the Minister reject the machinery of the review office system that was pioneered in Australia, which at least appeared to be administratively convenient and offered an independence of judgment that many thought lacking in his present proposals?

Does the Minister recall that, time after time, we have called for just such a reform—the introduction of a discretionary element, through an independent review procedure—only to be repulsed with a lack of sympathy and sensitivity that I hope he now regrets? It is apparently intended that so-called clean-break settlements prior to April 1993 should be in the remit of the new appeal procedure. Will the Minister, however, say a little more about future cases and the perhaps unhappily christened broad-brush approach? With that, a great deal depends on the practical effect.

The formula that illustrates bands and the impact on exempt income will not make immediate sense to everyone. Is not it important—I put particular emphasis on this—in this case and, indeed, with every part of the package, that the Minister makes the impact transparent? Will he publish examples of the impact of those various provisions on typical cases and, where necessary, on a range of assumptions? Does not he agree that that is the best way in which to inform public debate?

Will the Minister note that there will be welcome on Opposition Benches for the translation of the advisory guidelines that no liable parent will pay more than 30 per cent. of net income, or 33 per cent. including arrears, into legislative form? There is plenty of evidence that in practice the financial formula has breached those guidelines in many thousands of cases. Is not it a striking comment on the failure of the system when a total of—I think—40,000 cases was quoted to the Select Committee where the guidelines had not been met? That clearly came as a shock and a surprise to Ministers.

On other changes in the financial formula, subject to further study, we are prepared to offer support. I am thinking specifically of the change to housing costs. However, may I remind the Minister again that those tardy moves reflect pressure from hon. Members of all parties, which he has long resisted? Will he also note that, at first acquaintance, the broad-brush approach to travel costs borders on the crude?

On administration, too, the Minister is giving ground and not before time. The incentive to co-operate represented by an eight-week moratorium on liability for arrears and the protected income provision where deduction from earnings applies are useful, but I suspect that, in impact, they are very modest changes. Will he

[Mr. Donald Dewar]

note that the cap on arrears at six months, as a form of remission for good behaviour, is welcome, especially as it is linked to compensation for the parent with care, which is a particularly important safeguard and feature?

Does the Minister accept that the so-called maintenance credit, no more than a poor relation of the back-to-work bonus, will simply not do? Does not he realise that parents with care living on income support need help now, not a possible windfall at some future date? Is not there a danger that the households where work will be difficult to come by will be the least likely to pick up the divvy? Would not it have been wiser and more in line with the social purpose of the 1991 Act to establish the principle of disregard, even if at a modest level? Why is the proposal on such a slow fuse and not coming into effect into April 1997, when other changes are being introduced this April?

May I ask about the deferment of take-up of cases by the agency, when no state benefit is involved and there is a court order or written maintenance agreement? Does deferment mean that those cases will become the agency's responsibility at the earliest possible point, as soon as administrative capacity allows? Does the Minister accept that it is important to establish what is intended, as otherwise some will charge that the Child Support Agency is rough justice for those on benefit, while the courts protect the better-off? Would not that become a problem, if there were a perceived continuing differential in awards between courts and the agency?

The House will note that none of those changes will apply retrospectively. I accept that there are difficulties, but does the Minister recognise that that may cause major problems? The day before the House of Commons rose for the Christmas recess, he announced that 350,000 cases were being shelved by administrative fiat. When those cases come back into the system, are the individuals concerned to benefit from the changes announced? Is not there a danger, if that is so, that they will be seen as being advantaged as a result of the agency's own inefficiency and, in some cases, perhaps more seriously, will not it be a matter of non-co-operation unfairly rewarded?

Opposition Members want reform. We want reform that gives a better service to both sides of a broken partnership and we want reform that will take some of the stress and strain off the staff of the CSA who have been put under, at times, almost unendurable pressure. May I make it clear that we shall not unnecessarily obstruct the legislation when it comes forward? There will be no call from the Opposition Front Bench for trench warfare. However, we reserve the right to weigh the merits of the proposals, to scrutinise properly and to try to strengthen the Bill in Committee in the public interest.

The tragedy is that reform which might have made an impact 18 months ago will now have to contend with the bitterness that has built up in the system. Is not it clear to everyone involved in the argument—many of whom, honourably, are on the Conservative Benches—that the delay is deeply regretted? The fact that Ministers have had to be driven to action by public pressure and parliamentary anger is a considerable downside.

Does the Secretary of State recall that, as recently as 4 July last year, sheltering behind the very marginal changes made the previous February, he said:

> "We must not put the improvements in performance that we are achieving at risk by introducing unnecessarily disruptive changes".—[*Official Report*, 4 July 1994; Vol. 246, c. 43.]

That is a prime example of complacency writ large.

The Opposition believe firmly in the duty of a parent to contribute to the maintenance of his or her child. This is perhaps our last chance in this Parliament to get matters right. I hope that the changes will undo some of the damage caused by delay and restore a measure of public confidence to the child support system.

Mr. Lilley: Assuming that the hon. Gentleman was welcoming the changes, I am grateful for his welcome. I welcome the fact that he has consistently supported, as the whole House has, the underlying principle that the changes are designed to reinforce and uphold.

However, the hon. Gentleman was quite wrong to suggest that there has been inaction since the agency was established. He ignores the changes that were introduced last February and the fact that it would have been impossible to introduce a Bill in the previous Session. Had we done that, it would not have been able to undertake the changes that we are now proposing.

I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the administrative problems that the agency has experienced, and we are doing all in our power to overcome them. He said that he would look closely at the system of departures from the formula and he seemed to want them to be as open-ended as possible. We believe that it would be wrong to have a wholly open-ended system of discretion, which would amount to going back to the courts and which would allow the system to be degraded, unfair and unsystematic. However, we believe that it is right that there should be limited discretion to deal with the hard cases that have caused hon. Members concern.

The hon. Gentleman complained about, or thought that he might have complaints about, the broad-brush approach to dealing with past property settlements. That broad-brush system cannot be satisfactory on its own. Had it been possible to deal satisfactorily with the problem of past property settlements simply through changes in the formula, I would have preferred to do it that way. However, it is necessary to have an element of discretion as well, and that requires primary legislation; that is why I am introducing it. I wanted to ensure that the change in the formula was in place as soon as possible from April, to deal with the situation as best we can in the interim.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to make available worked examples of how some of the changes will affect people. I have asked my officials to place some worked examples in the Library. I hope that they will be available by the time that I finish my comments.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned rightly the 30 per cent. limit on maintenance assessments as a percentage of net income. A proportion of people were retaining less than 70 per cent. of net income. That was never intended or expected from the simulations carried out before the agency began its operations. I thought that it would be much better to place that hard and fast cap on maintenance assessments so that when stories abound that people are being left with only a tiny fraction of their income, people

will know that those stories simply are not true—*[Interruption.]* They will not be true when we have this cap. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] People will know that.

The only circumstances in which people may have large assessments relative to their income will be when they have refused to co-operate with the agency and to give any details of their income. People can rapidly resolve that problem by co-operating with the agency and providing the necessary details.

The hon. Gentleman complained that the travel-to-work broad-brush element in the formula was too crude. He simply cannot have it both ways and say, on the one hand, that we are in danger of creating additional administrative problems, and then object to a simpler way of dealing with a problem without imposing a huge administrative burden such as would be required if everyone had to confirm, identify and provide bills and details to show their travel costs over the past year.

The hon. Gentleman says that the maintenance credit will not do. He is conspicuously unwilling to say what he would do in terms of a maintenance disregard, which he would like. He had previously costed his own proposal at £340 million. That is not a sensible and priority use of public money. It would act as a disincentive to work and it would be unfair as between those who did and did not have maintenance.

It is sensible to defer the take-on of pre-1993 cases where there is no taxpayer interest because those people are not on benefit and they already have an agreement or a maintenance order from the courts, and to give them continued access to the courts if they wish any changes. There will be power on the statute book to bring them into the purview of the agency, but that can be done only with the approval of the House.

The 350,000 cases that the hon. Gentleman says were shelved were not shelved. There always has been a phased take-on of people, and we are rightly trying to get the backlog down before we take on new benefit cases where the mother has not requested us to do so. Parents with care who request early help from the agency will be given priority, as now.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's understanding of the problems that staff have often faced and the hostility and often adverse treatment that they have had, which the whole House deplores. I welcome his assurance that that will not be a matter for trench warfare. All of us have an interest in ensuring that we improve the system of child maintenance, so that more maintenance is paid more rapidly to more parents with care and their children.

Sir David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): May I welcome what my right hon. Friend has said, particularly in respect of the change in the travel-to-work arrangements, which will be welcomed by my constituency and others in commuting areas? Will he say a little more about the Child Support Agency automatically writing to people? Does it mean that, when people are in dispute with the Child Support Agency, it will write to them and tell them that a new appeals system is coming in? If people trigger the appeals system, will they be entitled to legal aid?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome for the changes to take account of people who travel reasonably long distances to work. They will be welcomed by those who commute a long way. The agency will write and tell people about the changes and about how they influence them. It will, however, point out that the appeals process—the discretionary system—will not come in until 1996-97. The formula changes will be applied, wherever possible, automatically from April this year, but people may be asked to give some information to trigger off the travel-to-work changes in the formula to their benefit. There should be no question of or need for legal aid.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement, but I wish that it had come sooner, before many parents had suffered so many problems. However, he has not properly answered the question about why he did not bring in a proper maintenance disregard of, say, £15, so that parents with care would not have their benefit withdrawn pound for pound. That would have benefited the children. I welcome his taking into account the cost of visiting the child by the parent without care, but the Secretary of State does not state the distance beyond which that measure would be brought in. I would be grateful for information on that point.

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her welcome for the changes. The change in child contact is that it will be a ground for appeal to seek a departure from the formula when people have exceptional costs. We shall spell out that point in secondary legislation, but obviously it will not be just any costs if someone lives just around the corner. As far as a disregard is concerned, we have not proposed a disregard— let alone one of the order that the hon. Lady suggests—because it would cost about £340 million. We take seriously the remarks of her hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), who was criticising the Labour party at the weekend for its reckless spending of public money by making promises that it could not possibly fulfil.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I am most grateful for what my right hon. Friend has said this afternoon. During his statement, he said that he wanted people to keep working. Does he accept that it is necessary for many second wives to work? Has he therefore given consideration to allowing the inescapable costs of child-minding to be taken into account when making the calculations?

Mr. Lilley: It is important to give parents with care the opportunity to work, and to remove disincentives. A great many parents have said that they wish to work, and the maintenance credit will be welcomed as simultaneously enhancing and reinforcing that incentive and enabling parents to make the move back into work.

It would not be justifiable to give the desire of a second partner to go to work— rather than staying at home to look after her children—priority over one's obligation to maintaining a first family. I cannot see how that can be done at the expense of the first family.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): May I thank the Secretary of State for implementing many of the proposals that the Select Committee considered, including some—such as the independent appeals tribunal—which his hon. Friends voted down in Committee? As non-payment of maintenance already puts between 2p and 3p on the standard rate of tax, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the House and many millions of mothers and children have a vested interest in making sure that the agency

[Mr. Frank Field]

works? Will he therefore tell us how much new money the agency is raising, and whether it is performing more effectively in raising funds than the system that it replaced?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome, and for the helpful and influential report that his Committee produced. We have endeavoured to take on board the bulk of the recommendations that the Committee put forward, or at least the substance of them.

With regard to the appeals tribunal, my reading of the report was that there was a proposal for a simple formula that would not take into account many factors that were already taken into account by our system. In turn, that formula would have required a practically open-ended discretionary system to deal with all those circumstances, which would then not have been taken into account. The last thing that we wanted to do was to go back to an open-ended discretionary system, like the courts. My hon. Friends will tell me whether that is a correct analysis of the decisions that were taken in the Committee, but a limited discretionary system— such as we propose— with fairly closely circumscribed opportunities is right and sensible.

In the first eight months of this year, savings— including benefit savings, maintenance arising from people who were coming off benefit and maintenance being paid and replacing benefit—amounted to about £280 million, as against £180 million in the same eight months of the previous year.

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): May I thank my right hon. Friend for responding positively to the Select Committee's report? Does he agree that a great deal of the problems that the CSA has faced have come about as a result of the percentage of income that non-custodial parents have been asked to pay? Those figures are hard to prove and have often been exaggerated. Will not the very welcome 30 per cent. cap that my right hon. Friend announced today put an end to that confusion once and for all?

Mr. Lilley: I believe that my hon. Friend is right. The 30 per cent. cap—it is a 33 per cent. cap when the combination of an assessment and any arrears that people may have to pay off is taken into account—will be beneficial in ensuring that there is no hardship. It will be beneficial also as it will gain acceptance for the agency, as it will be seen clearly that people have at least two thirds, and normally more than 70 per cent., of their net income with which to meet other expenses not taken into account in the formula. Therefore, there will be no reason for absent parents to refuse to pay maintenance for the support of their children.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Secretary of State aware that probably only one other piece of legislation in recent years has had to be amended so often, for which Ministers have come to the Dispatch Box to apologise—the poll tax? We know that, after all the efforts to amend the poll tax, the Government finally had to withdraw it. Has he considered doing the same with the Child Support Act?

Mr. Lilley: No, certainly not. I believe that the principle—it was endorsed by the whole House, and explicitly so by the Opposition when the Bill went through Parliament and became an Act—still has the support of the House and the country: that both parents are responsible for their children; that both should contribute according to their means; and that the taxpayer should pay only when the parents do not have the means to support the children. The hon. Gentleman gave his support and acquiescence to the Bill when it was going through the House, although he is normally willing to object to most things. He may now be withdrawing his support retrospectively, but he certainly did not vote against its Third Reading.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I thank my right hon. Friend for agreeing to take a twin-track approach, to regulate as swiftly as possible where possible and to legislate where necessary. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister of State— [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."]— for the unfailing courtesy with which he listened to submissions and complaints. The fact that my right hon. Friend is now willing to allow travel costs to be taken into account will be particularly welcomed by my constituents in east Kent. I express my continuing concern, however, at the level of arrears that some of my constituents must still pay and ask my right hon. Friend to look again, even at this late stage, at whether there is any way in which those arrears can be mitigated.

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome for our attempt to make rapid changes where we can through the regulatory route and more substantive changes through primary legislation. I agree entirely with his plaudits for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and his promotion of him, which was well deserved.

My hon. Friend made a specific point about arrears. It will be widely welcomed that the agency recognises that, where it has contributed to the build-up of arrears, there should not be an attempt to go back more than six months. Therefore, that means writing off some of the money that should have been due to the parent with care. Once the system is established, compensation will be provided by the taxpayer. It will not be right to go beyond that, as my hon. Friend suggested. It will be widely welcomed that we are making the change.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): With regard to the impact of the changes in child support on children, who are sometimes forgotten in the debate, will the Secretary of State confirm that the vast majority of children in one-parent families will continue to see the extra child support deducted pound for pound, penny for penny, from income support and that for the very poor children in Britain, it remains a Child Support Act in name only?

Mr. Lilley: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his consistent recognition that two parents are involved in the production of children. Whereas many hon. Members have talked as if it was solely a matter of concern for the absent parent, the hon. Gentleman has always recognised the interests of the parent with care. Income support is payable to help parents who do not have maintenance or other means to support their own children. It is not meant to be in addition to maintenance and it would be wrong to do so.

What we have done in introducing a maintenance credit squares the circle, in giving parents a greater interest in the system. They already have an interest inasmuch as

maintenance is a portable benefit that they can carry back into work and that will help them back into work. But now, in addition, the maintenance credit would build up while they remained on benefit and were in receipt of maintenance, and that will be welcomed, I hope, by those who, like the hon. Gentleman, recognise that parents with care have often had the raw deal in the whole arrangement.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I thank my right hon. Friend for listening so carefully to all the representations that were made, and join my colleagues in commenting on the help given by the Under-Secretary of State.

May I be clear on the way in which this will work? My right hon. Friend said that the changes are not retrospective. Does that mean that all the consistent, continuous cases, which are already with the CSA, will be reassessed from April onwards under the new formula and that that is why nobody needs to take up a case, because the CSA will write to all its current clients and make that clear?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me an opportunity to clarify that point. Although not retrospective, the changes will apply to those who already have maintenance assessments from the date that the new changes come in: April for the new changes introduced by regulatory means in the formula; and 1996-97 for the changes made through the exercise of discretion. Thus everybody, including those who have been paying and those in the process of being assessed, will get help.

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): The Secretary of State has made a considerable climbdown in the face of mounting public anger about the Child Support Act. Obviously, many of his measures will help non-resident parents, and those are to be welcomed. But as the changes are non-retrospective, the way in which people are treated will be patchy. What about non-resident parents who got into debt to pay the huge arrears assessed? Will that money be paid back to them with interest, or is it just tough for them? Although it will be better for some non-resident parents in the future, it seems to me—

Madam Speaker: Order. We have had a reasonably brisk exchange, although not as brisk as I should have liked. The Secretary of State wishes to answer a number of questions from Back Benchers, so will Back Benchers put their questions directly to him? I am sure that he will do his best to answer them equally briefly.

Ms Gordon: Will treatment be uneven? Will the Secretary of State also say a little more about the discretionary regulations, because they appear to be nowhere near an appeals system? As all cases are individual and as the voluntary agencies have listed about 40 differences that needed to be made, if it is not a proper appeals system, it will not help many people. I have said before—

Madam Speaker: Order. I ask the hon. Lady now to put her final question to the Minister. Let us be a little tolerant with each other. Many other hon. Members want to put questions, so I am sure that the hon. Lady will now come to her final point.

Ms Gordon: I apologise, Madam Speaker.

Finally, parents with care will get help only if they go to work, possibly in low-paid jobs, and if they can find work. What about parents with care who rightly want to stay at home with their children? Do not they perform a service to the state, and should not they have a disregard that would help their children?

One further—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I think that I have let the hon. Lady have a fair crack at the whip this afternoon.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady appeared to want me to make the changes retrospective. That would be paradoxical when some of the resentment aroused by the changes was caused because they were thought to have retrospective implications. We would not want to pile Pelion upon Ossa. On the hon. Lady's point about arrears, there will be a limit on the combined amount of assessment and arrears that people can pay together. That will be welcomed and partly meets the point that she made.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I welcome my right hon. Friend's continued pursuit of feckless fathers. Will he continue to pursue fecklessness within the CSA and contract out to the private sector wherever possible?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right. I hope that the agency will continue with increasing success to trace and track down fathers who have attempted to get out of their obligation to contribute. The agency has so far succeeded in tracking down 58,000 absent fathers, who previously would have remained unknown and undetected, because of the arrangements that we have in force to trace them through national insurance numbers and other means. On improving efficiency through use of the private sector, I gave my hon. Friend an opportunity to put the points that he makes so eloquently to the agency and I know that they will have been listened to with care.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): Given that the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration has expressed his extreme disappointment at the fact that the CSA should repeat the systemic failures of the disability living allowance, can the Secretary of State tell us exactly what he will do to assist the CSA staff to improve the service that they give to their clients and the taxpayer, so that we might see less of the chaos that has marked the past two years' operation of the agency?

Mr. Lilley: I share the hon. Lady's desire to see continuing improvement in the administration and efficiency of the agency, which goes hand in hand with any changes that we have made to the assessment system to make it fairer.

On the ombudsman's remark about the disability living allowance, the report on the DLA was not produced until the Child Support Act 1991 had already been passed. The introduction of the CSA and the DLA was largely simultaneous, but take-on by the CSA was phased in, unlike that of the DLA—that failure was perceived as a major problem. We have phased in the take-on of cases by the CSA, but we have already received criticisms and complaints about that. It should not be assumed that those two issues are identical and that a formula could be derived from one and applied to the other.

[Mr. Lilley]

I welcome the fact that the ombudsman accepted that action had been taken to deal with the complaints that he examined in his report.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): May I warmly welcome the explicit reference to those who have remarried and taken on extra stepchildren? Does my right hon. Friend accept that that will alleviate the great concerns felt by those with new responsibilities?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right. There was a sense of injustice as well as a cost implication where people had a new partner and stepchildren and, as a result, did not get full allowance for their housing costs. They will now do so and that will help the formula to achieve acceptability and ease the problems that some families face.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): While I obviously welcome the broad thrust of the paper that has been presented to the House, the Secretary of State will understand that many of its details will be explored further by individual hon. Members. On property settlements, how was the sum of £5,000 reached as the share that the parent without care would have to pass over from his equity? In the assessment of clean-break settlements, the right hon. Gentleman will understand that occupational pensions are often regarded as part of capital assets. Will they be excluded in this case?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady is right: the House will obviously want to examine in detail the proposals that I have put forward. I am sure that it is right that it should do so.

On property settlements, the £5,000 threshold was set because it seemed reasonable that there should be a minimum for a broad-brush approach. The greatest concern arose where people had passed over the whole of the house rather than just slightly more than 50 per cent. of the value of it or a fairly small sum of capital. We reached that threshold after discussion with family lawyers about the array of different costs and amounts involved.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): As a founder member of the all-party child support group, may I say how much I welcome the statement, which is absolutely first rate? It shows that Conservatives not only listen to what the public say, but act on what they hear. As a member of the party committed to the family, will my right hon. Friend say something about the CSA's future arrangements governing the absent parent and the child, because CSA staff have done a great deal of damage to that relationship and some reparation work is needed?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his wholehearted welcome. He is right. We have tried to listen to the experience and the worries that have arisen in the first 18 months or so of the operation of the agency—an agency, I would remind everyone, which was supported by the whole House when it was established, and which all of us have been keen to improve to deal with the problems that have emerged.

I am not sure that I would entirely accept the argument that my hon. Friend appeared to make about staff of the agency and the relationship between absent parent and child. It must be remembered that it is always an emotional matter when the law intrudes in matters involving children, family breakdown and money. None the less, a decision must be taken about where responsibility lies. The House has decided that it should be taken through the Act and the agency, and the staff do try to fulfil their duties as sensitively as possible.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am pleased to hear that this discredited system is to be improved, but why has the Secretary of State refused to accept the legitimate argument that the employers of recalcitrant absentee parents should be compelled to co-operate with the agency, and why has he failed to tackle the companies—not all of them small—that pay the moneys arrested from wages to the agency so slowly? That is causing a great deal of distress to mothers in my constituency.

Mr. Lilley: It is easy for hon. Members to speak about discredited agencies. But when they did not vote against the agency in the first place and their parties wholeheartedly supported it, they share the overall responsibility for Parliament and our overall responsibility for responding sensitively, which we are now doing through the report of the Select Committee and today's statement.

Of course, employers have an obligation to help when the agency requires them to deduct from earnings at source. The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that a large number of deduction from earnings orders have been made—4,000 in November alone, compared with 2,600 in the whole of last year—and they are proving a successful way of enforcing and ensuring payment.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I spent Friday night with a group of my constituents, all of whom pay maintenance and all of whose lives have been turned upside down by the agency. They will be as pleased as I am to hear of the improvements and changes that my right hon. Friend announced to the House today, especially with reference to housing costs, travel-to-work costs and the element of discretion to be granted to the new appeals tribunal.

I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend told me a little more about the housing costs. Does he mean that the agency will now recognise mortgages other than repayment mortgages—the ones that perhaps depend on endowment policies, personal equity plans and other methods of repaying capital?

On administration, we recognise that it will take some time for the discretion to be allowed to the appeal tribunal. In the meantime, my constituents continue to be told that, even when they are dissatisfied with the initial assessment, it might take as much as a year for it to be reviewed; that is unacceptable.

Mr. Lilley: I know that my hon. Friend has been in close contact with his constituents who have been worried about the working of the agency, so I am all the more grateful for his support.

I think that the agency does take into account more than the simple basic mortgage costs, and I should be happy to confirm details of specific types of mortgages about which my hon. Friend may have worries. The agency is devoting more resources to undertaking reviews and

completing them more speedily, so I hope that the length of time quoted to my hon. Friend will not apply to his constituents in future.

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): The Secretary of State's statement follows two critical reports from the Select Committee and an even more critical report from the parliamentary ombudsman, but he nevertheless insists in the House that the principle that absent parents must pay and the principle—which he has not mentioned much this afternoon—that more money should be directed to maintenance of children, are the aims of his announcement. His refusal to budge on the disregard on income support demonstrates that he is led more by the Treasury than he is by putting more money into looking after children. Why will he not reconsider that point?

Mr. Lilley: For the very simple reason that I spelled out to the hon. Members for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and for Rochdale (Ms Lynne)—that it would be a system that discouraged people, a system that made it more difficult for people to return to work and improve their standard of living, and a system that would be hugely costly to the taxpayer. We do not hand out public money like confetti without thinking where it will come from.

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): Does my right hon. Friend recall the anguish expressed by a number of my constituents, especially one from Chelmsley Wood, whom he kindly met? Does he accept that the measures will help greatly? Will he, however, clarify how discretion would work for such a person who was seriously affected and who was well over the 70 per cent. level? Would CSA officials make judgments? Would my right hon. Friend make judgments? Who makes judgments?

Mr. Lilley: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me for not remembering the precise details of his constituent; I have seen a number of constituents during the relevant period. If, as he says, people are being assessed to pay more than 30 per cent. of their net income, they will benefit immediately from the cap on assessments when it comes into force in April. If, in addition, people have particular, exceptional expenses that are not taken account of in the formula and, because they are not taken account of, mean that they would suffer hardship, they will be able to apply to the agency once discretion is operational—once the Bill has received Royal Assent and the new procedures are in force. They will be able to apply to the agency and ask for such expenses to be taken into account. If the agency refuses or responds insufficiently, people will be able to appeal to the appeals tribunal and ask for the assessment to be reconsidered. In that way, proper consideration will be given to those with genuinely difficult circumstances.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that there will be a great deal of dismay and anger at his statement that none of the changes announced today will apply to those whose settlements have already been concluded with the CSA, or at least not until two years—*[Interruption.]* That is what it says in the White Paper, as hon. Members will see if they care to read it. Is the Secretary of State aware— *[Interruption.]* Oh yes. It says at paragraph 5 on page 9:

"None of these changes will apply retrospectively."

That means, for people whose settlements have already been resolved. In addition, the right hon. Gentleman's failure to deal with income support disregards means that the CSA is best known, justly, as the "Chancellor's Support Agency".

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me another opportunity to clarify the point that I made in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester). Although the changes will not apply retrospectively, they will apply to all cases, whether or not they have received an assessment, from the moment that they become legally applicable. A change in the formula from April this year will apply to people who have already had a maintenance assessment in terms of their future maintenance liability. Any changes will not, of course, alter the amounts that they were required to pay last year or the year before. That would be retrospection, which is something that the House has always turned its face against.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): Although I warmly welcome the changes that my right hon. Friend has announced today, I remind him that many of us thought that the principal reason for setting up the CSA was to chase fathers who contributed nothing to their children. May I remind him that many of us still believe that that should be our top priority? Will my right hon. Friend continue to carry out that task with renewed vigour?

Mr. Lilley: The agency's intention was always to chase those who were paying nothing and to ensure that everyone paid a reasonable amount. Some 77 per cent. of those taken on this year have paid not a penny of regular maintenance. As I said, we have been more successful than expected in tracking down those who had not merely paid nothing, but who had disappeared without trace. Even if there was some payment, in 96 per cent. of all cases taken on so far, the mother and children were dependent on benefit. It is only reasonable that the taxpayer should require parents to contribute first, according to their means, before the taxpayer has to contribute towards the maintenance of other people's children.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Like other hon. Members, I am disappointed that the Secretary of State has not taken the opportunity presented by today's statement to help families on benefit who are worse off as a result of the operations of the Child Support Agency. For example, a pair of children's shoes can cost about £20 or £30 and were often purchased by the absent parent who is no longer able to make such a purchase. I do not advocate a return to ad hoc measures, but they should be reflected in some kind of disregard for the parent with care.

I also take up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche). Can the Secretary of State tell the House how he intends to ensure that the measures that he has announced today will not plunge the Child Support Agency into further administrative chaos? For example, does he intend to ensure that extra staff are taken on? Surely experience has

[Dr. Lynne Jones]

taught him that his penny-pinching attitude in the short term has resulted in a loss of money from the public purse in the long term.

Mr. Lilley: On the disregard, I have made the position abundantly clear as to cost and disincentive effects. With regard to the administrative burden that the changes may impose on the agency, as I said in my statement and elaborated on at greater length in the White Paper, I am introducing a number of regulatory changes that will enable administrative simplification and greatly ease the working of the agency to the benefit of those to whom it endeavours to provide a service. I think that the hon. Lady should welcome those changes.

Madam Speaker: We will now move on.

Private Clegg

4.31 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Madam Speaker, I am grateful for your indulgence and that of the House in this matter.

I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the case of Private Clegg."

The case has been much reported in the newspapers and in the electronic media. As it does not involve my constituency, I have spoken to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe), who is in his place, and he has made it clear that he wishes to be associated with many of my remarks.

In urging you to grant such a debate, Madam Speaker, I think that we need to consider three main factors. The first concerns Private Clegg himself, who has now been incarcerated for three and a half years awaiting the outcome of judicial manoeuvres. I am reminded by reading the Law Lords' summary judgment on the case that even they think that Private Clegg is in a somewhat different category from other murderers. They said:

"There is one obvious and striking difference between Private Clegg and other persons found guilty of murder. The great majority of persons found guilty of murder, whether they are terrorists or domestic murderers, kill from a wicked and evil motive. But when Private Clegg set out on patrol on the night of 30 September 1990 he did so to assist in the maintenance of law and order and we have no doubt that as he commenced the patrol he had no intention of unlawfully killing or wounding anyone".

The Law Lords make it clear that the case is different, but Private Clegg has been sentenced to life imprisonment, although he acted in good faith. The Law Lords also raised the matter of the yellow card. When Private Clegg set out, the yellow card instructions included the words:

"You may only open fire against a person . . . deliberately driving a vehicle at a person and there is no other way of stopping him".

That point was made clear in the judgment. Private Clegg had to take one other factor into consideration: a member of his own regiment had been knocked down and killed by a speeding car at a previous checkpoint.

The second and possibly the most important factor is the Law Lords' statement about the yellow card. They said:

"It is not suggested that the Yellow Card has any legal force".

We now have a situation in Northern Ireland where members of the armed forces go on patrol in some doubt as to their position and about how they will operate. This is a matter of great urgency, which must be dealt with because they may make decisions that will affect their lives and those of other people.

Thirdly, some people may say, "So what? This is one man, but big events are taking place and we must not upset one or other members of the community". Surely the House exists for one purpose, if for no other—to ensure that the rights of the individual will never be drowned by the greater issues that may be at stake.

Madam Speaker: I listened most carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and I must give my decision without stating any reasons. I do not consider that the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20, so I cannot submit the hon. Gentleman's application to the House.

Points of Order

4.35 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have the Government asked for time to make a statement on Welsh national heritage? The Secretary of State for Wales is discussing with the Countryside Council for Wales proposals to privatise more than 50 nature reserves and savagely to cut wildlife protection. Those crackpot proposals are bitterly resented in Wales. Surely the Secretary of State should come before the House, to consult right hon. and hon. Members before he proceeds.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. As far as one can tell from the documents, the proposals will also breach Britain's international obligations under the biodiversity convention signed by the Prime Minister as part of the Rio treaty just after the previous general election and, worse, under the European Union's habitats and species directive, which passed through the House just before it rose for the summer recess last July. The document of which we have had sight appears to have passed through the Countryside Commission for Wales on the instructions of the Secretary of State, so it would seem appropriate for him to make a statement on how Britain is to meet its international obligations.

Madam Speaker: Members on the Treasury Bench will have heard the remarks of both hon. Gentlemen, but I have not received any intimation from the Government that they will seek to make a statement.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I should be most grateful if you could assist me with a matter on which the Clerks have been extremely helpful, but an element of doubt remains. A number of hon. Members would like to raise the issue mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) on the Adjournment of the House, so that we may press the Government for a statement. The problem is that although debate on the individual case would be in order, we are advised that the legal position that creates doubt for the 19,000 soldiers still serving in Ulster could go beyond the rules of order, because hon. Members are not supposed to press for legal changes in an Adjournment debate. If an hon. Member were to raise in an Adjournment debate the specific, narrow issue of Private Clegg—which would be in order—would it be in order also to point out in general terms the gaps in the law that led to Private Clegg's problem and how they might be put right?

Madam Speaker: The matter can be raised in general terms, provided that the House does not enter into debate on the decision of the Law Lords. I would hear such an Adjournment debate on that basis.

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

(Clauses Nos. 2, 5, 8, 15, 52, 64 and 91, Schedules Nos. 1, 4, 11 and 14, and any new Clause first appearing on the Order Paper not later than 19th January and designed to continue the statutory effect of any of the Ways and Means Resolutions of the House of 13th December)

Considered in Committee.

[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair*]

Ordered,

That the order in which proceedings in Committee of the whole House of the Finance Bill are to be taken shall be New Clauses 1 and 2. Clause 2, Schedule 1, Clause 5, New Clause 3, Clause 8, New Clause 4, Clause 64, Schedule 14, Clause 91, Clause 15, Schedule 4, Clause 52 and Schedule 11.—[*Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.*]

New Clause 1

FUEL AND POWER FOR DOMESTIC OR CHARITY USE

'.—(1) The Value Added Tax Act 1994 shall be amended as follows.

(2) In section 2 (rate of VAT) in subsection (1) the words "and paragraph 7 of Schedule 13" shall be omitted, and the following subsections shall be inserted after that subsection—

"(1A) VAT charged on—

(a) any supply for the time being falling within paragraph 1 of Schedule A1; or

(b) any equivalent acquisition or importation,

shall be charged at the rate of 8 per cent.

(1B) The reference in subsection (1A) above to an equivalent acquisition or importation, in relation to any supply for the time being falling within paragraph 1 of Schedule A1, is a reference (as the case may be) to—

(a) any acquisition from another member State of goods the supply of which would be such a supply; or

(b) any importation from a place outside the member States of any such goods.

(1C) The Treasury may by order vary Schedule A1 by adding to or deleting from it any description of supply for the time being specified in it or by varying any other provision for the time being contained in it."

(3) The following Schedule shall be inserted immediately before Schedule 1—

"SCHEDULE A1

CHARGE AT REDUCED RATE

The supplies

1.—(1) The supplies falling within this paragraph are supplies for qualifying use of—

(a) coal, coke or other solid substances held out for sale solely as fuel;

(b) coal gas, water gas, producer gases or similar gases;

(c) petroleum gases, or other gaseous hydrocarbons, whether in a gaseous or liquid state;

(d) fuel oil, gas oil or kerosene; or

(e) electricity, heat or air-conditioning.

(2) In this paragraph "qualifying use" means—

(a) domestic use; or

(b) use by a charity otherwise than in the course or furtherance of a business.

(3) Where there is a supply of goods partly for qualifying use and partly not—

(a) if at least 60 per cent. of the goods are supplied for qualifying use, the whole supply shall be treated as a supply for qualifying use; and

(b) in any other case, an apportionment shall be made to determine the extent to which the supply is a supply for qualifying use.

Interpretation

2. For the purposes of this Schedule the following supplies are always for domestic use—

(a) a supply of not more than one tonne of coal or coke held out for sale as domestic fuel;

(b) a supply of wood, peat or charcoal not intended for sale by the recipient;

(c) a supply to a person at any premises of piped gas (that is, gas within paragraph 1(1)(b) above, or petroleum gas in a gaseous state, provided through pipes) where the gas (together with any other piped gas provided to him at the premises by the same supplier) was not provided at a rate exceeding 150 therms a month or, if the supplier charges for the gas by reference to the number of kilowatt hours supplied, 4397 kilowatt hours a month;

(d) a supply of petroleum gas in a liquid state where the gas is supplied in cylinders the net weight of each of which is less than 50 kilogrammes and either the number of cylinders supplied is 20 or fewer or the gas is not intended for sale by the recipient;

(e) a supply of petroleum gas in a liquid state, otherwise than in cylinders, to a person at any premises at which he is not able to store more than two tonnes of such gas;

(f) a supply of not more than 2,300 litres of fuel oil, gas oil or kerosene;

(g) a supply of electricity to a person at any premises where the electricity (together with any other electricity provided to him at the premises by the same supplier) was not provided at a rate exceeding 1000 kilowatt hours a month.

3.—(1) For the purposes of this Schedule supplies not within paragraph 2 above are for domestic use if and only if the goods supplied are for use in—

(a) a building, or part of a building, which consists of a dwelling or number of dwellings;

(b) a building, or part of a building, used for a relevant residential purpose;

(c) self-catering holiday accommodation;

(d) a caravan; or

(e) a houseboat.

(2) For the purposes of this Schedule use for a relevant residential purpose means use as—

(a) a home or other institution providing residential accommodation for children;

(b) a home or other institution providing residential accommodation with personal care for persons in need of personal care by reason of old age, disablement, past or present dependence on alcohol or drugs or past or present mental disorder;

(c) a hospice;

(d) residential accommodation for students or school pupils;

(e) residential accommodation for members of any of the armed forces;

(f) a monastery, nunnery or similar establishment; or

(g) an institution which is the sole or main residence of at least 90 per cent. of its residents,

except use as a hospital, a prison or similar institution or an hotel or inn or similar establishment.

(3) For the purposes of this Schedule self-catering holiday accommodation includes any accommodation advertised or held out as such.

(4) In this Schedule "houseboat" means a boat or other floating decked structure designed or adapted for use solely as a place of permanent habitation and not having means of, or capable of being readily adapted for, self-propulsion.

4.—(1) Paragraph 1(1)(a) above shall be deemed to include combustible materials put up for sale for kindling fires but shall not include matches.

(2) Paragraph 1(1)(b) and (c) above shall not include any road fuel gas (within the meaning of the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979) on which a duty of excise has been charged or is chargeable.

(3) Paragraph 1(1)(d) above shall not include hydrocarbon oil on which a duty of excise has been or is to be charged without relief from, or rebate of, such duty by virtue of the provisions of the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979.

(4) In this Schedule "fuel oil" means heavy oil which contains in solution an amount of asphaltenes of not less than 0.5 per cent. or which contains less than 0.5 per cent. but not less than 0.1 per cent. of asphaltenes and has a closed flash point not exceeding 150°C.

(5) In this Schedule "gas oil" means heavy oil of which not more than 50 per cent. by volume distils at a temperature not exceeding 240°C and of which more than 50 per cent. by volume distils at a temperature not exceeding 340°C.

(6) In this Schedule "kerosene" means heavy oil of which more than 50 per cent. by volume distils at a temperature not exceeding 240°C.

(7) In this Schedule "heavy oil" shall have the same meaning as in the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979."

(4) In section 97 (orders etc.) in subsection (4) (orders requiring approval) the following paragraph shall be inserted immediately before paragraph (a)—

"(aa) an order under section 2(1C);".

(5) In Schedule 13 (transitional provisions and savings) paragraph 7 (fuel and power) shall be omitted.

(6) This section shall apply in relation to any supply made on or after 1st April 1995 and any acquisition or importation taking place on or after that date.'.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also amendment (a), in new subsection (1A)(b), leave out '8' and insert '5'.

4.38 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

New clause 1 provides for the rate of value added tax on domestic fuel and power to be held at 8 per cent. It reflects the decision of the House on 6 December 1994 and the subsequent resolution passed by the House on 13 December. The new clause is necessary to stop the otherwise automatic move to the standard rate with effect from 1 April this year.

Through amendments to the Value Added Tax Act 1994, the new clause establishes the 8 per cent. rate and defines the scope of its application by means of a schedule to the 1994 Act. The scope of the 8 per cent. rate mirrors exactly what prevailed before. Thus the detail of the schedule is no more than a carry-forward to the existing definition of domestic fuel and power.

A positive rate of VAT on domestic fuel and power makes sense both for revenue and for environmental reasons. All other European countries with VAT systems tax such fuel, usually at their standard rates. In our case it is accompanied by a generous compensation package.

When linked with falling energy prices, that package did and does protect vulnerable people against the introduction of VAT at 8 per cent. to this sector.

Prices for gas and electricity are 1 per cent. lower than they were two years ago, even allowing for the introduction of 8 per cent. VAT in April last year, so the compensation package is an addition to household incomes. It is worth more than £400 million in 1994-95, rising to about £750 million in 1995-96. That is about half the yield of the tax in a full year. All pensioners, most disabled people and all persons on income-related support have been receiving extra help since April last year through permanent additions to the relevant benefits.

With that in mind, I commend the new clause and the 8 per cent. VAT rate on fuel and power to the House.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): The new clause carries into effect the victory—although the Minister did not put it quite like that—of the great popular campaign against the increase in VAT on fuel to 17.5 per cent. It is worth remembering that the Bill as it stands would do nothing to change that rate from 1 April. The new clause is therefore necessary to give effect to the victory that we won in December.

It would have been nice to hear the Paymaster General acknowledge that the people of this country got it right and the Government got it wrong. The House should pay tribute to all who campaigned against the increase—many of them pensioners groups—to bring about a remarkable parliamentary defeat for the Government. It was one of only three occasions since 1979 when the Government have been defeated on a vote with a three-line Whip.

All too often, the work of petitioning, writing to hon. Members and other forms of lobbying, although exerting influence, does not get the hearing that it should in our imperfect democracy. It is good for us all when people power, democratically expressed, makes itself felt and makes such a tangible difference. That is why we shall be happy—we are well aware that there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip—to allow the new clause safe passage into the Bill, so that people can be assured that they will not have to face 17.5 per cent. VAT on domestic fuel from April and that it will be held to 8 per cent.

There are still some important points to explore before the House can proceed. The fact that the vote was won last year, halfway through what the Government had intended to be a staged increase to 17.5 per cent., means that we now have three rates of VAT in the system, including the zero rate. The intermediate 8 per cent. rate that the Government have chosen for VAT on fuel arose, to some extent, by chance. Perhaps the Paymaster General will therefore tell us whether he envisages that the 8 per cent. rate will have a permanent place in the VAT system.

First, will the Minister—as he should—give an absolute and clear assurance that the Government have once and for all abandoned their ambition to put up VAT on domestic fuel to the full standard rate of 17.5 per cent.? Secondly, does he foresee the possibility of other goods or services being taxed at 8 per cent., either by way of transfer from the 17.5 per cent. band or, for that matter, from the zero-rated or exempt bands? Since the number of bands that we can have is limited by European law, the Government ought as a matter of principle to tell us whether they see the 8 per cent. band as a fully fledged, permanent fixture or as a one-off for domestic fuel only.

4.45 pm

I also draw the Minister's attention to the strong case made by many people and organisations, including the Association for the Conservation of Energy, and by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South, (Mr. Simpson), who presented the Energy-Saving Materials (Rate of Value Added Tax) Bill, in favour of transferring to the 8 per cent. rate certain energy conservation goods, to bring them into line with the rate charged on fuel. Paradoxically, the former Chancellor—the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont)—set this case out clearly at the time of the 1993 Budget when he said:

> "For the first time, the rate of VAT on domestic fuel and power will be the same as that charged on goods . . . which improve energy efficiency. This will bring to an end the current anomaly, which makes nonsense of any attempt to use the tax system to improve the environment."—[*Official Report*, 16 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 183.]

That was actually a ruse whereby the right hon. Gentleman tried to justify that which could not be justified—putting VAT up to 17.5 per cent.—but his point related to comparability between the rate of VAT on fuel and on energy-saving materials.

In the House on Friday we heard many arguments about this from Conservative Members, especially the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who urged reconsideration of the rate of VAT imposed on materials for energy-saving purposes. The Association for the Conservation of Energy has suggested a number of logical candidates for an 8 per cent. rate: draught proofing materials, loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, hot water tank jackets, lower emission glazing, and domestic heating controls. The association envisages two results: increasing the market for energy saving goods, which would bring in revenue to the Treasury; and improving the environment by saving energy.

I should be grateful if the Minister would let us know the Government's thinking on comparability as between the proposed rate of VAT on domestic fuel and the rate levied on materials that people buy to save energy. Will Sir Crispin Tickell and the Prime Minister's team be looking into this issue as part of the so-called green tax strategy described in *The Observer* yesterday?

I understand that there are problems to do with European VAT laws, which do not include energy-saving materials in the category of goods on which reduced rates are chargeable. Does the Minister intend to explore this as an option to help meet our environmental commitments in Europe? When the Government launched VAT on fuel, they used the excuse of the environment as cynical cover for what was essentially a tax-raising measure. Do they now realise that that was a grave mistake? Do Treasury Ministers acknowledge that the Government were wrong to break their promises about VAT on fuel, made at the time of the general election, just as they were wrong to break their promises on other taxes and on national insurance?

Will the Minister assure us today that the Government will not extend or increase VAT? He and his colleagues seem not to understand even now just how gravely their broken promises damaged not just themselves but democracy and public confidence in this House. At the election they said that they had no plans or intention to extend or raise the rate of VAT; yet they went on to do exactly that.

The Government owe it to the House of Commons and, more importantly, to the country, as they try to unscramble the awful mess in which they find themselves with regard to VAT on fuel, to tell us whether they now plan to extend or increase VAT. The only perpetual motion machine yet invented is the Tory propulsion of VAT: they are keeping the boundaries of VAT moving forward all the time, sometimes in huge leaps, as with VAT on home improvements and fuel, sometimes by smaller steps, as with VAT on orange juice, language schools and, most recently, certain sectors of transportation.

The increase in VAT on fuel that the Government proposed would have been extremely damaging. Even at 8 per cent., the tax reflects a Government who have been addicted to VAT and to indirect taxation generally. Even allowing for inflation, the amount of VAT per week paid by a typical family has risen from £370 a year in 1979 to £1,140 at 1994 prices, and total indirect taxation, including VAT, has increased from £1,562 to £2,545. Those are the figures calculated by the Library.

Even without the extra tranche of VAT on fuel, pensioners will still be hard pressed. The Paymaster General referred to the compensation package, but pensioners will still find it difficult to keep themselves warm in the cold winter months. Single pensioners will now receive only 20p per week compensation instead of the 50p that they had been promised, bringing total compensation for them to an inadequate 70p a week, while pensioner couples will receive just £1.05. In cutting the compensation package, the Chancellor of the Exchequer appears to have ignored completely the representations made so strongly by people throughout the country. There are enormous variations between regions in heating costs and in types of housing. The right hon. and learned Gentleman could and should have been more generous in living up to his initial promise to pensioners.

We must not forget that many people will receive no compensation at all. Those who receive maximum help with housing benefit receive nothing to help them pay increased heat and power bills. The unemployed, the disabled and the most vulnerable groups in our society receive no compensation to lessen the burden of the essential cost of keeping warm. The Opposition believe that the Chancellor has failed fully to take into account the needs of such groups. In his negligence, he leaves the poorest 20 per cent. of households £44 a year worse off as a result of the imposition of VAT on fuel.

The sorry story of VAT on fuel has brought the Conservative addiction and its costs home to people—to their pockets and their purses—in no uncertain terms. I ask the Paymaster General to give the Committee a firm assurance that the Government will extend VAT no more. As the new clause becomes part of the Bill, that is the assurance that we want to hear, as do those outside the House of Commons—the people are sick of the Government and their VAT policies.

The proposal behind the new clause is to carry into law a great people's victory in holding down VAT on fuel at 8 per cent. and the Opposition will do nothing to put that victory at risk. The people campaigned, petitioned and fought for month after month to hold VAT at 8 per cent. and nothing that we do today should put that at risk.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The impact of amendment (a) to the new clause would be to reduce the imposition of VAT from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent.

Like the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), I welcome the substantial victory that was achieved late last year by a combination of parliamentary interests against the Government. Perhaps the most significant feature of today's debate has been the perfunctory way in which the Paymaster General introduced the new clause. It is clear that the Government do not want to be reminded of the circumstances of their retreat at the end of last year or indeed to dwell on the subject of VAT on domestic fuel at all.

My party has chosen a 5 per cent. amendment partly because, as the hon. Member for Oxford, East said, it is important to tease out from the Government what will be the lower rate across the range of VAT. Secondly, 5 per cent. is probably in accordance with European Union regulations as the rate to which the Government can move without seeking a specific derogation from our partners in the Community. Once having abandoned a zero rate, it is difficult to move back to one under current regulations, although I should obviously have preferred to be arguing for a zero rate.

It was irresponsible of the Government to take domestic fuel, an essential for all people throughout the country, and apply VAT to it, contrary to electoral promises. They did so against a background of substantial fuel poverty and the fact that every year thousands of people suffer from hypothermia and tens of thousands die from cold-related illnesses in the broader sense. Throughout the country, millions of our fellow citizens suffer from endemic fuel poverty.

There is a specific argument that Scottish Members have advanced in the Chamber on many occasions. We say that VAT on fuel is especially unfair because it results in unequal burdens throughout the country. That is applied common sense because of temperature variations in different parts of the country. In a memorable exchange about 18 months ago, a junior Minister at the Department of Social Security tried to convince the House that it was colder in England than in Scotland. I do not know what mountain-top temperature he was comparing with temperatures in various areas in Scotland, but that was the burden of his argument.

More recently, however, the Scottish National party was delighted to have the Government caught telling the truth. On 24 November last year, in a written answer to a question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), the Department of the Environment finally owned up to the reality of temperature variations and the impact of that on fuel costs throughout the country. The Minister said:

> "The percentage of extra fuel required to heat a typical semi-detached house with gas central heating is as follows for each of the specified locations."

Bristol is taken as the base.

> "*(a)* Edinburgh +28 per cent., *(b)* Glasgow +23 per cent., *(c)* Aberdeen +41 per cent., *(d)* Dundee +32 per cent., *(e)* Lerwick +53 per cent and *(f)* Braemar +66 per cent."— [*Official Report*, 24 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 249.]

According to the Department of the Environment, those were calculated using the Building Research Establishment's domestic model—the acronym being BREDEM; that is the name given to the computerised model in the Department.

That Government answer raises what can be called the 66 per cent. question or, in Scottish politics, the Kincardine and Deeside question. The Member whose constituents suffer most from the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel, the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), has been an extraordinary Government loyalist in the various debates that have taken place in the Chamber over the past two years or so. However, I thought from that answer that the Government had at last owned up to what the rest of us knew from our common sense—the fact that there are temperature variations throughout the country, particularly as one moves from south to north or north to south.

Unfortunately, however, the Government were not prepared to let the truth rest and I received a rather panicky letter from the Secretary of State for Scotland on 30 December, the day before Hogmanay, seeking to rubbish the answer supplied by the Department of the Environment. The letter reads:

"In compiling the answer to Margaret Ewing on 24 November, the Department of the Environment used data from a computer model which is set up to calculate the hypothetical costs of heating a standard semi-detached house. It is quite wrong and misleading to draw general conclusions from this."

And it is quite remarkable for a Cabinet Minister to try to rubbish a written answer from another Department. Are we to believe the answer from the Department of the Environment or the panicky explanation from the Secretary of State for Scotland? Or should we rely on the evidence of our own experience? Common sense tells us that it costs substantially more to heat a home in various parts of Scotland than one in the south of England.

The Secretary of State for Scotland referred to independent studies. I have brought along one from the *Sunday Mail*. This excellent report was published on 7 November last year and compared heating costs in pensioners' homes in three locations, not hypothetical computerised models from the Department of the Environment. The locations were Bournemouth, Buckie and Lerwick. The heating costs of the pensioner couple in Bournemouth—Albert and Jean Clark—were £427. In Bournemouth, the average maximum temperature was 14.2 deg C, the average winter temperature was 1.7 deg C and there were seven hours 58 minutes of daylight in mid-winter. In Buckie, the heating costs of another pensioner couple, George and Mary Clark—all the couples were called Clark—were £602 and the weather facts were an average temperature of 11.1 deg C, an average winter temperature of 0 deg, and only six hours and 41 minutes of daylight in mid-winter. In Lerwick, the average bill of the pensioner couple was £630, with an average winter temperature as low as minus 1 deg and a mere five hours and 49 minutes of daylight in mid-winter.

5 pm

It is incredible that Ministers, including the Secretary of State for Scotland and the junior Minister responsible for social security, are denying an obvious fact to the House. Of course it costs substantially more to heat homes in parts of Scotland than it does to heat those in the south of England. Once one admits that fact, the inequity of imposing a flat rate of VAT on fuel throughout the United Kingdom—and, more importantly, a compensation package with no geographical variations—becomes apparent.

Yet again, the Government must tell us why they proposed such an anti-Scottish tax when there is strong evidence of crippling fuel poverty in many parts of the country. Scotland is in an unusual situation in that there is fuel poverty amid energy plenty. Scotland has about 80 per cent. of the European Union's hydrocarbon resources, but we have endemic fuel poverty unmatched in any other European country. The country with the most energy resources has the greatest problem with fuel poverty.

Scottish local authorities have done their best to compensate for the imposition of VAT on fuel and for existing fuel poverty. Tayside regional council is controlled by the Scottish National party and Grampian regional council by an SNP-Liberal Democrat administration. In recent months, they have set up substantial efficiency and anti-fuel-poverty schemes. The scheme in Tayside costs about £500,000 and involves a variety of initiatives, such as payment holidays, meals on wheels, lunch clubs, £100,000 to the organisations dealing with fuel poverty at the sharp end, help to pensioners, free phones, energy advice booklets and active support in the front line for those agencies dealing with fuel poverty. However, even the excellent efforts of those two regional councils cannot compensate for the millions of pounds that have been taken from their communities due to the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel.

Value added tax should not have been imposed on domestic fuel, but since it has been imposed, the better figure would be 5 per cent. rather than 8 per cent. The lower the figure, the better it will be for pensioners and others suffering from fuel poverty. I urge the House to follow last year's victory and move the goal posts further—this time, from 8 to 5 per cent. We owe it to our constituents to do that.

The Government have made much of their compensation package, but, as the Labour Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Oxford, East, pointed out, many of the people who suffer substantial fuel poverty are not covered by that package. As Members of Parliament for Scotland, our constituents would wish us to act directly on the frightening paradox of fuel poverty amid energy plenty. In the absence of the ability to return to a zero rate of VAT on domestic fuel in the short term, we should vote today to reduce the rate to the lowest practicable level—5 per cent.

In a private conversation, one Scottish Conservative Member, whom I shall not name, told me after the Government defeat in the vote last year, "By your actions, and by stopping a 17.5 per cent. rate for VAT on fuel, you have saved us politically," even though that hon. Member had loyally supported the Government in trying to sustain that rate. Let the Government realise today that no level of VAT on domestic fuel is acceptable in any part of the country and it is certainly not acceptable in the energy-rich nation of Scotland.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): We welcome the fact that the new clause has been tabled as a result of last year's vote, after which the Government were forced to accede. Nevertheless, their defeat is costing them £800 million in revenue for which they had budgeted.

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) voiced some pertinent arguments about the iniquity of the variable impact of a tax on domestic fuel, and the Government have certainly shown a lack of sensitivity to the matter. Those of us who represent north-east Scotland do not need to read the *Sunday Mail* to know that our fuel bills are higher than those in southern England. When the bill hits the doormat, we see how significant it is, and that the VAT element is substantially larger. People feel that VAT on domestic fuel is an unjustified and unfair burden, which disproportionately affects people on low incomes, who live in colder, darker areas where the winters are longer.

For that reason, I welcome the fact that the Government supported the private Member's Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on Friday. We undoubtedly need some practical measures to deal with fuel poverty, especially in areas where the problems of high fuel bills and inefficient heating and insulation are most acute.

From my travels to Scandinavia, I am aware that fuel poverty is rarely discussed in Norway for two fundamental reasons: first, because Norway has abundant hydro-electric power, which is almost free, and so fuel is not a major factor in household bills; and, secondly, because the Norwegians build their houses to take account of the climate. The British seem to have been extraordinarily slow to discover that we live in a cold, windy and wet island, and many of our building standards are not designed to deal with those conditions, which is regrettable.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) wanted to know whether the new low rate was an anomaly that would be dealt with or a permanent fixture. If it is the latter, the arguments against extending VAT to domestic fuel apply equally to extending it to energy-saving building materials, insulation and so on. VAT on such goods could usefully be reduced to help people to combat the cost of 8 per cent. VAT on their fuel bills for the foreseeable future.

The story of the strange behaviour of some Conservatives who represent north-east Scotland cannot be repeated too often. It is worth recording the political reality. The Conservatives lost their last remaining seat in north-east Scotland in the Kincardine and Deeside by-election. No doubt they were very pleased—we were very disappointed—that not only did they win back that seat in the general election, but they regained Aberdeen, South from Labour. I am absolutely sure, however, that if the election were held today, that result would be reversed.

How have the people of north-east Scotland benefited from electing Conservatives? They were told that it would be handy to have people on the inside of government who could fight their cause. What did the Conservatives do to fight their cause? They voted to impose 17.5 per cent. VAT on fuel bills, they voted to change the oil tax regime to undermine the most important industry in north-east Scotland and they voted to keep our fishermen in port. That is how they have benefited from voting Conservative, and that is one of the reasons why they will not do so in a hurry again. They have learnt the error of their ways and its consequences.

Liberal Democrats certainly believe that there is a strong case for reducing VAT to 5 per cent., as proposed in amendment (a), but as part of a package that includes the introduction of a carbon energy tax partly to offset the cost of the reduction.

That brings me to another point that I hope that the Paymaster General will address. The Government maintained, somewhat late in the day, that the real reason for their wishing to put VAT on fuel was not so mercenary and mundane as to secure revenue from the British people, but that it was part of a much higher objective to fulfil environmental commitments made at the Rio summit. How will the Government now achieve those objectives, and is there any substance to reports in yesterday's papers that they are about to adopt the idea of a carbon energy tax?

If the Government are about to adopt the idea, I can assure Ministers that the principle will be welcomed by Liberal Democrats, since the Government's opposition to such a carbon energy tax has prevented the European Union from making progress in implementing the tax across the Union, which is clearly the right and proper way in which to implement it.

The Government need to answer many questions. It is recognised that although VAT is not being increased to 17.5 per cent., many people will still struggle to pay VAT at 8 per cent. and that to avoid such hardship they require practical and financial assistance. I hope that the Government acknowledge that.

I do not wish to support measures that may take us backwards, having forced the Government to change tack. I agree with the hon. Member for Oxford, East that it is good for our democracy for the Government to be defeated on an issue that is not a matter of confidence. I give some credit to the Chancellor, who, although he really had no option, at least had the grace to acknowledge immediately that he could no longer resist the view and the vote of the House. That, of course, is why we are here today considering this amendment.

Liberal Democrats welcome the amendment. It is a triumph for the House of Commons and for those people throughout the country who campaigned to bring it about, but it still leaves many questions for the Government to answer and we shall certainly continue to press them for answers.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): This is the tail-end, in some ways, of a long debate that has taken place ever since the former Chancellor announced the imposition of VAT on fuel. As others have said, it is not surprising that the Paymaster General has had very little to say as he has simply conceded the position that the Government had forced on them because of the victory last year in managing to hold the increase of VAT to 8 per cent.

The only point with which I shall deal briefly is that made by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). It is unfortunate that, as in other matters, the nationalists insist on seeing the subject as a fight between Scotland and England and that, somehow, the tax is being imposed on Scotland but not on England. To Labour Members, the battle is not, and never will be, between Scotland and England. In this example, the battle was between the Tories and the rest of the country, and on this occasion the rest of the country won and the Tories lost.

5.15 pm

I find it deeply distasteful that yet again a nasty element is introduced that, somehow, the measure is being imposed on Scotland by another country. I find that repulsive as a patriotic Scotsman. I wish that the nationalists would not insist on introducing that unpleasant element into Scottish politics time and again. Coldness knows no political or geographical boundaries. Of course it is generally colder in Scotland than it is in England, but it is cold in England, as any pensioner who, even as we speak, is freezing because he cannot afford to heat his house can testify.

This nationalist amendment is another cynical ploy from an increasingly opportunist and desperate party. The nationalists know that the amendment has no chance of succeeding because there has been no campaign behind it. Indeed, the nationalists' amendment puts at risk holding VAT on fuel at 8 per cent. because they are throwing a life-line to those in the Government who want to re-open the debate and increase VAT to the full 17.5 per cent.

Surprisingly, the nationalists have made no attempt to mobilise public support for their policy since the amendment was tabled on Friday evening. No approach has been made to other political parties seeking their support; no letters have been written to Tory rebels. It was our campaign, which had a considerable amount of thought behind it, that led hundreds of thousands of people to protest against VAT over the past 18 months. It was our campaign, which we were happy to articulate in this Chamber, that finally led to the Government being defeated on this crucial issue.

The nationalists' amendment has been tabled for them to be able to play party politics with people's VAT bills. It is a cynical ploy from a party that sees its support slipping in the Scottish polls. Labour Members will not put our VAT victory at risk by supporting an amendment of this nature.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman has not fully grasped House of Commons procedures. A Division can be called on the amendment only if the new clause is passed; he had better answer that point for a start. He seems to have written his speech before he heard my speech. I referred specifically to VAT on fuel and the problems that it caused across the United Kingdom. The impact of the amendment, if it were successful, would not only reduce VAT on fuel to 5 per cent. in Scotland, but in England as well. He had better explain to his constituents and his supporters north and south of the border why the Labour party is not prepared to vote for VAT on fuel at 5 per cent. in Scotland and England.

Mr. Darling: There we have the main point of the amendment being tabled. It is nothing to do with any honest or serious attempt to reduce VAT. Our old nationalist chums are at it again, trying to score party political points against their opponents. They tabled the amendment in the knowledge that there was never any realistic chance of VAT being reduced to 5 per cent.

May I remind the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan about procedure? This new clause is not yet in the Bill. We are not debating a clause in the Bill. We are debating a new clause, which has to be put in the Bill to stop VAT being imposed at the full rate of 17.5 per cent.

We are seeing yet another cynical ploy from a desperate party. The nationalists will not fool anyone. Perhaps they will get one or two commentators to jump around to their tune, but most sensible people will see this move for what it is—a cynical ploy that could never have helped anybody. In the important vote, people will remember who managed to keep VAT at 8 per cent. and stop the full increase to 17.5 per cent., which the Conservative Government tried to impose and would try to do again if they should ever be returned to office.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) that, as the only Yorkshire-born Scots Member of Parliament in the House who has lived in Scotland for half a lifetime, I do not intend to engage in a battle of the roses between Yorkshire and Scotland or between England and Scotland. However, I have some sympathy for amendment (a).

Shortly after the Government were defeated before Christmas on the VAT increase, Mr. Donald McDonald, secretary of Inverclyde Elderly Forum, told me of his delight and pleasure, which was shared by many pensioners throughout my constituency, at the Government's defeat on that iniquitous measure. Since then, I have spoken to many elderly people in my constituency. They have expressed deep concern that VAT on domestic fuel at 8 per cent. represents a harsh penalty on their ordinary everyday lives.

All Scottish Members present, and some Conservative Members, will be aware that although my constituency is 200 miles south-west of the Banff and Buchan constituency, many of my constituents live in cold, damp houses that were built before the war several hundred feet above sea level. The weather station that assesses severe weather payments is located at sea level at Glasgow airport.

Many of my constituents, not just the elderly, and the overwhelming majority of people who live on low incomes in Gibbshill, Strone Farm and elsewhere—places well known to my honourable and old Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham)—suffer very badly, as they try to live on social security and to heat their inadequate homes, many of which are in the public sector. I should like to see all those houses demolished and replaced by modern, waterproof, warm homes; my constituents deserve no less from the Government.

In the meantime, I do not believe that my constituents should be paying such sums of money to heat their homes. I visited an elderly lady recently who lives in the east end of my constituency. It was a very cold day and she was sitting over a one-bar electric fire. I do not want anyone in this place to tell me that perhaps she should have saved some money during her long life in order to provide for more adequate heating.

That old lady is the mother of a large family and she was widowed many years ago. In this day and age, it is utterly disgraceful, and it reflects badly on all of us, not just on that odd-job lot on the Government Benches, that a woman in her late seventies should have to live in those conditions, sitting in her overcoat in her sitting room—

The Chairman of Ways and Means: Order. I understand the sincerity with which the hon. Gentleman

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

is making his point, but this is the Committee stage of the Finance Bill and we are discussing specifically VAT on fuel and power.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to you, Mr. Morris. I was simply supporting my argument with a case study that can be replicated many thousands of times in the west of Scotland, let alone in the north and north-east of Scotland. Ordinary people on low incomes should not have that imposition placed on them to add to the burdens that they already suffer.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): My hon. Friend will recall how many times, before VAT was imposed on fuel, I told the House about the incredibly high cost of heating homes in our constituencies. I described the massive difficulties facing some of our pensioners, some of whom were found dead behind their doors as a result of hypothermia. The imposition of VAT on fuel will undoubtedly make it extremely difficult for many folk to see out a really bad winter in Scotland. As a result of the recent flooding, people do not know what kind of heating bills to expect. Value added tax on fuel will exacerbate the problems of people on very low incomes.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I cannot comment on the dreadful consequences of that appalling disaster, which affected many of his constituents recently and which elicited such a hardnosed response from the Secretary of State for Scotland and his Ministers.

The imposition of VAT on fuel creates a horrendous burden for many people on low incomes. There is a good deal of sympathy for some of the sentiments that were expressed by the hon. Members for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). Such a tax burden should not be placed on the shoulders of ordinary people. We should be giving them, especially those who are coming to the end of their lives, every possible assistance to live decent lives. That is why I have some sympathy for the amendment.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): The problem is that the pass was sold by the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer when he first introduced VAT on domestic fuel and handed the poisoned chalice to his successor. He said that it would not be introduced for 12 months and that it would not apply fully for two years. He firmly believed that the anger about its imposition would have dissipated before the first tranche of the VAT increase was implemented. His political judgment was wrong, as was his feeling about how the imposition of VAT would be received.

I have never known anger like the anger felt throughout every part of the community in my constituency, and around it, about the application of VAT to domestic fuel. Domestic fuel is a necessity: people have no choice of whether they use it. Regardless of whether VAT is levied at 17.5 per cent., 8 per cent. or 5 per cent., the argument about VAT on domestic fuel will not go away. We must all recognise that it will continue in the years ahead.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) will not think me too unkind if I say that he objected very strongly to the Scottish National party making political capital. Perish the thought that we in the Labour party would ever try to make political capital.

I would not take lessons from the SNP about how to make political capital. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central said, no attempt was made to canvass the proposition for 5 per cent. until it appeared on the amendment paper. The leader of the SNP constantly tells us in the press that, especially in Scotland, the opposition parties should get together before they table amendments This is an example of preaching one thing and doing another. That is what I object to most about the way in which the SNP behaves.

I am quite happy to take on the SNP in respect of making political capital. A most disgraceful episode occurred about a year ago when the SNP sought to make naked political capital and gain during the regional council elections. The Scottish nationalists proposed in their manifesto that, if elected, they would pay every peasioner in the Grampian area £10—in cash, not in benefits, in kind or in a fancy scheme.

The Scottish nationalists were told at the time that that was illegal. I recall saying at a public meeting that it was quite illegal and I was berated by the nationalists for daring to doubt their credibility. The Scottish nationalists said that everything had been checked out and the legal implications had been assessed. However, the nationalists had not been in office with the Liberals in the Grampian region for five minutes when the £10 suddenly disappeared from the agenda. The nationalists suddenly discovered that the proposal was not legal.

The Scottish nationalists then said that they would persuade the hydro-electric companies to make discount stamps available, but that proposition also fell by the way. The nationalists apparently now have a raft of measures that they hope will help people with their winter fuel bills.

I would be happier if the nationalists were honest and straightforward and did not make false promises that they knew to be untrue and which they had no intention of implementing. They were simply concerned with making political capital, and that is making capital in the worst possible sense.

Mr. Salmond: If the hon. Gentleman had the extraordinary knowledge that our proposals were illegal for regional councils but not for district councils such as West Lothian, where the SNP has implemented the £10 payment, why on earth did Labour members of the regional council table it on the regional council agenda after the regional elections? Did they do so in the full knowledge that it was illegal? Why did Labour members on Grampian regional council vote with the Conservatives to stop the substantial fuel poverty action package that has been welcomed by every pensioner organisation in north-east Scotland?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is being disingenuous in saying that that action was legal for the district council. The SNP knew that it was illegal for a regional council, but it went ahead and made that promise. He cannot have it both ways. The SNP was flushed out by having to vote against its own proposition, otherwise it would have tried to let it pass.

5.30 pm

The issue is whether we should stick to VAT at 8 per cent. or 5 per cent. I prefer zero per cent. I hope that, in the months and years that remain—I hope that it is only months—before we have a change of Government, we are able to use the mechanisms of the European Union to review the matter. That is not beyond the bounds of possibility. We are not tied to being prevented from going back to the zero rate. That matter is negotiable and we should consider it.

The argument will not go away. I will certainly continue to argue. VAT on domestic fuel is a most unfair impost on the British people. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan mentioned England, but the thrust of his remarks related to Scotland. He made a special appeal to Scottish Members to defend their people. My people live on both sides of the border, and they live in Wales and in Northern Ireland. They are the people whom we should seek to defend. It looks as though the nationalists have gone against their own arguments. In previous debates, they have said that they do not vote on any matter that affects the people of England. That was a disgraceful attitude. I am glad that they are beginning to see the sense of their arguments, but the VAT argument will go on.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I rise to speak mainly because I was surprised at what I can only call an hysterical outburst from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling). His remarks were slightly tempered by those of the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), who showed genuine concern about the issue which my party is addressing in amendment (a). We are trying to ensure that there is a reduction in VAT on domestic fuel to the extent to which that is allowable under current regulations. That is the point of our amendment. Our amendment applies not to one part but to all parts of the United Kingdom.

We are concerned about fuel poverty. Some hon. Members who have served in the House longer than the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central will appreciate that I have campaigned in respect of fuel poverty for more than 20 years. It sits uneasily on the shoulders of Labour Members to forget that when I first raised the issue of a cold climate allowance and of ensuring that people were not frightened to put on their fires or to buy bags of coal, the Labour Government accused me of being hysterical and of frightening people. It has taken a long time for many people to be convinced of the arguments. Obviously, I welcome the fact that they have.

On the issue of VAT on domestic fuel, I have shared many platforms with many people in the United Kingdom. I have always been committed to trying to win the argument, which is as much about morality as about economy. If hon. Members cannot adopt a moral approach to the people who are needy, who are living in poverty and who are frightened to heat their homes, we are not fulfilling our roles as democratic representatives. My Cold Climate Allowance Bills, which have not always won favour with hon. Members, have always applied on a United Kingdom-wide basis, just as our amendment does.

Given the comments by some Labour Members, I assume that peace will break out and that they will consult us every time they table an amendment. This amendment is being debated on the day when we heard about British Gas investigating possible reductions in its services to the elderly and to the handicapped. It is even considering not sending braille bills to blind people. That makes me feel sick when we know that money can always be found for chief executives to have substantial pay increases that almost equal national lottery pay-outs. We have that moral responsibility.

Hon. Members must recognise that the amendment can be voted on and be attached to new clause 1. That is the mechanism. If new clause 1 is accepted, our amendment can be voted on. If the amendment is accepted, the Government would have to take it on board.

Mr. Darling: No one doubts the sincerity with which the hon. Lady has waged her campaign on behalf of those who must pay VAT on fuel. Given the constraints in this Parliament that are needed to obtain a majority, what steps did the nationalists take between Friday evening and this afternoon to see whether they would have sufficient support to command a majority? The issue is not the difference between 8 and 5 per cent., it is ensuring that the full 17.5 per cent. that the Conservatives wanted does not go ahead.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Gentleman knows the SNP's opposition to the 17.5 per cent. rate. The amendment, which was tabled in my name, was not canvassed because 250 redundancies were announced in my constituency on Friday, courtesy of the Ministry of Defence, and that matter had to be dealt with. The Labour party is extremely miffed that it did not work out the possibility of tabling such an amendment to the new clause. If that is what is worrying Labour Members, it is a shame, but there was nothing to prevent the Labour party, with all its resources, from doing exactly what my party did.

Mr. Darling: I do not wish to labour the point, but of course we considered the possibility. Given that we had to obtain a majority which, of necessity, would include some Tory rebels, we were anxious to prevent VAT from being imposed at 17.5 per cent., and we believed that the one position that we could win was to keep VAT at the present year's level. Without exception, Labour Members have always opposed VAT on domestic fuel.

Although I have great sympathy with the hon. Lady in respect of the redundancies that were announced in her constituency on Friday night, it has been my experience that the leader of the Scottish National party has never been reticent about using the press. The reason why we did not hear a cheep between Friday evening and today was simply that the hon. Lady was otherwise engaged, no matter how understandable the situation in which she found herself.

Mrs. Ewing *rose—*

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. It might be wise to return to the amendment.

Mrs. Ewing: It must be recorded that the amendment was on the blues at the back of the Order Paper on Friday, if Labour Members had cared to check. I take it from the remarks of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central that the official Opposition plan to call a Division on new clause 1, although I had understood that new clause 1 was not opposed. There is still an opportunity to vote on the recommendation that we have placed before the Committee. All that we are asking for is hon. Members'

[Mrs. Ewing]

support. Hon. Members must make up their own minds. They must take decisions and answer to their constituents. Many people will find it very interesting if the official Opposition do not support our amendment in the Lobby tonight just because they happen to be miffed that they missed an opportunity.

Mr. Graham: I am confused because the amendment refers only to 5 per cent.—it should be 1 per cent. My opposition to VAT on fuel is well known, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as is my opposition to the fuel poverty which is affecting constituents all over Great Britain.

Ministers' replies to the questions that I asked before they put VAT on fuel should have had some credibility. I asked: Did they know what the price of coal was? Did they know how much it cost for a bag of coal to be delivered to a house? Did they know how much a bottle of Calor gas cost? Did they know what a gallon of paraffin cost? I never received any answers. One would think that, with all the resources which Ministers have, they could have found that out. The Minister may wish to intervene now to tell me.

We are again speaking about fuel poverty, and the Opposition are trying to protect pensioners, the disabled and the low paid. We are constantly arguing about the issue because elderly people and others cannot heat their houses and live in comfort. The Government deny them that. The amendment aims to reduce the costs of heating the homes of the elderly and of the disabled.

The Government should tell us how much it costs to heat a home, and then they should look at by how much they are increasing that cost. There is confusion among some Members, but I am keeping strictly to the amendment. I should like to see the abolition of VAT on fuel, and the Government should go further and make some other dramatic reductions to the cost of heating homes. We do not want the Government's penny-pinching schemes to help people who are suffering fuel poverty. We need something that is more committed and would allow folk to live in comfort.

The House often gets caught up in minutiae which, at the end of the day, does not help anybody. I should like the Government to take some cognisance of fuel poverty. People are living in real hardship in cold and damp houses. Many of my constituents live in damp homes, and the local council does not have enough money to heat those houses. Hon. Members may ask what is the relevance of that. Clearly, if people are paying for heating, they will also be paying the additional VAT on fuel. If VAT on fuel were reduced, that would help people to live in comfort.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) rightly let the Committee know that we have too many homes in Scotland which are damp and need heating. Too many homes have condensation and have been badly built. Do the Government come up with enough money to remedy those problems? No. They come up with an increase in VAT on domestic fuel, which brings us back to square one. Ordinary men and women who are low paid or pensioners cannot heat their homes because of this Government's actions.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): During the past hour of the debate, I have become bemused about which way hon. Members in different parts of the Committee will be voting on this issue. I look at it as a simple issue. The Opposition are against VAT on domestic heating. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), I would support a rate of zero per cent. Unfortunately, VAT on domestic fuel has been imposed for a year, and we cannot remove it without co-operation from other member states of the European Union. I suspect that such co-operation would be unlikely, given the Government's relations with the other member states.

It is surely better to have a rate of 5 per cent., which is at the bottom of the reduced rate of VAT, than one of 8 per cent. An argument has been advanced that we should leave well alone, and that we should not move the rate to 5 per cent. Another argument is that new clause 1 might not go through, but I do not believe that. The Chancellor said that he would introduce clauses as a result of a decision of the House before Christmas regarding VAT, when the Government were roundly defeated on increasing VAT on domestic fuel to 17.5 per cent. The Chancellor then said that he would take note of that decision.

5.45

The Chancellor had his revenge in his mini-Budget just before Christmas, although he need not have done so, by putting up the duties on lots of other commodities. He said that he would have regard to what the House decided, and that he would propose a new clause in time for it to be discussed in Committee. This he has done. The Treasury produced draft clauses, and we have the clauses before us.

There would be no honour on the Government side—there is some—if they incited their own Back Benchers to vote against new clause 1. I do not think that they will do that. I am prepared to accept the word of the Government that they will do their best to ensure that new clause 1 is read a second time and becomes part of the Bill.

If that is the case, what is left? After the new clause is dealt with, we can—as an attempt to find the opinion in the Committee—ask whether we want the reduced rate of VAT to be 8 or 5 per cent. I am simple-minded on the matter. I do not believe that we should have VAT on fuel, but, if we have to have it, I would rather it was at 5 per cent. than at 8 per cent.

It is clear that, for many people, the cost of energy is great. Members have talked about fuel poverty. It exists not just in Scotland but in England and, as a Welsh Member, I can tell the Committee that fuel poverty is present in Wales as well. Consumers of electricity have to pay high standing charges, and that again is a measure that bears hardest on those who can least afford to pay.

Meanwhile, the regional electricity companies have so much money that it is flowing out of their ears. There is no justice. Despite the adverse effects upon the poorer people in society, we are debating whether we should leave VAT at 8 per cent or reduce it to 5 per cent. I certainly have sympathy for the amendment, and I do not care whether it has been tabled by the SNP or by the Labour party. We should look at what the amendment says and ask whether, in our judgment, it is good for the country and for the people whom we represent.

I have no doubt that my electors would, to a man and woman, say that if I have a chance to vote for VAT on domestic fuel to be at 5 per cent. rather than at 8 per cent., that is what I ought to do. I intend to do that.

There is a problem within the Labour party. While the Scottish National party will never form a Government, the Labour party will form the next Government. I do not know what my hon. Friends on the Front Bench will suggest, but they might be worried that the Government will say that the Labour party is forgoing a certain amount of revenue. The Government may then ask where the Labour party is going to get that revenue.

I do not how much revenue a 3 per cent. reduction in VAT would amount to—it might total £0.5 billion. The Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget—I am speaking from memory—said that he was expecting a public sector borrowing requirement of about £30 billion in 1995-1996. As a result of changes in the economy, he is now expecting a PSBR of £21.5 billion. Those matters are dealt with by guess and by God, and estimates of the PSBR can vary by huge amounts. If the Labour party—through its support of the amendment—were able to bring the rate of VAT down from 8 to 5 per cent., what would happen to the PSBR? It would go up from £21.5 billion to perhaps £22 billion. I do not think that that is serious. I cannot say that about many things, but on its own it is not a serious problem. On the other hand, what other tax could be put up instead?

I recommend that the Government accept the amendment and resolve, as a quid pro quo, not to abolish tax on share transactions. That would more than compensate for any loss of revenue resulting from acceptance of the amendment. The tax that the Government will forgo voluntarily when they abolish duty on share transactions is about £1 billion. That is more than they would forgo if they accepted the amendment. I will not vote for the amendment irresponsibly and say, "Well, as it is something that my constituents would want, I'm not going to worry what happens to the economy as a result." I shall vote for the amendment and urge the Government, if it is passed, to recoup the money by retaining duty on share transactions. In itself, that abolition of duty would lead to more short-termism and difficulties for the economy.

I hope that that is a reasonably logical argument. We should not try to squabble about who thought of something first. It does not matter. People do not care tuppence about who tabled the amendment. They care only about the effect that it will have. I am sure that, if it were passed, 99 people out of 100—not only in my constituency but throughout the land—would give three cheers.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) asked about the status of the 8 per cent. VAT rate on domestic fuel and power. In my introductory remarks, I said quite clearly that we accepted the decision of the House in December of last year and have no intention of increasing the rate further. In fact, the new clause fixes the 8 per cent. rate in statute and removes its transitional status. Let us contrast what I just said with the evasive attitude of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who, in the debate on the Budget, despite being asked several times by one of my hon. Friends, refused to give any assurances about the intentions of a future Labour Government on the rate and scope of VAT.

We do not intend to bring in any more reduced rates of VAT. To do so would undermine the comparative administrative simplicity of the VAT system in this country. It would create new boundary lines between rates and types of products and services, which would provide endless scope for disputes and difficult decisions.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Can we be clear about precisely what the Paymaster General said? When he said that the Government have no intention of bringing in any more reduced rates, is that what he means—no rates other than 8 per cent? Or is he saying that no other goods and services will be brought to the 8 per cent. rate? Which is it?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am saying that the VAT rate on domestic fuel and power will be a unique reduced rate in this country and we will not be adding any more products or services to the reduced rate band.

In answer to a question about energy saving materials, I can confirm—it was apparently not understood by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson), who introduced his Bill last Friday—that such products are not on the annexe to the sixth VAT directive and therefore we could not introduce a reduced rate for such products, even if we wished to. The Commission said that it has no intention of proposing any additions to the reduced rate to cover energy-efficient materials, and therefore I must say that that, too, falls at the first fence.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) described the regional variations in the weather pattern in the United Kingdom and pointed out—as if we did not know—that it is generally colder in Scotland than it is in the rest of the United Kingdom. It is not quite that simple, because parts of Scotland, such as the west coast, are not as cold as certain parts of England. Therefore, any attempt to introduce regional variations in the taxation of fuel, or in the compensation package, would rapidly turn into an administrative nightmare. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that various other costs in Scotland are somewhat lower than in England, certainly in the south of England. If we were to compensate for those costs as well, in the opposite direction, the whole system of taxation and the benefit system would rapidly become bureaucratically unworkable.

Certain payments go to Scotland more frequently than to England. Cold weather payments, which the Government introduced, go differentially to those living in Scotland. Last year, for example, Scotland received 40 per cent. of the cold weather payments that were paid, and they are due to rise. They were increased from 1 November last year from £6 to £7 per week and will increase further to £8.50 per week from 1 November this year.

Mr. Salmond: I am well aware of the inadequacy of the emergency payments scheme. The Minister talks about an administrative nightmare for the Government. Will he just contemplate the fuel nightmare, which the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel has made worse for so many of his fellow citizens? Has he actually read the Cold Climate Allowance Bill, which has been introduced several times by my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), which suggested that regional variations in compensation be built-in to the social security system to bring about some alleviation of fuel poverty? Does he understand that all those questions were dealt with in that

[Mr. Salmond]

Bill and that all that is required from the Government is some political will not to put people into a situation of desperate fuel poverty?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I well understood the points that were made by the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, both in this and previous debates, but I am firmly of the view that any attempt to go down that road for one specific item of domestic expenditure would become administratively unworkable.

On VAT and the climate, it is worth pointing out in passing that not only do all other EC countries have a positive rate of VAT on domestic fuel and power, but in countries that are colder than the United Kingdom the VAT rate in higher. For instance, in Sweden and Denmark, the rate of VAT on fuel and power is 25 per cent. and therefore it is not the only matter to be considered under this general heading.

Mrs. Ewing: Does the Minister understand that, in those Nordic countries, the housing standards and the standards of insulation are much higher and that they have much lower winter death rates than we do in the United Kingdom, particularly when we compare them with northern parts of Scotland? I realise that VAT is one aspect of the argument, but at the moment we do not have a sufficient scheme to bring our housing stock up to the necessary quality. Until that is achieved, we must do everything possible in our power to avoid fuel poverty.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: That is why I said that there were a number of other factors in play. I am sure that the hon. Lady would give us credit not only for introducing but for generously funding the home energy efficiency scheme, which will receive £100 million a year over the next three years and which is far and away the most comprehensive scheme for improving the insulation and draught-proofing of domestic dwellings.

I return to the main substance of the amendment, which is the determination of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan to force through an amendment to reduce the 8 per cent. rate of VAT on fuel to 5 per cent. That is unacceptable to the Government because of the revenue loss concerned. It would cost some £500 million a year, which would have to be made up by other taxes elsewhere or be funded by cuts in public expenditure. Under neither heading did the hon. Gentleman make any suggestions.

The Committee was entertained by the exchanges between the Labour party and the SNP on this matter. Although I resist the amendment and disagree with it for the reason given, I concede that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan and his party are at least consistent on the matter. He opposed VAT on fuel and now wishes to reduce it to the minimum rate permitted under EC legislation. Both he and my hon. Friends were somewhat bemused and baffled by the wriggling explanation—or non-explanation—given by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) in trying to describe why he will not support the amendment. If the Labour party is against this tax—its opposition to the Budget was founded on opposition to VAT on fuel—it is strange that it would rather have VAT at 8 per cent. than at 5 per cent.

6 pm

There is a clear amendment, which I understand is in order, to amend the new clause and insert 5 per cent. rather than 8 per cent., so it intrigued us that, although the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats want zero per cent. VAT on fuel, they would nevertheless prefer 8 to 5 per cent. That Mickey Mouse arithmetic and contorted logic gives us a glimpse of what a future Labour Government would be like. It clearly did not impress the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), who said with genuine and heartfelt sincerity that he opposed the whole concept of VAT on fuel and would vote accordingly. He will certainly join the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan in the Division Lobby.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The Minister is correct to say that the Liberal Democrats will not support the amendment. The reason, however, is clear. We said that we favoured the 5 per cent. rate but must show how it would be funded. We proposed that it be funded by a carbon energy tax, which the Government resisted and prevented the European Union from adopting. Are the Government in favour of a carbon energy tax, which would help to finance the 5 per cent. rate? If so, not only could we support the amendment but so could the Government.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: That reasoning is highly specious. I confirm that we are not in favour of a carbon energy tax, which is unnecessary and would damage the competitiveness of British industry. If we imposed such a tax on British business, it would simply encourage industry, particularly heavy industry, to migrate away from the United Kingdom and the European Union to parts of the world like north America and the Pacific basin, which have no intention of imposing a carbon tax. So we could see carbon emissions rising globally, rather than diminishing.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the Minister for showing his characteristic courtesy. He has confused me with another hon. Member because at no time did I use the phrase, "vote accordingly". I said that I had some sympathy for a 5 per cent. level of VAT on fuel. I would prefer a zero rate. Incidentally, for what it is worth, the pronunciation of my constituency is Greenock and Port Glasgow.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for getting the pronunciation of his constituency wrong, but I was crediting him with more logic than he has displayed. If he opposes VAT on fuel and power and wants a zero rate, it defies logic that he will not support an amendment that would reduce it to 5 per cent. and that he would rather have 8 per cent. That logic obviously impresses the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), who clearly said that he will support the SNP amendment. The Labour party has a mini, or perhaps a major, rebellion on its hands. I see that the hon. Member for Wrexham is now being spoken to, no doubt in stern tones, by a colleague. I doubt whether that will be sufficient to get him out of the wrong Lobby, in eyes of the Labour party, or the right Lobby in the eyes of the SNP.

So what started as a simple amendment by the SNP has driven a dagger right the way through the Labour party. Although I have no sympathy and will invite my hon.

Friends to reject the amendment, I must at least congratulate the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan on his parliamentary tactics.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. It may assist the Committee if I advise on the order in which I intend to put the Questions. First, I shall ask whether the clause should be read a Second time; secondly, I shall put the SNP amendment; and, thirdly, I shall ask whether the clause should be added to the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time.

Amendment proposed to the proposed new clause: (a), in new subsection (1A)(b), leave out '8' and insert '5'.—*[Mr. Salmond.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 7, Noes 283.

Division No. 43] **[6.06 pm**

AYES

Barnes, Harry
Canavan, Dennis
Corbyn, Jeremy
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Skinner, Dennis

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alex Salmond and
Mrs. Margaret Ewing

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'hre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow West)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert

Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexleyheath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Waller, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whitingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Liam Fox

Question accordingly negatived.
Clause added to the Bill.

New clause 2

SPIRITS, BEER AND CIDER: RATES

'.—(1) In section 5 of the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979 (spirits) for "£19.81" there shall be substituted "£20.60".

(2) In section 36(1) of that Act (beer) for "£10.45" there shall be substituted "£10.82".

(3) In section 62(1) of that Act (cider) for "£22.82" there shall be substituted "£23.78".

(4) This section shall be deemed to have come into force on 1st January 1995.'.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following: Amendment (a) to the proposed new clause, in subsection (1), leave out '"£20.60"' and insert '"£17.83"'.

Clause 2 stand part.

Government amendments Nos. 1 to 6.

Amendment No. 26, in schedule 1, page 156, line 25, leave out '£19.81' and insert '£17.83'.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Clause 2, together with schedule 1, replaces the present five-band duty structure for low-strength wine and man-made wine with a two-band structure. It is a sensible, simplifying measure. The broad effect is fiscally neutral, but British producers will generally benefit from the change, as they produce proportionately more product at the higher end of the range. I am sure that the Committee will welcome that modest reform.

The schedule also envisaged a duty standstill on wine, as on beer and spirits. That is now to be amended; I shall say why and how in a moment. The duty on fortified and sparkling wines was also reduced. In the case of fortified wine, that takes into account the third stage of the agreement with Spain, to reduce the differential between fortified wine and table wine, and to allow the name "British sherry" to be used until 1996.

The reduction acts to correct an anomaly whereby sparkling wines are taxed more heavily than stronger fortified wines. More than half of all sparkling wine is not champagne, and there is also a successful British production of sparkling wine, which will modestly benefit from that change.

In his statement on 8 December 1994, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said that he had hoped to spare the alcohol industries any duty increase. However, the loss of revenue, as a result of the VAT on fuel decision, meant that he, regretfully, had to revisit those excise duties.

Amendments Nos. 1 to 6 give effect to an increase of about 4 per cent. in each wine category. Similarly, new clause 2 raises the duty on spirits, beer and cider by about 4 per cent. They were the subject of resolutions passed by the House on 13 December 1994.

Those increases are not as we originally wished. However, even with those increases, the duty on spirits, beer and wine has decreased in real terms since 1985 by 16.1 per cent., 7.7 per cent. and 2.2 per cent. respectively.

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): We will vote against new clause 2, which seeks to increase duty on beer, wine and spirits. A 4 per cent. increase in alcohol duties is contained in that new clause, imposed on the industry following the Chancellor's acknowledgment in his Budget speech of the problem confronted by the beer and pub industry in relation to the increase in legitimate cross-border shopping and illegal smuggling.

The Chancellor said:

"one of the most widely publicised other effects of the single market has been the increase in legitimate cross-border shopping in alcohol and tobacco, and in smuggling.

Both of these have inevitably meant some loss of duty to the Exchequer, pressures on the British drinks industry and some damage to British business. No Chancellor can remain unmoved in the face of this".—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1095-96.]

We did not realise that he meant that no Chancellor could be moved for more than seven working days, faced with that problem. Despite the assurances that he gave the House in trying to persuade us that he understood the problems of the industry, he chose to increase alcohol duties about nine days later. Moreover, in the Budget itself, the Chancellor reduced duties on sparkling wine and champagne by 27p a bottle. Even with those changes, there is a reduction of 20p on champagne, making it cheaper than it was before the Budget in 1994.

The Labour party believes that the Government should act urgently in several respects. In opposing the new clause, I shall describe how the Government could have reacted differently.

I note with some interest, reading *Licensee and Pub Food Monthly*, that the Paymaster General's uncle, Derek Heathcoat-Amory, was Chancellor in 1959, and he understood then the need to control duty on beer to prevent damage to the British industry. He reduced the duty on beer—a step that the hon. Gentleman did not feel able to take this year.

Beer smuggling is an enormous threat to the industry. It is a relatively new trade, if I may call it that, and we cannot estimate the extent to which the gradual build-up in the past 18 months has led to the undermining of the industry. The problems that are visible now are a fraction of the problems that will confront us in a few years' time if action is not taken.

The Government, in deciding their panic measures—having lost the VAT vote—sought only to plug holes in the short term, rather than to consider changes in taxation to preserve the industry for the medium and long term. We are witnessing the emergence of a whole new sub-culture—a black market sub-culture, whereby smuggled drink, and indeed tobacco, is easily obtainable. It would be putting it politely to say that it is remiss of the Chancellor to take little notice of that danger—that undermining of the tax base and the industry. I am not speaking about legitimate cross-border shopping; I am speaking about the very expensive occupation of smuggling, and the damage that that does to the industry.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Do I take it that the hon. Lady will base all her arguments on illegal cross-border imports of alcohol, or will she take account of the point of view that I think that I remember her expressing when she was shadow spokesman on health—that there are sound grounds for increasing the price of alcohol, in all its various categories, to discourage people from the problems associated with alcoholism?

Ms Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken in his memory of what I may have said about reducing the consumption of alcohol, although I obviously agree that the balance of people's consumption of alcohol is an important health consideration. We are talking not about encouraging a greater consumption of alcohol but about arranging a tax system that does not create the opportunity for smuggling, which undermines the legitimate market. The difference between taxation here and taxation in France is so great that it provides that opportunity. The illegal entry of alcohol cannot be regulated by our health policies or controlled by our legitimate methods of dealing with alcohol consumption. That means that the Government's health policy on alcohol consumption is undermined by a tax policy that cannot deliver controls on that consumption.

6.30 pm

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): The hon. Lady mentioned that she took basically the same attitude to the cross-border smuggling of alcohol as she did to the smuggling of tobacco. Does that mean that she will oppose new clause 4, which introduces an increase in taxation, using the same argument? I assume that the Opposition will vote against new clause 4, just as they will vote against new clause 2.

Ms Primarolo: I shall deal with that point when we discuss new clause 4. The point about the balance between taxation and the control of a product is important, as is the question of how the Government could not only prevent illegal imports which undermine our industries but provide for an increased consumption of, for example, cigarettes which clearly we do not want.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I take the hon. Lady back to what she was saying before the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle). She rightly drew attention to the substantial difference between duties in France and duties in this country. When the matter was discussed during the Finance Bill Committee last year, one Front-Bench Labour Member drew from that the conclusion that the British Government's policy should be substantially to reduce duty to levels much closer to the French levels. Is that now Labour party policy?

Ms Primarolo: On the question of duty levels and the ability to prevent smuggling, the Danish example gives us a good idea of how duties need to be balanced to secure income for the Treasury and to ensure that there is no loss through smuggling. The point is— *[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) want to hear the answer to his question or shall I move on to my next point?

The differences between excise duties in France and those in Britain are so great that to ignore them undermines the industry. The problem is how income to the Treasury would be replaced. The Government have not come forward with any suggestion or plan to deal with that gap. In fact, they have done the opposite. In their desperation to raise taxation, they have exacerbated the problem. When the Chancellor made his comments about freezing duty in his original Budget, he was acknowledging those problems and the need to correct them. If that policy was good enough on 29 November, it is certainly good enough now.

The importation and sale of undutied alcohol are criminal activities. At the lower end of the market, there are enormous opportunities for people to engage in that enterprise. On one trip, a large van carrying 25 cases can deliver profits of more than £700. Once a sales network has been established, smuggling can become a regular "business"—not a legitimate business. With a network of friends and friends of friends, the "business" is developed and the Government's whole strategy is undermined. The Government tell us that they are engaged in a thorough assessment of how to secure money for the Treasury. The truth is that they are saying that they can raise some taxes and lose some taxes and that, in the short term, they simply have to raise them.

I give two examples. One individual was making three trips a week and clearing a profit of more than £2,000 a week, which was not taxed. Another gang was doing seven to 10 runs a week. About 15 people were involved and they had been carrying out that work for 11 months or more; they were making £10,000 a week of untaxed profit. In the beginning, opportunists were involved. Organised professionals are beginning to enter the "business". Yet again, the Government's free market ideology provides an opportunity for criminal activity.

The Government originally told us that they would take the cheap option in dealing with the problem of excise duties. They said that they would go for controls on trade as the likeliest means of getting a grip on this illegal activity. Against the background of there being only 200 excise verification officers, the results achieved are good. The Government, however, have now announced that they will cut the number of Customs and Excise officers, the front-line officers who investigate those illegal activities. The Government need to explain why they are doing that—why they are going back on promises made to the House.

How can only 200 excise verification officers deal with the problems of bootlegging? In the Leeds collection area, only 10 staff cover York, Leeds, Bradford, Halifax and Hull. In the south-west of England—I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West to this—eight staff cover the area from Bristol to Land's End,

[Ms Primarolo]

which is a lot of coastline. In the Birmingham collection area, 12 staff cover the entire west midlands. The Government intend to reduce those figures through further cuts in Customs and Excise.

The cuts in the number of Customs and Excise staff break a promise, given in the House on 2 February 1993 by the then Paymaster General, the right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope), to my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), that there would be no reduction in the number of Customs and Excise officers. The Paymaster General went on to say:

"I can readily undertake to keep matters under close review, particularly in the early stages of the single market—indeed, we are already doing so. As I have told the House before, we are determined to ensure that smuggling, bootlegging and the resale of goods brought back without UK duty having been paid are pursued with the utmost vigour of the law by all the customs officers that it requires."

After being challenged by my hon. Friend, the Paymaster General said:

"Yes. The customs and the Government must determine how we define necessary . . . and see what we determine to be necessary in order to police such matters firmly."—[*Official Report*, 2 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 287-88.]

He said that the Government would keep the position under review and that there would be no cuts in the number of Customs and Excise officers. In the same Budget in which the Government have increased the excise duty on alcohol and declared a "prevention" strategy—with the option of increasing the number of customs officers to tackle smuggling—they have announced a 16 per cent. cut in the number of customs officers. Those cuts have immense implications for preventing the illegal importation of alcohol. Furthermore, the brewing industry has said that the future growth of the market in illegal alcohol products will lead to job losses in pubs, off-licences, supermarkets and cash-and-carry stores.

The Government explained that they were cutting the number of customs officers in order to increase surveillance and ensure greater flexibility by deploying officers in vans. Officers will no longer need to perform routine inspections and front-line work; yet it is those routine inspections and spot checks of off-licences and cash-and-carrys that ensure that illegally imported alcohol does not find a retail outlet.

The Government must implement a clear policy which respects the rights of individuals to engage in legal cross-channel shopping but which uses Customs and Excise to control the ports and ensure that alcohol does not enter the country illegally. The Government must also develop a clear strategy to deal with the problems caused by our European partners' differing levels of alcohol duty.

The Government must strengthen Customs and Excise; tackle the illicit sale of contraband, including drugs and tobacco as well as alcohol; ensure that the negotiations in Europe bring about a reasonable and acceptable package of solutions to protect our industry; and urgently undertake a comprehensive review and present to the House ways in which taxation and Customs and Excise can work together to reduce smuggling and ensure the protection of British industry.

A taxation system must work in the short, medium and long term. It must deliver revenue to the Government without creating unemployment or undermining their position in certain areas by allowing smuggling to continue. The Government have picked on duty on beer and spirits as a soft target which will provide a "quick fix". They are undermining our industry. We are opposed to all the increases in duty—unlike the Scottish National party, which is opposed only to the increase in duty on whisky. We will vote against the increases in duty on whisky, beer and cider.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): As the representative of the brewing centre of England and the universe, I am angry on my constituents' behalf at the proposed increase in the duty on beer. It shows that the Government have paid scant attention to my last two speeches which called for a reduction in excise duty on beer because of the inevitable consequences for the brewing industry and my constituency. Nobody is convinced that the taxation measures might not ultimately prove far worse for the industry, for the reasons given by the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo). The Government will suffer if bootlegging and smuggling continue to leach revenue from the tax take, and I am not convinced that they have taken that factor accurately into account when doing their sums.

I understand, of course, that there are very important reasons for increasing the duty on alcohol: it is the only way in which the deficiency in the value added tax take can be remedied. I am angered by the attitude of Labour Members. They are responsible for the increase in the cost of beer, and we must ensure that the finger is pointed at them. If, as the hon. Lady said, the increase in the excise duty on beer is a "quick fix", it is the Opposition who have forced the Government to come up with that remedy. They have forced the Government to extract VAT in this way. I do not think we need listen to any lectures on the subject from Labour Members, who have certainly not offered any alternatives.

6.45 pm

Dr. Marek: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I shall give way in a moment. We must look to the future and to reducing the excise duty yield from the brewing industry, so that it can flourish without that heavy taxation burden imposed by this or any other Government. However, it is difficult to see how we can achieve that aim. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has talked about getting our European partners to come into line with us. If it were a matter of a few pence difference in excise duty, it would be easy to see how that might be achieved. But the gap is enormous—the excise duty on a pint of beer is about 4p in France and 52p in Britain. It is difficult to see how my right hon. and learned Friend can be optimistic about getting our European partners to come into line with us, and he has not explained how that can be done.

Do we not make achieving that aim still more difficult by setting the appalling example of increasing the duty on beer to boost the VAT take? With this measure, it is even more difficult for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to advance his argument with our European partners.

The persistent hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) has something to contribute to the debate.

Dr. Marek: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. In the last debate I said that,

if the rise in value added tax were forgone, the Government would be faced with raising an extra £500 million; but that sum could have been recouped by not withdrawing the duty on share transactions. The Government could have easily gained £1 billion from that measure. The hon. and learned Gentleman would not suggest that because it does not affect his friends; he is seeking to make political capital from this issue. Will he persuade the Minister to accept that the Government should aim for long-term harmonisation of duties? If the Minister accepts that, we can make some progress.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: My right hon. and learned Friend has already suggested that harmonisation is his aim—it must be, if we are to stay part of the European Community. If the share transfer tax that the hon. Gentleman mentioned were as easy to impose as he suggests, I am sure that it would have been adopted. The fact remains that it has not and cannot be done. The imposition of duty on alcohol is the simplest way, but it has dealt another blow to jobs and to the success of a great industry that is at the root of so much of our social life, never mind our industrial, economic or any other kind of life. We know as a party how the industry feels when we open the newspapers and learn how much of the industry's former support is ebbing away, which I deplore.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and my hon. Friend the Paymaster General should seriously address constructive ways of reducing this appalling duty burden. I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend the Paymaster General will say to reassure not just the Committee but the people who send us here—a high proportion of whom drink in our pubs, clubs and restaurants, and many of whom are employed in the brewing industry. My hon. Friend the Paymaster General should make no mistake about it. I shall, of course, support him in the Lobby tonight, because the blame for all this lies on the other side of the Chamber, but that does not mean that I am any the less angry or will not continue my fight against the Government to bring down this inequitable, iniquitous and harsh measure against the industry that is the heart of the constituency that I represent.

Mrs. Ewing: Amendments (a) and (b) would reduce by 10 per cent. the duty levied on all British spirits, but I wish to speak particularly of the Scottish whisky industry. I remind the Committee that this is the Burns season, when a fair amount of uisqe beatha will be consumed not only in Scotland but throughout the world. Last night, I attended a Burns supper in my constituency hosted by a major distillery organisation and attended by representatives of independent distilleries and other interests. When I replied on behalf of the lasses, I received the biggest cheer when I said that I was introducing these amendments, because those present appreciated the industry's significance to not only my constituency but the whole economy.

The present boundaries of Moray contain more than 40 distilleries. They do not provide a huge number of jobs in direct employment but provide employment in farms, maltsters, warehouses, cooperages, transportation companies and tourism. Anyone who knows my constituency will be aware that it is a great pleasure to follow the whisky trail. All right hon. and hon. Members would receive a warm welcome in my constituency and learn a great deal about the industry. That is true even of the Chancellor, although I would not advise him to show his face too soon in the light of his December statement.

Right hon. and hon. Members often regard speeches about the whisky industry as frivolous, but in the areas in question, it is as significant as mining or shipbuilding to other parts of the country, and equally symbolic. If there is a depression in the whisky industry, there is a depression in our communities. That has nothing to do with consumption but has to do with the local as well as the national economy.

The industry is a huge earner, particularly in exports, raising more than £2 billion last year. Ministers may argue that the 26p per bottle increase in duty will not be imposed abroad—but at a time when the industry is arguing to break down international tariff barriers and arguing for a level playing field in the European Union with other alcoholic drinks such as wines and beers, the Government have sent a signal that they do not care. Why should the industry try to persuade the Japanese to treat it with more respect and to get rid of the internal discrimination that exists in many far eastern countries?

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Does the hon. Lady agree that the most pressing aspect is tax harmonisation in Europe? The Chancellor's action, in a moment of petulance, of imposing 26p on a bottle of whisky means that harmonisation is further away than ever. Seventy thousand jobs in Scotland depend on the whisky industry, and many will be jeopardised as a result of the Chancellor's decision. The need for harmonisation in Europe is, more than anything, the message that should be put across to the Government.

Mrs. Ewing: I much agree with the hon. Gentleman. I know that he has a substantial interest in the subject because Allied Distillers has its headquarters in his area and provides a great deal of employment. He appreciates, as I do, the importance of harmonisation, for which we have argued for some time. We thought that the Government had begun to listen and to accept the need for cuts in the duty levied on whisky.

On 20 November 1994, *The Sunday Times* in Scotland published a substantial article on the arguments made by the Scotch Whisky Association and the all-party group for a 10 per cent. reduction in duty. It stated:

> "Ministerial colleagues are convinced that Kenneth Clarke, the chancellor, is set to deliver a long-awaited boost to the scotch whisky industry."

It was said that he had closely scrutinised the issues and was "particularly impressed" by the argument

> "in favour of countering the anomaly that the UK taxes home product scotch at almost twice the rate of imported wine . . . Ministerial sources said that the full 10% cut is 'expecting too much at one stroke' but they also pointed to a treasury briefing document published at the last budget which said: 'The UK duty on spirits . . . is already relatively high and seriously out of line with the rates of duty elsewhere in the single market'."

That showed that the Treasury was listening. The Chancellor's action in quickly attacking the industry could only have been a fit of pique resulting from the vote on an increase in VAT on domestic fuel. The duty on alcohol already brings substantial amounts into the Treasury's coffers every year. The last time UK duty on whisky was increased, there was a net reduction in Treasury income, so the Treasury cut off its nose to spite its face, rather

[Mrs. Ewing]

than boost an industry that generates so much money for the Government and provides thousands of jobs in Scotland and many other parts of the United Kingdom.

The Treasury should have shown more respect and devised something simpler—such as the tax suggested by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek). If it had examined the public sector borrowing requirement, it would have realised that an increase in VAT on domestic fuel was unnecessary in the first place.

I cannot emphasise enough how angry is the Scotch whisky industry at what has become known as the mini-bar Budget. The industry is furious because it is working hard to promote its products. I know people who fly from my constituency every week to far-off parts of the world to promote Scotch whisky. That is sometimes difficult, but the industry was making progress. Now it sees that the Government do not care about its wonderful product.

Mr. Forman: In what sense does an increase in duty on a bottle of scotch damage the industry's export prospects?

Mrs. Ewing: The domestic market is damaged—sales have fallen—but it is the message sent out that really matters. It shows our attitude to a unique industry, the quality of whose product is unrivalled in the world. The industry brings in money to the Treasury directly and it attracts as many international tourists a year as a great many other attractions put together.

Recently, Macallan whisky chairman Allan Shiach met Clint Eastwood's production company

"on the day Kenneth Clarke did his Dirty Harry act on the Scotch industry. It did not make his day. 'If the government shoots itself in the foot, I am not sure why everybody else has to limp'".

The Government have wounded the Scotch whisky industry and the whole UK spirit industry. I trust that hon. Members will seriously consider supporting our amendments; we shall certainly vote with the official Opposition on the new clause.

7 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): It may be for the convenience of the House to know that although I ran public houses until the beginning of last November, and had been doing so in London for 25 years, I have now disposed of those interests, although I briefly remain a non-executive director of the company in question.

I have listened carefully to the speeches so far, in which several hon. Members have mentioned the fact that bootlegging has been on the increase since the barriers went down on 1 January 1993. I should be interested to hear from the Minister whether expectations of the duty to be collected have been met or, if they have not been met, what the shortfall in the year to April 1994 was. What was the shortfall, if any, for the first three quarters of this year? I believe that the House needs that information, because the mini-Budget has proved to be profoundly unhelpful to an industry that has suffered greatly in the past three years.

The public house in London is under threat, not just from bootleggers—although they are undoubtedly a factor—but from the fact that people's drinking habits are dramatically changing. Bootlegging is one thing; people's consciousness of health is another. In London and the south-east there has been a dramatic decline in trade over the past three years, and the industry shows no sign of recovering from the recession.

It would have been far better if my right hon. and learned Friend had listened to the case put to him by the Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association in the middle of last year, when it suggested that progressive harmonisation with rates of duty on the continent would lead to increased employment in this important industry—in production, and in wholesale and retail. That should have been done instead of putting a relatively small additional burden on top of the duty already charged.

There were expectations that the first Budget might have taken a modest step in the right direction by reducing duty. That was not to be, and the trade was duly disappointed. But it was horrified by the mini-Budget, which put a 4 per cent. increase on duties and which sent out the wrong messages. So trade will continue to be depressed and many jobs will be lost, as will many drink outlets in the retail, wholesale and off-licence sectors.

I look forward to the day when my right hon. and learned Friend will be able to tell us that we are about to move towards the duty levels that prevail on the continent.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): I, too, oppose the increased levies on beer. I declare an interest, as chairman of the all-party parliamentary beer club—an unpaid post, I might add.

It was not just pique but cheek on the part of the Government to introduce such an increase. They are trying to keep wage increases down to 1 or 2 per cent. at the same time as inflicting the increase on the beer trade, which is so important to the Treasury. I understand that the industry, directly and indirectly, supplies the Treasury with about £12 billion a year. An increase of 4 per cent. will inevitably be passed on to the customer. Furthermore, jobs linked directly and indirectly to the industry will be lost.

The beer trade has already lost about 70,000 jobs—including jobs in other sectors related to the industry—in the past six years. That important industry generates about 750,000 jobs in Britain. My constituency is the location for both the Mansfield brewery and the Tom Cobleigh retail outlet. The constituency has suffered 6,000 job losses because of mine closures; if we now lose the brewery and Tom Cobleigh, the situation will be serious indeed.

Dividing up the 750,000 jobs in the industry among the 650 seats in the House gives a figure that shows that the industry is just as important to most other hon. Members. A 4 per cent. increase in duty would lead to another 10,000 jobs, direct and indirect, being lost to the industry. The Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson described the scale of the problem facing the beer industry in Britain due to a lack of action. Cross-border imports are flooding in from Europe at a rate of about a million pints a day because of the huge duty differential, which the Government have done nothing to remedy it. That represents 3.5 per cent. of all United Kingdom beer sales and 15 per cent. of all UK take-home sales. It also amounts to the same as the sales from every single pub in Kent, the west midlands and west Yorkshire, and the output of 18 regional brewers.

Many hon. Members have been on official day trips by bus to the continent— *[Interruption.]* They are not jollies; I do not know anyone who wants to go to Calais for a day just for a jolly. Be that as it may, heavy advertising by cross-channel ferry companies has led to people going across with their vans—to such an extent that our beer club discovered, in November 1993, that there were no vans for hire in Kent until the following February. They had all been booked by people who hired them to make two or three trips a day to the continent, to make thousands of pounds a week.

The lack of Government action to close the differential has rendered the situation extremely serious. In France I can buy a small bottle of beer for 11p, a price that includes the tax and duty. In Britain, we would pay 15p or 16p in duty and excise alone for the same bottle. We cannot compete on those terms.

The Government increase taxes and duties on beer while cutting the number of staff at Customs and Excise, whose unions have been told by the Government that they intend to cut 4,000 jobs in the Department. That represents 16 per cent. of the entire Customs and Excise operation. How can that be reconciled with helping the beer industry to make progress or with retaining those 750,000 jobs? We cannot stand up in Europe for our beer industry unless we start to tackle some of those problems.

The Chancellor admitted in his Budget speech that no Chancellor could remain unmoved in the face of the evidence that had been presented. If we are not willing to recognise what he said and do not start to take on board the seriousness of the problem, the British pub will be lost for ever.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to correct the wrong impression that he is certainly giving me, which is that every person who goes abroad and returns with cheap drink is evading duty. Most of that activity is completely legal trade and part of being in the European Union, which I understand his party supports.

Mr. Meale: The hon. Lady is right. Much of the activity that we are talking about is legal trade. In a way, that is the problem. Unfortunately, there is an ever-growing trade in smuggling. If she has any doubts, she might like to talk to those of her hon. Friends who have visited France and seen queues of vehicles stretching for half a mile. I am talking of not only vans but half-empty or empty lorries, which are being loaded with pallets of beer. Those vehicles will return to the United Kingdom across the channel. Perhaps she will choose to talk to those of her hon. Friends who have visited pubs and clubs, or to those who have talked to brewers in Scotland, the north-east, the north-west, the midlands, the east and west and London. Over the past 18 months, 12,000 pubs have been lost, mainly in the south and south-east. The direct cause has been the beer and spirits that have come into the country from across the channel.

Mrs. Lait: I have made three speeches making precisely those points. It is clear that the hon. Gentleman has not been following proceedings during debates on the Budget and the Second Reading of the Finance Bill.

Mr. Meale: I feel sorry that I allowed the hon. Lady to intervene. She made an irrelevant point.

If the hon. Lady believes in what she said when discussing the Finance Bill on Second Reading and if she believes in the arguments that are being advanced to explain why an increase in duty is wrong for the beer industry—I have in mind those who depend upon the industry for their employment and an industry that is paying such a great deal of money to the Chancellor year after year—she will vote in the Opposition Lobby.

If we do not change the price differentials between buying beer in this country and abroad, we shall lose the British pub. That will have serious consequences for all communities.

Mrs. Lait: I am grateful to have the opportunity to take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) and to repeat some of the arguments that I have advanced in other debates. I apologise to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench because this is the fourth time that I have spoken on this subject since the Budget statement. I find no comfort in hearing Opposition Members make precisely the points that I have already made. I suppose that I can comfort myself by thinking that at least they are learning something.

The increase in excise duty that we are facing on alcohol and tobacco will result in job losses. It will have an effect on the nation's health and will quite significantly undermine the rule of law. There are various options. My hon. Friend the Paymaster General has assured me on many occasions that the Government are planning to approximate our rates of duty with those of our European partners. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) drew attention to the huge differentials between the United Kingdom and our European partners.

I understand that my hon. Friend the Paymaster General is pressing for changes, and I would like to know what progress he expects to make. I would like also to know that he is encouraging other members of the Government, such as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, to press her opposite numbers in the EU so that they, too, are putting pressure on their Chancellors to increase duties because of the damage to health that is happening in countries such as France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece.

I re-emphasise that while I make no criticism of our excise officers, who do a good job, it must be recognised that prevention is not paying. We are already spending more on preventing the smuggling of beer, wine and tobacco than on the products that are being recovered. History re-emphasises that argument. I wish very much that the Treasury would do its sums and work out the excessive cost of prevention over the cure, which is approximation of duties. The Treasury should stop regarding excise as the milch cow of first resort—when in trouble, first increase excise duties.

Mr. Salmond: While the hon. Lady is waiting for other European countries to change their policies to get the Government off the hook, and given that this is the fourth time that she has made her points to the Government Front Bench— those on the Government Front Bench seem not to be taking much notice of her— is she proposing any stronger action such as voting against the actions of which she disapproves?

Mrs. Lait: I see no point in voting against an increase in duties that has had to be put in place because of the irresponsible behaviour of Opposition Members.

[Mrs. Lait]

I hope that my hon. Friend the Paymaster General will give me an assurance that the Treasury will think more strategically about the use of excise duty and stop regarding it as the milch cow that will solve any problem when we need to raise revenue quickly. I hope that that is the direction in which the Treasury is planning to move.

7.15 pm

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): I do not have the same constituency interest as the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) or my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). However, like many Scots Members, I have whisky interests within my constituency.

We are faced with an issue that spans the United Kingdom. The action of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in imposing increased duty on alcohol has an impact on major manufacturing industry. During the lifetime of the Government we have seen repeated attacks on manufacturing industry, and the Scotch whisky industry is a major part of the manufacturing sector. It is of great strategic importance to the United Kingdom because it draws heavily on indigenous suppliers. Its United Kingdom valued added is estimated to be about 70 per cent. It is sold in 190 overseas markets. It is very much a standard bearer for quality goods from the United Kingdom.

It is appalling that United Kingdom tax treatment limits the ability of the industry to have the same impact in Britain as it has in other countries. It is ironic that in his first Budget statement the Chancellor of the Exchequer took measures to ensure that the price of a bottle of champagne was reduced by 27p. Even after his second go at presenting the Budget, a bottle of champagne will be 20p cheaper. It is appalling that we do not recognise the impact on our industries and manufacturing businesses of moves that were made by the Chancellor following the shambles of his initial Budget statement on 29 November.

There can be no case for increasing tax discrimination by fiscally hitting spirits in general more harshly than tobacco in the mini-Budget. The Chancellor excluded hand-rolling tobacco from the mini-Budget specifically because of the European dimension. Why could he not extend that commonsense attitude to the spirits industry?

I have no hope that we shall hear any common sense from the Treasury Bench tonight. When the Government last increased duty on whisky—there was a 25p increase in the price of a bottle of whisky—the net impact was an £80 million decrease in the revenue available to the Exchequer following the slump in the industry as a result of that increased taxation. It is appalling to think that a critical and strategic industry should be treated in that way.

Scotch whisky is one of the United Kingdom's top five export-earning industries and shares top billing with cars, aircraft, North sea oil and its derivatives, and high-tech products. As the hon. Member for Moray pointed out, in 1993 its export earnings topped £2 billion for the first time, and 40 per cent. of whisky sales are in the European Union. Our other spirits contributed another £175 million to the United Kingdom's export earnings.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton pointed out that, directly and indirectly, the whisky industry employs 70,000 people—four times more than the 15,000 who are directly employed. The industry generates more than £1 billion of business with suppliers, yet the tax levied on Scotch whisky and other spirits is virtually twice the rate per unit of alcohol applied to wine and beer. I recognise the arguments that my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) employed on behalf of beer brewing, however, which is also important to the economy of many communities.

The two Budgets of 1993 set no increase in the excise duty on Scotch whisky, yet when the Chancellor was backed into a corner by his own lack of foresight and by the shambles that the Government created in his first Budget, the first people he chose to attack were workers in a valuable manufacturing industry who play a key part in our economy.

What are the growth prospects for the Scotch whisky industry? After a slump following the previous tax increase, great marketing efforts gave the industry an increased profile—especially in its bicentenary—in the United States, Japan and throughout the European Union. A British industry has the option to grow, but the Government are directly attacking that option. They are so short-sighted that they do not realise the opportunities for a crucial industry.

Scotch whisky is price-sensitive. There is no doubt that the increase of 26p on a bottle of Scotch whisky will affect the fragile recovery in the industry. Many people in the whisky communities suffered directly as a consequence of the previous attacks on the industry. Jobs and distilleries were lost as a result. We are throwing away the heritage of large communities in Scotland and the associated industries involved in the distribution and marketing of Scotch whisky, throughout the United Kingdom.

We must narrow the tax discrimination against Scotch whisky throughout the Community. We were led to believe that the Chancellor would be vociferous in his support for the industry and for tax harmonisation. I have heard nothing from the Treasury Bench today to convince me that that promise will be kept. I am worried that there will be a negative impact on the United Kingdom economy and that the Government are being short-sighted.

I am not merely concerned about the impact on the Scotch whisky industry. Whisky blenders in my constituency also manufacture gin. The gin manufacturers association just celebrated its 50th anniversary and it, too, is worried about the impact of the increase in duty on such a crucial manufacturing industry.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I have spoken on this topic on several occasions and I thought it important not to let this opportunity pass without saying a few words.

Last year, I and several other members of the Standing Committee on the Deregulation and Contracting Bill—including my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth), who cannot speak in today's debate—tried to save the great British pint of beer, including its head. Today we want to save the great British pub, which is vitally important, as we heard from the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Neale).

How many pubs have closed partly as a result of the massive differentials in duty on British and French beer? It is estimated that a million pints a day are being brought into this country. Something has to be done to stem that massive tide, and the problem is growing.

One can travel very cheaply across the channel to Calais because of the many special offers. The channel tunnel has opened since I last visited the town, so the problem will get worse. It is estimated that beer from Calais accounts for 15 per cent. of United Kingdom take-home sales. My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) mentioned the illegal trade, but much of it is legal. Many people want to travel to Calais and try different beers, and I do not condemn them for that.

Last year I went to Dover to see at first hand the problem faced by Customs and Excise officers due to the amount of beer being imported into this country illegally. On the morning of my visit, two transit vans were stopped. One was packed to the roof with beer that had been brought in with some sort of documentation to show that it was for a party to celebrate winning a contract, which was illegal as it was a business deal. Someone else had brought in a transit van full of alcohol supposedly for personal consumption, but the owner had a list of addresses in the United Kingdom where the alcohol was to be sold.

I was very impressed with the work of Customs and Excise officers in Dover. I informed my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) that I was visiting the port, as he also has done, because of the problem. The problem is indeed massive, and it can only get worse.

I also visited Calais, with the hon. Member for Mansfield, as a member of the all-party beer group. We saw at first hand the problems that the British brewing industry is experiencing. It is not just a matter of people bringing in a few extra cans in their cars. We saw heavy goods vehicles loading pallets of beer at the cash and carry stores which entice such trade. Judging by the tarpaulins, the vehicles came from all parts of Britain. People think that illegal imports are a problem only in the south-east of England, but that is not so: beer is being transported throughout the United Kingdom and the massive tax differentials make this worth while.

The alcohol is being distributed in many ways. It is not merely a matter of Arthur Daley characters shoving one or two cases here and there. It has become a trade for many people and the alcohol is distributed through all kinds of outlets, including car boot sales, and so forth. Indeed, I have raised in an Adjournment debate the problem of car boot sales and the amount of beer coming into this country.

I am concerned because I have brewing interests in my constituency—Thwaites, Whitbread and Samlesbury are on the edge of it and are all vital for job creation, as well as being particularly good beers— and because brewing is important throughout the United Kingdom. All the breweries, both small and large play a vital part in the United Kingdom brewing industry and I do not want them to suffer any more damage.

The British pub has become a social centre—a place where the local villagers can gather and talk—and I do not want the great British pub to be damaged. Pubs are one of the first places that many tourists want to visit when they come here because they are famous throughout the world. Many, however, have closed. The hon. Member for Mansfield mentioned the figure of 2,000. One can only estimate how many jobs were involved. If the differential is allowed to continue and if the amount of beer that one is allowed to bring back into this country is not changed, that problem will only worsen. More pubs will close, more breweries will be damaged and more jobs will be lost.

During my visit to Calais, I noticed that Sainsbury's had opened its own off-licence in one of the hypermarkets to sell alcohol to British customers because it thought that it knew British customers best. That off-licence is part of a much larger hypermarket where the sale of British and continental beers is going on apace and where the marketing is directed towards the British consumer. The signs are not just in French but in English, the prices not just in francs but in pounds, and the signs show how much cheaper it is to buy beer there to bring back into this country.

One can only imagine how cost-effective it is for people, especially those living towards the south of England, to make regular trips across the channel. The number of people going over to France and buying large amounts of beer, which they would normally buy in British off-licences or in British pubs, was a considerable problem over the Christmas period.

With the hon. Member for Mansfield, I was part of a delegation to the Paymaster General about the problems. We thought that we had won the battle before the initial Budget statement. At least we had taken a step in the right direction. This new clause, however, is a step in the wrong direction. A penny extra tax is neither here nor there, of course: the problem is much bigger than that, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has said that he is looking at the greater problem of the differential.

7.30 pm

As a matter of urgency, we should try to approximate tax on beer on the continent with that in the United Kingdom. In the mean time, since that may take a number of years and we cannot afford to wait that long for the problem to be rectified, will the Treasury team assure us that the number of Customs and Excise officers operating at ports of entry is built up to ensure that the chances of people being stopped when trying to bring back beer are greater and that the chances of prosecuting them are also greater? Can we ensure that the excise verification officers operating in the United Kingdom, who look around shops and car boot sales, also look at the amount of beer brought through customs and that more prosecutions are brought? If we stand back and do nothing, the problem will only worsen. We need to take action, and we need to take it now.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: There are two basic arguments that the Government seemed to have ignored. The first is about smuggling, which the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his Budget speech was a major reason for not widening the duty. A week later, he promptly widened the duty. The second is that brewing and especially distilling are major British industries in terms of employment and exports. The Government do not seem to have addressed the importance of those industries at all.

The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) made the point that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, up to the second Budget, had given a clear indication that he had understood the argument, taken it on board and was going to do something about it. That is why I maintain that he took the decision in the mini-Budget simply out of political pique. He had been beaten on the first vote, so he wanted to be vindictive on the second. There was no intellectual credibility to his decision.

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

The most effective authority to put against the Chancellor's decision is the Chancellor himself. He can be quoted his own record of saying that widening the duty would not work and that it would damage the home industry, increase the problems of smuggling and probably damage Exchequer revenues. Yet the Government are going ahead with the decision to widen the duty.

Yet again, the Opposition parties together are trying to save the Government from themselves. Conservative Members have made speech after speech agreeing with the arguments put forward by Opposition Members but then saying that they intended to vote with the Government. We are told that that is because they hope and believe that the Government will address the problem, but in the meantime the problem will become worse.

The Government are in a ridiculous situation. It is indefensible and shows a total lack of understanding of the fact that our industries require a tax regime which gives them the confidence from which they can build up an export market. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) knows perfectly well that a strong home market is an essential precondition of a successful export market. It is not that firms cannot export when there is a declining home market, but that the home market provides the base and the profit to finance the export drive.

When I was newly elected to the House, because I was the hon. Member for Gordon and because I spoke about the spirits industry, I was described by one columnist as "the hon. Member for Gordon, the home of malt gin." I remind the Committee that the gin industry is a significant producer as well—we are not just pleading for the scotch whisky industry, but for the whole home-produced spirits industry.

It is odd that the Government seem to have regarded the wine industry as deserving a fairer tax deal than the beer, whisky and gin industries, although this country produces relatively little wine. We make some wine, and some of it is quite good, but it is not a significant national industry. In contrast, we make an enormous amount of gin and whisky and we export it. We also make an enormous amount of beer. Yet the Government tax it more heavily than wine.

If we were not in a single market scenario, I would suggest that the Government considered putting up the duty on wine and reducing the duty on spirits. There is a very good argument for that, not least because the alcohol content per unit in relation to the tax is such that whisky and gin are taxed at double the rate of wine, which is an unfair and distorted mix. Raising duty on wine and reducing duty on spirits would appeal to everyone because it would ensure that we protected our own industry and taxed imports. The trouble is that the single market does not make that a viable, long-term and sustainable proposition.

If the Government are serious about taking the argument of the major brewing and distilling industries on board, they should abandon the new clause and at least freeze the duties. If they are to try to restore the industry's confidence, which has been seriously damaged by the Budget, they should quickly tell the House, the country and the industry exactly how they intend to resolve the matter and narrow the differentials. In reality, that can be done only by recognising that duties in the United Kingdom will have to go down; no matter what agreement we may secure with our partners in the European Union about raising their duties to narrow the differential, there is no chance whatever of their coming anywhere near our rates.

The health factor was raised by one hon. Member, but there is not a fair comparison between alcohol and tobacco. All the evidence is clear that tobacco is fundamentally harmful to all users. It is a health hazard and a health risk. That is a justifiable reason for increasing the duties on tobacco, even though I acknowledge the smuggling problem. With alcohol, there is not such an absolute health factor to consider. The abuse of alcohol, not its existence, is a problem. It can be argued that alcohol used in moderation is positively good for us. Indeed, a slogan used to tell us that Guinness was good for us and many a doctor will tell patients that a nip of whisky before bed will enhance their sleep and prolong their life. Not enough people are taking that nip, and the Chancellor has made it that little bit more difficult and expensive.

For all those reasons, my colleagues and I will vote against new clause 2 and we look to the Government to indicate how and when they intend to do something not to make the problem worse, but to tackle it and narrow the differential.

Mr. Stern: I wish to make a few brief comments. First, I should emphasise my continuing interest in these debates over the years. I represent part of the city of Bristol, which contains the Courage brewery, a considerable number of substantial wine importers and a major centre for the manufacture of cider. As a result, it is rightly twinned with Bordeaux, which itself is not unknown for its wine.

Before considering the broad argument which has been rehearsed by many hon. Members today, I want to follow up a point that was raised in last year's debate. When my hon. Friend the Paymaster General replies to the debate, I hope that he will be able to take this point on board. There has been much doom and gloom today about the low level of seizures of smuggled alcohol. However, the level of seizures is increasing substantially and is now a real deterrent in certain parts of the country.

Nothing has been said today about what should happen to the very valuable product being seized. It irks me, and I believe that it irks many people, that the beer, wine and spirits seized as a result of smuggling are simply poured into a hole in the ground. From the point of view of sheer waste, that is not acceptable. In Committee last year, I raised with my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary, who replied to that debate, the question of whether the seized wines, spirits and beer could be re-exported so that they would not affect the home market. In reply, the Chief Secretary said that the Government were considering vinegarising or denaturing the seized alcohol and recycling the glass and metal involved. Although there is provision in later clauses for a new tax regime for denatured and vinegarised alcohol, there is no provision for taking the matter forward. Our job of selling the public the idea of a continuing tough regime on imports will be much more difficult if the Government are engaged in a vast waste of the products that they are seizing.

I want now to consider the more general argument. Although the Opposition may be heartened by some of my remarks, I must begin by totally dismissing the comments from official and unofficial Opposition spokesmen today. As the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) made clear in last year's debate, their only solution to the problem is to throw substantial sums of money at it. They cannot think of anything else to do about it. I totally reject the absence of policy from the Opposition: simply saying, "We must do something about this", is not a solution.

The Government have a policy which they had to breach in part this year because of the irresponsible vote by the Opposition on VAT on domestic fuel. I am not entirely happy with the Government's position. It is all very well to say, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) said, that the long-term solution is harmonisation of duties, but if we consider the level of harmonisation required and the time scale involved, one is clearly looking at 50 years of cloud cuckoo land.

We must understand that we are asking our European allies and partners to disadvantage their own home producers in favour of our producers and to decrease their market share in favour of ours. It is increasingly unlikely that we shall make any substantial progress on harmonisation. It just will not happen. If that is the Government's only alternative policy for a long-term solution to the problem of the skewing of the single market against our producers because of the existing pattern of duty, I must tell my hon. Friend the Paymaster General that that is not good enough, so please go away and think again. Simply to rely on our European allies to disadvantage themselves for our benefit is unlikely to prove to be a successful policy in the long term.

We need to think again about the problem. Clearly the Chancellor cannot forgo the kind of revenue that we are talking about this year, or in the long term, by a consistent and steady reduction down to something approximating European levels of excise duty. But if substantial duty reduction is not available to us, what is?

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I remember the Chancellor of the Exchequer standing at the Dispatch Box not that long ago lambasting Scottish Members who had voted against the imposition of VAT on fuel. He said that we were to blame for the increase in duty on whisky. That was lamentable. It was not a wee grouse; it was a big grouse, and that big grouse could cost thousands of jobs in the whisky industry.

7.45 pm

The Chancellor was being punitive. He did not realise what damage he was going to inflict on the whole of Britain. He had not considered the earnings that the whisky industry generates and the more than £1 billion that is involved in supplying the industry to ensure that it survives.

I have already said that 15,000 people are employed directly in the industry and that nearly 70,000 folk are employed indirectly. As a former engineer, I recall working in the industry. I did not produce whisky, but I did produce engineering machinery for the industry. Thousands of folk produce machinery for the whisky industry.

Some of those engineering companies are involved in other aspects of manufacturing, for which they require the support of the whisky industry. For example, the chemical industry benefits from engineering companies involved in the whisky industry. Some pipe-fitting companies in the whisky industry supply other industries in Britain. If the whisky industry is affected, those companies will be punished.

The brewing industry is very much like the whisky industry; it relies on the same engineering skills and development. I am not separating my support between the beer industry or the whisky industry, which are an important part of life in Great Britain and which play an important role in attracting much-needed revenue to this country.

I recognise the terrible problem caused by the illegal importation of drink from the continent. As a Scotsman, I do not benefit too much from that. We are told that there are supposed to be convoys of vans travelling to Glasgow. I am a car boot lover; I like to go to car boot sales. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) said that people can buy whisky and spirits at car boot sales. I have never seen them for sale at car boot sales. However, I must confess that I have seen cigarettes and cigars for sale.

The Chancellor has not thought this out, but that is typical of the Government. They have thought nothing out in relation to taxation. If they had, we would not be in the trouble that we are in now. The 17.5 per cent. VAT charge on domestic fuel was incredible. I am glad to say that the combined power of the House destroyed that rise, but we have now been hit by this tax increase.

Hundreds of people in my constituency work directly in the whisky industry. They work in the Chivas Regal factory and in the Johnny Walker bottling plant, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams). They rely on the industry to provide them with their daily bread and to ensure that at the end of the week they get their wages and, at the end of the month, they get their salaries. It is very important to have dignity and to be paid.

The Government will deny those people through their punitive tax system and possibly their anti-Scottish feeling. They will impose an additional 20 per cent. duty on whisky, yet they have reduced duty on champagne. Hon. Members should think about that; it is absolutely mind-boggling. I have mentioned before that the Chancellor supports champagne Charlie. He is making it easier for folk who are stinking rich to buy their champagne cheaper. Ordinary men and women who love a wee tipple, a pint of beer or a wee hauf of whisky must pay through the nose because the Chancellor could not run a bus to Saltcoats, which is not very far from where I live.

I hope that this is the Chancellor's last Budget. I hope that it is a case of that famous saying of Bell's, 'afore ye go. I am happy for the Chancellor to have his last whisky 'afore ye go. I hope that he pours a further wee double and drinks to a new whisky, SS Politician. We all know how that went—down the hole—but it created great work for Scottish folk.

The Government have an opportunity to save the scotch whisky industry and the brewing industry from further redundancies by turning from the disastrous route of

increasing duty on our daily tipple. They should look for more sensible ways to raise taxation without creating further redundancies and unemployment in our country.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I enjoy a wee dram as much as I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham), and I pay tribute to the robust way in which he represents his constituents' interests.

There has been a bit of Scottish and, indeed, English hyperbole, and I should like to pour a little cold water on some arguments—I shall be a bit of a spoil-sport, in fact.

When members of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee recently considered differential duties, we were not completely convinced by the arguments that were put to us by licensed retailers of alcohol or by publicans. We listened carefully to what they said, but we concluded that the arguments were somewhat overstated.

Opposition Members in particular have stressed what they allege to be the damaging and, indeed, almost terminal effects of a fairly small duty increase in the Budget, but, bearing in mind changes in the drinks industry and in many other manufacturing industries, one is bound to conclude that in recent times new, changing technology and improved productivity have been at least as important, and probably much more so, than any marginal changes in duty.

Hon. Members have made great play of the problems facing many pubs. I know from experience that pubs in London and in the south-east have had a hard time, but the reasons for that go far wider than the subject of this rather narrow debate. Changing social habits, the growth of off-licences, the tendency of supermarkets to sell large quantities of alcohol to people to drink at home with friends and the drink-driving laws have had a major influence on pubs, not to speak of the temptation of some large breweries to kit out their pubs in a standard manner that makes them look more like building societies than pubs and has detracted from the character and individuality of many traditional British pubs.

There are other factors, such as the longer-run arguments about alcohol consumption and points that I have tried to raise with the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo). There is no doubt from the figures that the average industrial worker now has to work significantly fewer hours to be able to afford a bottle of scotch or a pint of beer than 20, 30 or 40 years ago. The real price of alcohol has fallen, with some adverse consequences for medical and health problems, which is the point that I raised with the hon. Lady.

It is rather surprising that the hon. Member for Bristol, South has made such a swift, easy transition from her shadow health duties to the shadow Treasury portfolio. She has clearly forgotten many of her party's arguments about the desirable health effects of discouraging excessive alcohol consumption by raising the real price of alcohol.

Ms Primarolo: That is exactly the point. Large amounts of alcohol are being smuggled into the country. The Treasury statistics on how much is coming in illegally and how much duty is lost are disputed. If alcohol is coming in unregulated, children and young people have greater access to it. Therefore, health problems are increased, not decreased.

Mr. Forman: The hon. Lady has a small point. According to the best estimates of Customs and Excise, the amount of alcohol that is imported illegally is not significant—less than a fifth—compared with the total volume of alcohol consumed.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but, leaving aside the smuggling issue, does he accept that the price of drinks over the bar is a relevant calculation because in every other European country drink is cheaper than it is at home, which encourages more British holidaymakers to go abroad rather than to stay at home and discourages others from coming here? That fact should be taken into account.

Mr. Forman: That might be a factor for keen drinkers, particularly those who enjoy continental wine, for example, but I doubt whether it is a determining factor when most families decide whether to go abroad or to stay at home, or perhaps not to go on holiday at all.

Opposition Members have been remarkably coy in stating where the revenue would come from if their amendment was successful. There is no doubt that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor needed to find the extra revenue in fairly short order. I have heard no suggestion of how Opposition Members would make up the shortfall. Would they simply allow it to be added to the public sector borrowing requirement, with all the unforeseen consequences that that could have for interest rates?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: The hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) suggested that perhaps the evil was that the Government have not taxed champagne enough. Perhaps Opposition Members propose to tax champagne socialists more.

Mr. Forman: That might be so. Perhaps certain future gatherings in Brussels will prove less attractive if that policy is followed.

I wish to end my speech on a fairly serious and contained point, on which I would appreciate a comment by my hon. Friend the Minister. Has he heard from the Opposition how they would make up the revenue shortfall?

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I am a sponsored member of the Transport and General Workers Union, and I represent many people employed in the brewing industry. As a result of the proposed tax, many of them are likely to lose their jobs in the near future.

Just before 29 November, I met representatives of the Midlands Brewery Society in my constituency. They were at pains to say once more to me, as they had said to many other hon. Members, that, if there was no movement in the duty on beer, they would face a serious and disastrous situation. I asked them to clarify what they would experience if there was an increase. They said that, after detailed consideration—they did not pluck the figure out of the air—10,000 jobs in the industry would be lost, either directly or indirectly. I have heard no Conservative Member challenge that figure.

8 pm

Every speech that I have heard this evening has suggested that the duty will cost jobs in the whisky and beer industries and elsewhere. It is a tax on jobs. The Government continually tell my hon. Friends that the Opposition's taxation policies will cost jobs, so it is ironic that tonight the same Government— with the support of their Back Benchers— will vote for a tax that will certainly cost jobs.

I was fascinated and intrigued by Conservative Members who suggested that they were seriously concerned about the tax. The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) and the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) made that suggestion, but then scurried into their bolthole and camouflaged their concerns by blaming the Labour party for the tax. We are proud that we were able to play a significant role in thwarting the imposition of 17.5 per cent. VAT on fuel, which the country supported. Conservative Members who say that it is the Labour party's fault that taxation has been put up to levels that we have never experienced in modern peacetime, when it is a result of the incompetence of the Chancellor and of the Government, are pushing credibility to the extreme.

I asked my constituents what they thought about the Chancellor of the Exchequer not putting any duty on beer in his original Budget statement. They did not believe it— they were incredulous about it. They did not believe that the Government meant anything that they said about taxation. They thought, too, that the Government were trying to discourage them from drinking beer and to encourage them to drink champagne. The Government failed on the latter aim, and within nine days they had failed my constituents on the former one.

Hon. Members have stated that the Government should urgently seek dialogue with other European Union member states to try to equalise the taxation regime so that we can make progress on what is undoubtedly a serious problem— the massive difference between tax regimes. The problem has been described by many hon. Members on both sides, and I have no wish to repeat their comments.

The Government cannot be serious about any such moves. In a previous life, I was a Member of the European Parliament and I clearly remember the Commission making proposals to harmonise excise duties on alcohol and tobacco. I remember that the first Government to reject any such moves was the British Government. I do not think that the assurances that the Government have apparently given can be serious.

Let us speculate on the negotiating position of the Government if they told other member states that they wanted to debate harmonising excise duties on alcohol and tobacco. They would be asked why they wanted to do so, and they would reply, "We have just increased ours and we expect you to do the same." I must challenge that negotiating position, as it is absolutely incredible.

I can well imagine the Prime Minister or the Chancellor saying from the Dispatch Box that such moves were to be made. The independent Tory party— those hon. Members who described themselves at the weekend as the real Tory party— would not stand for that. Given the Government's current policy on the European Union, there is no possibility that any move will be made on the crucial issue of harmonising taxation, even if it were the right thing to do.

Given that scenario and the concerns expressed by hon. Members about the Government's panic measure, two things should be done. The first is that the House should vote against new clause 2; the second is that the Government should urgently propose measures that would enhance Customs' ability to stop the illegal trade. Instead, they are making cuts in Customs and Excise. If we can do those two things, the House will be able to face the arguments that are being put outside with some credibility.

The Paymaster General: The Opposition have announced their opposition to the measures before the House. At other times, the Labour party certainly has supported higher taxes on alcohol and tobacco on health grounds. That is an interesting reversal of a long-standing policy. *[Interruption.]* I am responding to a point made by the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), who quoted with approval the example of Denmark. The Danish Government cut alcohol duty in response to large-scale cross-border shopping across its land border with Germany. They made a cut of 48 per cent. in beer and wine duty, yet consumption rose only slightly. The Danish Government then had to find compensatory tax increases elsewhere. If the hon. Lady is suggesting that we emulate Denmark, she must propose alternative sources of revenue.

That brings me to the point of costs. We would forgo £155 million if we were to accept what has been urged on us by the Labour party, which would create a large hole in Government revenue. If the Labour party wants to pose as a party of financial responsibility, it must tell us what new taxes it would replace the duty with, or what public expenditure cuts it would make.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) is quoted in today's newspapers rightly castigating and criticising the Labour party for constantly making expenditure promises without saying how they would be paid for. Yet the hon. Gentleman and his party support a reduction in revenue of £155 million a year— a spectacular example of the pot calling the kettle black.

Another point made by the Labour party, and echoed partly by some of my hon. Friends, concerned the efforts made by Customs and Excise to counter the smuggling of alcohol products. The hon. Member for Bristol, South got into a muddle about the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise staff who are supposed to be deployed in anti-smuggling efforts. She said that there were to be cuts in staff. I can confirm that the number of excise verification officers deployed in anti-smuggling duties will not be cut.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government intend to maintain the levels of prosecutions and of Customs officers at Dover port who check on smuggling? Will he further confirm that the Government will do everything possible to fight smugglers and to stop smuggling?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I can confirm that, and inform my hon. Friend— if he does not know already—that an extra 12 excise verification officers have been deployed to Dover in response to concerns expressed by industry and representations made by my hon. Friend.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) asked what is to happen to the increasing quantity of seized goods. We are considering a policy of sale without undermining the legitimate trade that we are seeking to protect.

The general point that I should like to make to my hon. Friend and in particular to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) and my hon. Friend for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait), both of whom have persistently raised it with me, is that we are concerned to protect the legitimate trade and will pursue harmonisation through the European Union, although we would not want to lose our essential fiscal sovereignty over our excise duties.

We have ensured that the biennial review, the first report of which was due by the end of last year but which was delayed, includes, at our insistence, a clause that requires the council to

"take into account the proper functioning of the internal market and competition between the various categories of alcoholic drinks."

Sir Ivan Lawrence : Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Will my hon. and learned Friend forgive me if I do not do so? I know that the House wishes to come to a resolution, but I want to respond to a point made by the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing).

I assure the hon. Lady that we have the interest of the spirits industries firmly in mind. That is why we froze excise duty on spirits in the past three Budgets and, if we had had our way, we would have done so in this Budget too. But because of the House's decision to reject the 17.5 per cent. VAT rate on fuel, we needed to look elsewhere to restore revenue. The Government do not have the luxury of seeing revenues reduced without the obligation to replace them, but I remind her and the House that the duty on spirits will have reduced in real terms by more than 16 per cent. since 1985, even with the increase proposed in the new clauses.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): For clarification, I should say to the Committee that I shall put a minimum of five Questions: first, That the new clause be read a Second time; secondly, the amendment; thirdly, That the new clause be added to the Bill; fourthly, That new clause 2 stand part of the Bill; and, fifthly, the amendments.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 290, Noes 251.

Division No. 44] **[8.11 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'byire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Dave, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan Smith, Iain
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Egger, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith

Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ar V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman, and
Dr. Liam Fox

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
MacKinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Wiltshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill

O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. John Cummings

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause read a Second time.

Amendment proposed to the proposed new clause: (a), in subsection (1), leave out '"£20.60"' and insert '"£17.83"'.—*[Mrs. Ewing.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 3, Noes 288.

Division No. 45] **[8.25 pm**

AYES

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Skinner, Dennis
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Elfyn Llwyd and
Mr. Alex Salmond

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre Forest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Egger, Rt Hon Tim
Ellerton, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger

Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Simon Burns

Question accordingly negatived.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 289, Noes 248.

Division No. 46] **[8.36 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Boreor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick

McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Mailland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Simon Burns, and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell,

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Colley, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr. John
Marshall, Jim
Martin, Michael
Martlew, Eric
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wythenshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Wiltshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward

Oiner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford East)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. John Cummings

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause added to the Bill.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 1

TABLE OF RATES OF DUTY ON WINE AND MADE-WINE

Amendments made: No. 1, in page 156, line 8, leave out '22.46' and insert '23.41'.

No. 2, in line 10, leave out '40.44' and insert '42.14'.

No. 3, in line 12, leave out '134.77' and insert '140.44'.

No. 4, in line 15, leave out '192.53' and insert '200.64'.

No. 5, in line 18, leave out '192.53' and insert '200.64'.

No. 6, in line 25, leave out '19.81' and insert '20.60'.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Schedule 1, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 5

RATES OF DUTY

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The Chairman: With this it will be convenient to take Government new clause 3—*Hydrocarbon oil rates: further provisions.*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Clause 5 increases the excise duty on hydrocarbon oils by between 6.4 and 9.9 per cent. The differential between leaded and unleaded petrol has been frozen at 5.7p per litre, including VAT. The overall increase in taxation at the pump is between 2.5p and 3.2p per litre on road fuels. The duty increases came into effect, as usual, on Budget day. Duty on aviation gasoline increases automatically by 6.4 per cent., because it is set at half the leaded petrol rate.

Gas oil used for industrial heating and power, and heavy fuel oil for industrial heating and furnaces, both increase by 0.5p per litre. The duty on road fuel gas is unchanged, but it is now expressed in pence per kilogram rather than pence per litre. Kerosene, which is used as aviation turbine fuel and for domestic heating purposes, is not charged with duty.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor also reaffirmed his support for the commitment to increase road fuel duties by an average of at least 5 per cent. in real terms per year. This sends a clear signal to manufacturers to build more fuel-efficient vehicles and a clear signal to customers to buy them. The announcement of our intentions for future increases in fuel duties will give manufacturers and customers a longer-term context in which to plan their investment decisions.

The 5 per cent. real increases are also an important part of our strategy to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The fuel duties policy should reduce carbon dioxide emissions by around 2.5 million tonnes of carbon by 2000. This, together with other measures already announced, should enable us to meet our targets of reductions arising from the Rio agreement.

New clause 3 raises the excise duty on road fuels by between 2.5 per cent. and 2.9 per cent. This arises from the statement by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor on 8 December and was approved by the House on 13 December. The differential between leaded and unleaded petrol has again been frozen at 5.7p a litre. The increase in taxation at the pump, including VAT, will be 1p per litre. This increase came into effect on 1 January 1995.

Ms Primarolo: As a result of new clause 3—the increases in excise duty on hydrocarbons—the Chancellor has imposed an extra tax of £51 a year on a typical car owner. This is the latest rise and it means that the duty on a litre of leaded petrol has gone up by 9.8p in the three Budgets since March 1993. The increases, which represent the Tories' one-club response to the Rio environmental targets to which they signed up, are a

[Ms Primarolo]

further blow to the many people living in rural areas—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] They all seem to be sitting in the Chamber.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): And why not?

Ms Primarolo: Indeed, why not. In the absence of a decent integrated public transport system, those living in rural areas are forced to rely on cars as their only means of transport. The increase in petrol duties is another example of the Government's hidden tax increases. In 1979, about 45 per cent. of the retail price of a gallon of petrol went in tax, excise and VAT. From January this year, 75 per cent. of the retail price will go in taxes.

The Government have claimed that this use of only one mechanism to reach the Rio targets is acceptable. The Chancellor, however, speaking in the House on 8 December 1994, said:

"I also propose that the duties on road fuels will rise by a further 1p per litre. I have kept these increases to a minimum to limit the burden on businesses and the rural motorist . . . The increases will also play a part in our strategy for curbing emissions of carbon dioxide."—[*Official Report*, 8 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 475.]

Transport-related air pollution is known to affect people's health adversely. The object must be to change polluting behaviour—to reduce the number of journeys made by car. Emissions of carbon dioxide from motor vehicles increased by 50 per cent. during the 1980s, but the use of above-inflation fuel tax increases may help only as part of a package. In itself, it is insufficient and will not satisfy the environmental targets.

People will not be persuaded to use cars less by this mechanism, because of the absence of public transport, unless there is an efficient, reliable and affordable alternative. Everything that the Government have done in public transport has undermined that arm of public policy; that continues to be the case. Funding for local government packages for transport in 1995-96 has been cut by 8 per cent. in real terms. The cut for London is 4 per cent. in real terms and will be 37 per cent. in real terms by 1997-98. Those are not the actions of a Government who claim to pursue an environmentally friendly policy on transport. The increases must be seen not as a contribution to a strategy on the environment but as another piece of the jigsaw in which the Government seek indirect taxes to replace direct taxes. They seek to take from people through indirect taxes so that they can save up to give tax cuts, perhaps, in future.

It is, of course, important to curb carbon dioxide emissions, but that will not be achieved simply by using this type of tax increase. People living in rural areas will be badly affected. They will find it difficult to understand why they must pay for the Government's taxes while receiving little in return in public transport. Pitching the tax and the tax rise as an environmental measure is cynical and no more convincing than the case that the Government tried to make for imposing VAT on fuel.

This is what needs to be done. We need an urgent shift of investment away from road building and towards public transport. We need to encourage bus priority measures, and we need a network of safe cycle routes and better provision for pedestrians. We need to promote clean air technology, setting minimum standards for fuel efficiency and exhaust emissions. We need to ensure that new developments are sited to minimise the need for the individual to rely on private motoring and an individual car. That, not the spurious case that the Government try to make tonight, which involves taking more taxes from the electorate to save their own skin now, while selling the environment of our children and the future, is the formula for dealing with the environment.

Mr. Salmond: I endorse everything that the Labour spokesperson, the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), said. These are vital matters which will affect rural communities, so it is all the more surprising that the Labour Whips have sent the troops home and they will not be able to vote against the Government if Divisions are called later this evening.

I turn to proposed new clause 3. When the Government were forced by the joint action of a variety of parties in the House to abandon the second tranche of the value added tax on fuel, they replaced one anti-Scottish measure with two anti-Scottish measures: the mini-Budget tax on whisky, which we have just debated; and the additional taxation imposed on road fuel duty, which will fall heaviest on rural communities, many of which are located in Scotland.

In the past couple of years, Scotland has been sheltered from the Government's yearly real terms 5 per cent. increase in those duties because of the prevailing low oil prices. That has meant that the pump price of petrol and DERV has not shot up astronomically in the past two years. However, oil is a cyclical market. Western economies are experiencing a general recovery and many economists are forecasting a sharp upturn in the price of oil—certainly a stabilisation and an increase in the current levels. If a real increase of 5 per cent., which the Chancellor has forecast for the indefinite future, and the impost in the mini-bar Budget of additional VAT on fuel is added to the expected upturn in the oil price, the outlook for many rural communities is extremely serious.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that in many rural communities—certainly in Wales, and, I dare say, in Scotland and in parts of England—the price of petrol is already substantially higher than in urban areas? We are seeing an additional imposition on an already burdensome level of cost, which will hit poorer people very hard indeed.

9 pm

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman is right; he anticipates the point that I was about to make. There will be an increase not just in the road fuel duty but in pump prices generally in rural areas. The increase in VAT on fuel will mean that people in rural communities will pay more tax because the fuel prices are higher. They will lose at every turn.

The point has been made that in many rural communities the car is not a luxury, but a necessity; it is often the only form of transport available. If the Government continue to pursue them, the measures will impact on transport costs in rural communities and they will hit rural industries by pricing them out of the market. It is academic to talk about competing in a single market of almost 400 million people if rural communities in this country are effectively priced out of accessing that major market because of the huge increases in fuel duties imposed by the Government.

The hon. Lady made several suggestions for formulating a more sophisticated, sensitive and environmentally friendly policy, and I shall make a few more. Given the importance of industry to rural economies, the Government should think seriously about increasing the differential between DERV and petrol.

If they had any imagination, the Government would think carefully about congestion pricing. Singapore intends to experiment in the near future with automatic pricing increases for people who take cars into areas of traffic congestion. One of the great ironies of imposing penalties on rural communities is that people caught in city traffic jams, with cars belching exhaust fumes, impact more on the environment than those people travelling by car in non-congested areas.

It may be argued that the road tax should be increased for second cars. By and large, if duties must be paid, families with a second car are in a better position to pay them than those families who rely on a single car as their only available form of transport. It can certainly be argued that the adequate provision of public transport—which has been decimated in many rural areas—should be a prerequisite of any move sharply to increase petrol and DERV duties.

As evidence of the pent-up demand for public transport, I cite the experiment that has been run in the Grampian region—it was begun by the SNP Labour-controlled council two years ago and has been continued by the SNP Liberal administration—offering a 10p bus fare. An old-age pensioner can travel in the north-east of Scotland from Dundee to Inverness for 10p. That experiment has been extraordinarily successful, and buses that were once empty are now full of people taking the opportunity to use rural public transport. The Government's measure will price people out of private transport in rural areas.

At the beginning of my brief remarks, I said that the Government had effectively replaced one anti-Scottish tax with two anti-Scottish taxes. Given that my colleagues and I have already voted against the general taxation measure in the Budget debate proper, given the opportunity this evening we will certainly divide against the Government's proposed new clause 3. I hope that on this occasion the other Opposition parties will join us in the Lobby.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) rightly said that the way to deal with CO_2 emissions is to develop public transport, but new clause 3 will further punish public transport because of the increase that it will make in diesel fuel. That was not highlighted in previous debates. That percentage increase is far higher than the 5 per cent. that the Chancellor highlighted as official policy, because of the freezing of fuel rebate in last year's Budget.

Until November 1993, local bus companies paid about 10p per litre of fuel. When the rebate was frozen last year, that amount was added to their costs. There was an increase of nearly 3p after last year's Budget, and after the two Budgets this fiscal year, users will have to pay an additional 3.62p. A local bus company will, in effect, face a 60 per cent. increase in fuel costs as a result of new clause 3. We must highlight the effect that that will have on public transport costs.

My local bus company, Lothian Regional Transport, said that the increases would add £600,000 to its costs in the forthcoming year, which is 1 per cent. on its total overheads. There were similar increases last year, although they were cushioned to some extent because oil prices were static and declined for part of the year. I am told that the reverse is likely in the forthcoming year because of the rise in the value of the dollar.

Bus companies will begin to feel the effects of the increased tax and the freezing of the rebate in the course of the next year. It is an anti-environment tax in respect of bus companies. The consequence will be higher fares and fewer people using public transport. That is usually the case when fares increase.

The Government presented last year's rebate freeze as a green measure, but that is typical of the hypocrisy that we saw when they introduced VAT on domestic fuel. The Government argued that buses would be forced to use more fuel-efficient engines if diesel became more expensive. The reality is that cutting emissions often means less fuel efficiency and more diesel being used.

Mr. Salmond: Is not one effect of Government policies, which is evident to any driver, that they result in a large number of older buses in use because of lack of investment?

Mr. Chisholm: I was about to make that point. Higher fuel costs mean less money available for investment. Since deregulation, there have been many more older buses on the road. We are seeing another example of the Government not thinking seriously about the environment. It is time Government Departments started paying attention to the recommendations of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution. If they did, they would start fully rebating amounts spent by bus companies on fuel. Because the Government are not doing that, I totally oppose the increase in duty on bus fuel.

Mr. Home Robertson: My hon. Friend said that the Government are imposing an anti-environment tax. I endorse also the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) that it is a ferociously anti-rural tax. The Government and the Paymaster General, who represents a rural constituency, ought to explain the reasons for their action.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South said that this measure will involve an extra tax take of £51 from every car owner in Britain. I suspect that my rural constituents will pay much more because they must travel greater distances and use more fuel. All the goods and services that they purchase are also subject to the tax. The tax certainly discriminates heavily against people living in rural areas.

Sometimes, people have no choice in this matter. Last week, I received a letter from a constituent who, until recently, used the railway service to commute to work in Edinburgh. Because of the lack of investment in that service, however, it has become so unreliable that she now finds it necessary to travel by road. Other Government policies are pushing more and more people on to the roads, and now the Government are taxing them for something that they did not want to do in the first place.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South said, the measure has been dressed up as something to do with the Rio environmental objectives. Clearly, that is bogus. If there is one group of motorists who do not significantly

[Mr. Home Robertson]

contribute to carbon dioxide pollution, it is rural motorists. The pollution of the environment caused by people driving around the highlands of Scotland, rural Wales or the south-west of England is hardly an important factor in atmospheric pollution. Far more important is the pollution generated by—largely stationary—vehicles in traffic jams in urban Britain. If, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and other hon. Members have suggested, the Government dealt with that problem, I am sure that the House of Commons would support them.

I hope that the Minister's constituents in Wells are aware of what he is doing. This is a ferociously anti-rural tax, and the Government should not be allowed to get away with it.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have listened carefully to this debate and to the opposition to the proposal from Opposition parties. Those same Opposition Members have in the past supported the idea of increasing taxes on environmentally unfriendly products—there are plenty of quotes on file to support that contention. Once a lobby group is assembled to complain about a particular increase in duty on environmentally unfriendly products, however, they cave in and vote against it. In fact, I am not sure whether they will tonight. We shall see who—and how many of them—votes against the measure.

The fact is that 20 per cent. of carbon emissions in the United Kingdom come from road transport, and a large increase in emissions is forecast by the end of the century; so transport must contribute to any strategy to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Under the Rio convention, we agreed to reduce our emissions by the year 2000. The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) is wrong to say that this is our only policy to achieve that end. The increase in road fuel duty contributes to only a quarter of the carbon dioxide reductions that we are planning. There are plenty of other measures in place which will deliver the bulk of our commitment.

Of course I recognise the position of those living in rural areas. As the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) reminded the Committee, I represent a rural constituency and I am alert to its interests. I know that a car is often a necessity, but all motorists must think about the environmental consequences of what they do. We have ensured in other ways that the cost of motoring is kept down whenever possible—

Mr. Salmond: As the Minister has recognised the interests of his own constituents, may I ask him whether the Government have made any study of the differential effect of their policy of blanket increases on rural motorists and rural incomes? Have they made any study of the impact on rural industries of the road—pardon the pun—down which they are travelling? Were any studies done before the policy was put in place? Do the Government know the implications for rural communities of the policies that they are imposing on them?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, a well-known study of the pricing of petrol and of petrol products throughout the United Kingdom has been done. The hon. Gentleman will concede that petrol and fuel costs are but one component in the budgets of those who live in rural areas. Plenty of other things are cheaper in rural areas—certainly in Scotland, where housing costs are generally lower than they are in my constituency. I am not asking for the Government to intervene to try to correct that imbalance; it would be impossible for the Government to lay down by some prescriptive formula what petrol and fuel companies should charge in various parts of the country. I am rather surprised that the hon. Gentleman advances that proposition. Why should such an approach be limited to fuel costs? Why should it not apply also to every item on which our constituents spend their money? I accept that some things are more expensive in rural areas. Some things are more expensive in urban areas. That is the interplay of a market and the inheritance of the past.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has already spoken.

9.15 pm

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister confirm that such increases in the price of fuel oil have nothing to do with the oil used by fishing vessels to power those vessels?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If I am wrong, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman, but my understanding is not. If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not give a definitive answer from the Dispatch Box. The structure of fuel duties is complicated. In my opening remarks, I referred to vehicle fuels and to heavier fuels, some of which are taxed more lightly and some of which are not taxed at all.

I shall pursue the argument about the overall cost of motoring. I remind the Committee that the abolition of car tax by the Government has made cars somewhat cheaper. That, in turn, has filtered through to the second-hand market. Although we see increases in the price of petrol, petrol is still cheaper in real terms than it was a decade ago. It is certainly cheaper here than in most other European Community countries.

We have resisted calls from some quarters for the doubling of duties on transport fuels. Such calls occasionally crop up from various environmental groups and others, which seek the abolition of vehicle excise duty and a transfer to fuel tax. That is attractive to some. It would equate costs more closely with usage. Precisely for the reason that it would disproportionately damage and hit the rural motorist, we have resisted that approach. For all the reasons to which I have referred, I must ask the Committee to accept the clause in its original form.

The Chairman: For the convenience of the Committee, I shall put the Question on the new clause after the Question on clause stand part.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New clause 3

HYDROCARBON OIL RATES: FURTHER PROVISIONS

'.—(1) In section 6(1) of the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979, as amended by section 5 above, for "£0.3526" (duty on light oil) and "£0.3044" (duty on heavy oil) there shall be substituted "£0.3614" and "£0.3132" respectively.

(2) This section shall be deemed to have come into force on 1st January 1995.'.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

The Chairman: We now come to clause 8 stand part, with which we shall take new clause 4.

Mr. Salmond: Have you overlooked new clause 3, Mr. Morris?

The Chairman: I have already put the Question on new clause 3 clearly. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was paying full attention. The Clerk read out the title of the new clause.

Clause 8

Rates of duty

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The Chairman: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government new clause 4—*Tobacco rates: further provisions.*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The clause raises the duty on tobacco by between 5 and 6.4 per cent. It adds 10p to the price of a packet of cigarettes, including VAT. It fulfils a commitment given in the previous Budget to raise tobacco taxes by at least 3 per cent. in real terms. That is for revenue purposes and health reasons, since evidence shows that price is an important factor in persuading people to give up smoking. The increase came into effect from 6 pm on Budget day.

New clause 4 increases tobacco duties by 3.7 per cent., other than for hand-rolling tobacco. The sole reason for that increase is that it will recoup some of the revenue lost by dropping the second stage of VAT on domestic fuel and power.

The increase will yield £205 million in 1995-96, and will increase the cost of a packet of cigarettes by 6p, including VAT.

Ms Primarolo: In new clause 4, the Government propose a 4 per cent. increase in tobacco duties, which will mean an extra 6p on the price of a packet of cigarettes, on top of the 10p increase announced in the main Budget.

While the Opposition accept that increasing duties is one way to reduce smoking, we cannot close our minds to the distributional effect, especially as the increase will hit low-income earners hardest, as they smoke most. A recent analysis by the Policy Studies Institute concluded:

"Smoking is greatest among the most disadvantaged families: nearly three quarters of council tenants receiving means-tested benefits smoke, spending £16 a week or £1 in every £7 of their net disposable incomes. The children of poor families who smoke are three times more likely to be going without essential items than the children of similar poor families who do not smoke."

For that reason, a ban on tobacco advertising is the most effective educational and preventive measure and a crucial aspect of any anti-smoking campaign.

This evening, the Minister tried to hide behind a health priority to justify the increase in tax. Smoking-related diseases account for about 110,000 premature or avoidable deaths a year. It is estimated that 50 million working days are lost annually through smoking. Recent evidence shows that about one non-smoker a day dies as a consequence of inhaling other people's tobacco smoke.

During the Second Reading debate on the Tobacco Advertising Bill, the then Minister for Health said:

"We are taking action on price because we know that there is a good, solid evidence that price influences consumption."—[*Official Report*, 11 February 1994; Vol. 237, c. 611.]

As they did during the debate on alcohol, the Government completely close their eyes to the implications of their tobacco taxation policy and the way in which it will provide opportunities for tobacco smuggling. Smuggling not only undermines the industry here, and therefore will eventually weaken what tax base there is, but undermines the Government's health policy, because the contraband goods are unregulated and available to the very groups for whom the Government's health policy, "The Health of the Nation", sets targets to reduce smoking—the 11 to 15-year-old age range.

By pursuing the tobacco industry, through taxation, the Government are undermining that. We have made clear our views on the health aspects, on curtailing smoking and encouraging people not to smoke, but taxation is not the way to do that.

Dr. Godman: My hon. Friend will recall that the Minister suggested that an increase in tobacco tax led to a reduction in the consumption of cigarettes and other tobacco-related products. Is it the older smoker who is deterred by such increases or the younger, newer smoker?

Ms Primarolo: There is not sufficient detailed evidence available on that subject. Clearly, what my hon. Friend calls the older smoker may be deterred by the increase in taxation. Our concern is also to prevent young people starting to smoke in the first place. The problem is that, because of the Government's taxation policy, smuggled tobacco goods are being sucked into the country, undermining the industry and, through the sales networks, providing access to smoking for young people.

Other countries have experienced similar effects. I shall use the example of Canada especially, which sought to use simply taxation on tobacco products as its method of introducing and policing a health policy to encourage people not to smoke. Two things happened. First, there was massive importation across the United States border into Canada and, secondly, Canadian-produced cigarettes were exported to the US and smuggled back in and sold. It undermined the health policy and proved to be totally ineffective. In the end, the Canadian Government had to reassess their position on imposing high taxation on tobacco products.

In this country, apart from the smuggling, mail order cigarette companies are emerging. I should correct myself. They are not cigarette companies, they are sellers of tobacco products through mail order, which thereby avoid taxation and undercut the existing industry. As yet, the Government have not come up with any proposals to deal with that. Several other problems are being experienced too, such as the smuggling of huge quantities of hand-rolling tobacco, especially the product Drum. Of all detected smuggling, 67 per cent. is of tobacco.

The industry itself has produced substantial and convincing arguments. I say that as a committed anti-smoker. The information provided by the tobacco industry shows only too clearly the disastrous route down

[Ms Primarolo]

which the Government's taxation policy is taking us. We will lose control of tax. We will lose control, through tobacco products, of our health policy and we will undermine considerably the country's industry.

We always return to the same arguments. There is no proper commitment, through the Government's policy on Customs and Excise, to preventing illegal importing of products. There is no clear commitment to balancing a health policy of taxation, education and banning of advertising as a way in which to pursue our health needs. The Government's taxation policy will undermine their own woefully inadequate health policy, which demonstrates clearly, yet again, that the Government have a series of Departments contradicting and working against each other, rather than collaborating and taking the country forward.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I cannot go down the same road as the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo). Hon. Members are well aware that Labour Front-Bench Members have in their sights punitive levels of taxation on tobacco. They have always wanted higher taxation than the Government have ever proposed, including the measures in the current Budget; 10p and 6p is not as much as Labour would like to see and the industry is aware of that. The 600 people in my constituency who work for Gallaher Tobacco in Northolt are aware of that— *[Interruption.]* It is no good the hon. Member for Bristol, South trying to interrupt me from a sedentary position.

My constituents are aware that the Labour party is completely illiberal in the sector that I have described. Labour Members do not accept people's right to choose whether to smoke. We are a responsible society. I am not a smoker, but I defend the right to choose.

The hon. Member for Bristol, South and her Opposition Front-Bench colleagues might care to reflect that, whether we like it or not, some people are comforted by smoking. To hide behind the smokescreen of a call for a ban on tobacco advertising is the most obviously crude tactic that I have seen. It will not convince anyone. The hon. Member for Bristol, South should be ashamed of what she said.

9.30 pm

Dr. Godman: I can understand the hon. Gentleman's desire to defend the interests of his 600 constituents who are employed in the industry. However, how would he campaign for a dramatic reduction in the consumption of cigarettes and other related products?

Mr. Greenway: Certainly not in the way that the Labour party is campaigning for it. As a result of Labour's pressure, cigarettes are being imported from such countries as France and Germany. That is undermining the sales of companies in this country and it led a few weeks ago to the loss of 209 jobs in my constituency. Those jobs have been exported to France and Germany. It is not that people are smoking less, it is that they are smoking differently. Our people are losing their jobs and Labour Members think that that is clever. They should think again.

My constituents and others who work in the industry are good, honest and honourable people. They are not pleased—I am not pleased—with the double whammy that they have received in the Budget— *[Interruption.]* The Labour party has aided and abetted such a policy for many years and it continues to do that. People in my constituency and elsewhere will not be deceived by the hypocrisy that we have heard this evening from the hon. Member for Bristol, South.

In 1995, the United Kingdom tobacco industry will lose sales to the continent as a result of high UK tobacco taxes. Excise duties on the continent are markedly lower. The United Kingdom is at a serious competitive disadvantage and the Government are losing revenue. Since 1993, there has been a significant increase in the level of legal, and more noticeably illegal, cross-border shopping for tobacco products. That must be noted.

The Chancellor's decision to increase tobacco duties twice in a fortnight—in his 1994 Budget and subsequent mini-Budget—has significantly widened the tax-induced price differentials between UK tobacco products and their European Union equivalents. That policy will exacerbate the problems caused by legal and illegal cross-border tobacco trading in 1995.

The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, in its cross-border shopping inquiry last year, and the Government, have acknowledged that cross-border trading for tobacco, particularly for hand-rolling tobacco, is a major cause for concern. The United Kingdom tax burdens on tobacco are among the highest in the European Union. United Kingdom tax on hand-rolling tobacco—HRT—is the highest in the European Union while UK tax on cigarettes is the second highest.

Tax levels are the prime determinant of price and the tax incidence on UK cigarettes is more than 76 per cent. of the retail price. Large savings can be made by shoppers travelling to low-tax European Union countries and stocking up on duty-paid tobacco goods, particularly cigarettes and HRT. Opportunities for bargains have attracted shoppers for the savings and bootleggers for the profits.

The latest official estimates of revenue loss from tobacco goods—*[Interruption.]* My constituents will note that the hon. Member for Bristol, South and Opposition Front-Bench Members are laughing. They think that it is funny, but my constituents are not amused. The latest official estimates of revenue loss from tobacco goods, relating to 1993, totalled £120 million. That comprised £100 million from shopping and £20 million from bootlegging, no less, based on an assumed 5 per cent. detection rate. Revenue losses from tobacco bootlegging were about 65 per cent. of the total revenue loss on all excise goods.

Industry data and market research demonstrate a steady growth in personal cross-border shopping. More significantly, there appears to be a rapid and worrying increase in smuggling or bootlegging, particularly for HRT. Evidence suggests that detection rates could be as low as only 1 per cent. for bootlegged goods. The retail value of United Kingdom sales losses on tobacco goods to continental companies is estimated to be £375 million in 1994. Revenue losses on tobacco have therefore been badly underestimated by Her Majesty's Government and could be as much as £275 million a year, comprising legal shopping at £100 million and bootlegging at £175 million.

It is now believed that more than 25 per cent. of the HRT market is sourced from the continent. Twelve per cent. of HRT smokers in the United Kingdom now say that Drum, which has been mentioned and which, for

trademark reasons, is not sold in the United Kingdom, is the brand that they smoke most often. A further 6 per cent. smoke Drum regularly. A great many cross-channel van traders are now buying HRT because of its profitability, in addition to beer. Also, 67 per cent. of all seizures by Customs in the 12 months to June 1994 were made up of tobacco products. HRT alone accounted for more than half of all seizures.

There is a wide discrepancy between a reduction in United Kingdom retail sales of HRT and an increase in sales of cigarette rolling papers. In fact, the HRT market may even be growing, despite official statistics showing a rapid fall in sales. Unless the Government moderate their tobacco excise policy, the significant growth in HRT cross-border trading will trigger similar activity for cigarettes, with associated serious social consequences from criminal activity.

Tobacco revenue accounts for 12 per cent. of all Government taxes on consumer goods. Any reduction in that revenue would have serious implications for the Treasury, which is already facing losses on cross-border trading. *[Interruption.]* We do not need the Opposition chorus to support the brief to which I am referring. I just wish that they actually believed in what I have been saying and supported it, but they do not. We know that, and the industry knows that. The 209 people in Northolt in my constituency whom I mentioned know that, in this matter, the Labour party is their bitter enemy, and so do I.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): When I first came to the House, 3,000 tobacco industry employees worked in Springburn. Only a few weeks ago, Gallaghers announced that the last 50 employees have left my constituency. It is interesting to note that my native city of Glasgow made its name during the industrial revolution. The tobacco lords, who made their money from the tobacco industry, were able to finance the industrial revolution in Glasgow. In a sense, Glasgow was made because of the tobacco industry.

This debate highlights the tobacco industry, but the Government could hammer another industry with tax tomorrow. I do not know how many people have been employed in the tobacco industry since the Government came to office. There must have been many thousands of employees, but the number is dwindling every day.

When the Government took over in 1979, I heard a lot about the Luddite attitude of workers. The Government could never say that about the workers in the tobacco industry. Tobacco firm owners— even the notorious Hanson— would be able to say that not one worker in the tobacco industry ever turned his back on the new technology that played a big part in those workers losing their jobs.

It is to the credit of the tobacco employers and the trade union movement that they were able to negotiate for the workers excellent wages and conditions and retirement for workers in their early 50s. The industry set an example in equal pay; in fact, there was equal pay in the industry before the Trades Union Congress and other wings of the trade union movement had begun their campaign for equal pay. Those who visited tobacco factories saw that the workers enjoyed excellent cafeteria facilities, pensions and other fringe benefits.

No one can defend the effects of tobacco on health. Anyone who has met a person suffering from emphysema or bronchitis must say that we should never have had cigarettes. If only we could have stopped cigarettes, we might have helped prevent the terrible lung cancer which— while I am not a medical man— I understand is a form of cancer that cannot be cured. No one can defend the health situation and if it means putting up taxation to stop someone smoking, I am all for that.

My hon. Friends mentioned that the smuggling that is going on across the channel has been helped because the Government have taken it upon themselves to sack Customs and Excise officers. Customs and Excise was a dedicated service, and it was considered to be a highly professional service in which a person could get a career, but morale now is terrible.

If people can smuggle tobacco across the channel, it must be the case that cocaine and heroin can also be smuggled. If the Government are getting more money from people who smoke, they should be reinforcing customs facilities, rather than breaking them down.

There are housing estates in poor areas—it always seems to be poor areas that are hit—where people turn to alcohol and tobacco because of despair. Many of the early socialists were teetotal or in favour of prohibition because they saw the terrible effect that alcohol and tobacco could have on ordinary working men and women. In those housing estates, the people who are smuggling beer are selling it from the back of a van and saying as an incentive that if a person buys two dozen cans of beer, he will get a free pack of hand-rolling tobacco. The people smuggling beer are also smuggling tobacco.

If anything can be learned from the tobacco industry, it is that the Government have killed the goose that laid the golden egg. They have destroyed the work force, but not the employers. Hanson will never be out of a job, but he went into the W.D. and H.O. Wills factory in my constituency and took every job there. That was a factory where people had worked loyally for generations, and they had built up the industry. He took away the tradition that the tobacco owners—the Mitchells and the Gallaghers—had. They had a reputation for doing good in the community.

The Mitchells built the Mitchell library in Glasgow. Gallaghers did a great deal, particularly during the troubles in Northern Ireland, to try to break down the sectarian problems, when it used its finance. But Hanson did not. He came into a factory, a list B building of special design and architecture, sacked the work force and moved the machinery down to Bristol. Then he had the brass neck to send some of his minions to see the local Member of Parliament—me—who said, "We would like to develop this building into a lovely office block, take away the offices from the centre of Glasgow and bring them into our new office block." I told them—I will not use the language here—where to go.

People such as Hanson and many others make such a lot of money. They can diversify, but the work force in Glasgow cannot. They cannot go into other industries. When I spoke to the tobacco owners, I said, "If you get into insurance, potato crisps or restaurants"—or many of the other things that the tobacco industry does—"take some of the new services in which you are investing and put them where you made your money: in Glasgow, Nottingham, Bristol and Liverpool." They would not do that.

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

9.45 pm

Therefore, my constituents feel bitter about some of the tobacco owners, but not Gallahers, which has been decent. Okay, there must be redundancies. We accept that the tobacco industry has had a difficult time, but keep putting up the taxes on it and we shall not be able to tax producers who are in Italy, France, Germany or even further afield, because the tobacco will be smuggled in. This country will have no tobacco industry. I know that the health people will say three cheers, but if Britain does not have a tobacco industry, that does not mean that we shall lose the health problems, because they will be brought in from somewhere else. We must tackle the problem through education and other things.

I despair that if the Paymaster General can do that to an industry in which the work force did not turn its back on new technology, were loyal and had excellent industrial relations, he can start on another industry and give it the same problems that he gave the tobacco industry.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): My hon. Friend the Paymaster General commended the measures to us tonight, I felt, without great enthusiasm. In his comments, he did not seek to analyse their likely fiscal effect. Rather, he made a simple statement that the Government needed more money because they do not have the tax on domestic fuel. He went on to say that there is a powerful health lobby outside, which would applaud what we are doing today. That is not a reason to develop the Budget of the nation.

Those arguments will probably carry the day. I do not know whether we will accept the measures, but I assume that we probably will. I ask my hon. Friend to give thought to what he is doing tonight. He may simply be speaking on behalf of others, but what he is doing is very serious. I do not wish to repeat what has been said, but mention has been made of employment, and if we simply buy tobacco that is processed overseas, we lose jobs in our tobacco industry. That cannot be to the advantage of our economy.

An important sector, although it has not been mentioned, is the retail tobacconists—the wholesalers, too, but the retailers in particular—very few of whom nowadays are the specialists they were in my youth. Nowadays, they are often part of a local social service that provides a range of products, sold during long hours throughout the day, of which tobacco profits are an essential factor. If those shops close, not only will the Government lose revenue, but local people will lose services. Surely that cannot be to the benefit of the economy, which is what the Budget should be about.

My hon. Friend the Minister prayed in aid the health factor. I was a teacher for 30 years. I do not smoke cigarettes and strongly believe that, as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) said, it would be wonderful if tobacco smoking had never been invented. But it has and millions of people in this country smoke, either by choice or because they are addicted. The measures that my hon. Friend the Minister has proposed will not protect their health, which can be dealt with only by a process of education. What is happening goes against all the principles of educating young people. Many young people smoke not because they like the taste of tobacco or are addicted to nicotine, but because they think that it makes them appear grown up and sophisticated and because smoking is not approved of by older people.

The taxation of tobacco products has reached the point where it is creating a massive flow of smuggled tobacco. I represent a south coast port, so I know about that problem. As far as we know, only 1 per cent. of the smuggled tobacco is being stopped and 99 per cent. is getting through. How else do we explain the fact that most tobacconists sell very little hand-rolling tobacco compared with five years ago, but 20 per cent. more tobacco papers? The Minister must deal carefully with that question between now and the next Budget, and ask whether his proposal assists the health education programme of other Departments.

I accept that the Government need money, but adding an excitement factor to smoking by making young people feel that they are getting hold of contraband goods makes smoking even more exciting. That is directly opposed to every part of health education.

The bulk of tobacco that enters the country carries no health warning. Packets from overseas carry health warnings in foreign languages, and youngsters cannot necessarily understand them.

So this is not a health measure and it is not right for my hon. Friend the Minister to say that it is about health. It is intended to raise money, which is the Budget's purpose. I am prepared to accept that it is necessary for the Government to receive revenue, but we have now reached the position where marginal increases in the price of tobacco do not bring in proportionate increases in revenue. That is why, in his opening speech, my hon. Friend drew attention to the fact that he was making different arrangements for hand-rolling tobacco and cigarettes. He must recognise the effect that such measures have on the marketplace and realise that the great feature of this Budget was the public revolt against what was seen as an unfair tax. Tobacco smokers are unlikely to rise up against the tax, as old-age pensioners did against VAT on fuel. But they have a sense of what is fair and decent. There are millions of them and they have votes. They will remember whether they were treated unfairly.

I suggest that, in the next Budget, the Government carefully consider a reasonable and fair tobacco regime that is geared to persuading our colleagues on the other side of the channel to raise their taxes on tobacco, so that there is more equality to get rid of the smuggling that now takes place. My hon. Friend the Minister would then be able to tell the House that he would be able to collect his revenue. He would also be able to tell us, and look us in the eye as he did, that he was working in the interests of public health.

Dr. Godman: I wish to ask the Minister a couple of questions about new clause 4, to which I give a guarded welcome. I say "guarded" because I believe that the tax increase on tobacco products should have been much higher. I say that as someone who began smoking at the age of 12 and who, over time, became a 40-a-day man. I now speak as a convert. Just a few weeks ago, I was in the company of a young couple with a two-year-old son. I was horrified when those otherwise mature, sensible youngsters smoked in the company of their tiny son. I thought that that was disgraceful and told them so.

Can the Minister estimate—*[Interruption.]* I hope to ask him a couple of questions when he stops chatting to the Government Whip.

Mr. John Carlisle: Get on with it.

Dr. Godman: I shall get on with it for quite some time if I am pushed.

Is the Minister able to estimate the reduction in the number of smokers that results from an increase in the tax on tobacco products? Can he estimate what proportion of the tax increases will be used to invest in and support health education programmes designed specifically to dissuade youngsters from smoking cigarettes?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The policy of the official Opposition is now apparently to resist tobacco duty increases—a reversal of their previous position. They now intend to rely, almost entirely, on supporting a total ban on tobacco advertising.

We should think long and hard before the House does something as illiberal as statutorily banning something that is legally on sale. The Government have, instead, pursued voluntary controls. A number of moves have recently been made to reduce the permitted level of outdoor advertising and to improve the size and impact of health warnings.

If anyone thinks that statutory controls are the answer, perhaps he could explain why the United Kingdom has a better record than Norway and Finland in reducing smoking in the very period since those countries introduced a statutory ban on advertising. The two European Community countries with the best record in reducing smoking—ourselves and the Netherlands—both operate voluntary controls on advertising.

Price rises are an effective way in which to reduce consumption when they are combined with voluntary controls on advertising. Since we took office in 1979, the consumption of tobacco has fallen by about 38 per cent.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) that we need take no lectures from the Labour party, which is no friend of the tobacco industry and which, until about an hour ago, has consistently, year by year, supported higher taxes on tobacco products. I take seriously the arguments about smuggling, particularly those put by my hon. Friends the Members for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) and for Ealing, North. That is why we exempted hand-rolling tobacco from the secondary tax increase, which was necessitated by the decision of the House not to proceed with 17.5 per cent. VAT on domestic fuel and power.

To answer the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin), I can assure the House that the fundamental review of Customs and Excise and staffing levels in customs have not and will not affect the number of excise verification officers, who are deployed to counter smuggling. We are determined to take vigorous action against smoking, and nothing that we do in Customs will put those staffing levels at risk. Indeed, there has recently been a modest redeployment and enhancement of the number of such officers on duty, especially at the main port concerned, that of Dover.

Cross-border shopping is a feature that is a natural consequence of the single market, but it has not overwhelmed the legitimate trade. We know that from the duty take. The amount of excise duty that we receive from that sector has not been significantly affected by the advent of the single market. However, I shall examine and dwell on the other arguments made, especially by my hon. Friends, about the cross-border shopping and smuggling issue.

If I may, I shall write to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) about the final two questions that he asked.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New clause 4

TOBACCO RATES: FURTHER PROVISIONS

'.—(1) For the Table of rates of duty in Schedule 1 to the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979, as substituted by section 8 above, there shall be substituted—

Table

1. Cigarettes	An amount equal to 20 per cent. of the retail price plus £57.64 per thousand cigarettes.
2. Cigars	£85.61 per kilogram.
3. Hand-rolling tobacco	£85.94 per kilogram.
4. Other smoking tobacco and chewing tobacco	£37.64 per kilogram."

(2) This section shall be deemed to have come into force on 1st January 1995.'.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

To report progress and ask leave to sit again.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Committee report progress: to sit again tomorrow.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order 94H(1) (Scottish Grand Committee (sittings)),

That the Scottish Grand Committee shall meet:

1. on Wednesday 8th February at half-past Ten o'clock to take Questions for oral answer and to consider a substantive Motion for the Adjournment of the Committee;

2. in the Edinburgh City Chambers on Monday 13th February at half-past Ten o'clock to consider a substantive Motion for the Adjournment of the Committee;

3. on Wednesday 1st March at half-past Ten o'clock to consider a substantive Motion for the Adjournment of the Committee.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Private Clegg

10.2 pm

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): I have a petition to free Private Lee Clegg, a soldier whose

"strength, dignity and composure are awesome",

to quote the *Daily Mail* of today. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) on his support for his constituent, but this most important petition has national implications. It was led by Councillor Peggy Grant, the mayor of Castle Point, and signed by a nominal 100 people in Castle Point, but it could easily have been signed by 1 million patriotic British citizens.

[Dr. Robert Spink]

The signatures are essentially a sample of the congregation of St. Mary the Virgin church, Benfleet, and the petition was organised this weekend by Father Michael Galloway and his wife, Carol, who have a specific interest. My constituents believe that the new forensic evidence should be considered and the yellow card embodied in the law. The material allegations are:

That we, the undersigned, are deeply concerned by the imprisonment of Private Lee Clegg of the Parachute Regiment and vigorously protest that he should be freed. The Government place a duty upon people in the Armed Services and Police to protect society and train and arm them to carry out this responsibility and set out rules by which they must operate. Sometimes, as in the case of Private Clegg, these people are young men who must make an almost instant decision. We do not believe that Private Clegg was a wilful murderer, but that he took what his training and experience and rules of engagement led him to believe, in a split-second decision, was appropriate action. At worst we believe that Private Clegg may have been guilty of misjudgment. The Armed Services and Police must be confident that, in such circumstances, the Government will take all possible action to protect those individuals whom it places in dangerous situations, to protect society.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House do urge the right hon. John Major MP, Prime Minister, to seek the early release of Private Lee Clegg from prison and to seek a change in the law as foreshadowed in Lord Lloyd of Berwick's judgment in this case and to secure Private Clegg's pardon.

To lie upon the Table.

Traffic (Bedford)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

10.4 pm

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): I am grateful to the Minister for coming to listen to the debate, which is very important for my constituents in Bedford. Greater Bedford comprises 134,000 people and the figure is expected to grow to 150,000 by the end of the century. Bedford has traffic problems beyond belief and it is not surprising that the transport element affects employment prospects in the north of the county.

The town has had the problem for decades. Due to stupidity, disagreement over an acceptable route and lack of funds, completion of a satisfactory bypass has been prevented. Bedfordshire, Hastings, Wigan, Gateshead and Carlisle, have the distinction of accommodating populations of roughly the same size without bypass relief.

There is now under construction the southern route from the A428 east of Bedford to a point near Elstow, where the traffic to and from eastern ports may link with the A421, which joins the M1 at junction 13. That is a welcome development and I congratulate the Government on contributing the money to it. It is, however, only part of the mosaic necessary to complete an effective bypass of the town. Currently, major routes such as the A428 and A6 pass through the centre of Bedford, causing maximum disruption.

Due to years of frustration caused by Government and local authority differences, a campaign has been initiated by local industrialists and public authorities, supported by the media, to persuade the Government to face reality and to give priority rating to the bypassing of the town. A substantial pamphlet, entitled "Get Bedford Moving", has already been produced and a petition supported by 15,000 constituents is ready for presentation. We have had the opportunity of having a word on the matters involved with the Minister, who has been most patient.

The reasons for the campaign are obvious. They are to improve employment by making it possible for existing firms to expand in the town and by attracting new investment into the local economy. Other reasons are to benefit the town centre environment by reducing the appalling traffic congestion which is a daily occurrence, to unfold the amenity of the riverside, to enhance road safety, especially for pedestrian shopping in the area, to strengthen the quality of life for those who live in Bedford and the adjoining areas, to lace together the several parts of the town which have been cut in two by the River Ouse, and thus balance the local road network, and to reduce the load on the three bridges across the river, which are already overstretched.

Current traffic conditions in Bedford are notoriously bad. Serious blockages occur on the A6 and in St. Johns street, south of the river, and also at Union street in the north. Other hazardous locations are in Goldington road and on the A428 at a variety of other spots. Nationally, the British chambers of commerce calculate that road congestion is costing small companies more than £6 billion per year.

The traffic cauldron in Bedford is a reality which must be recognised. Some 150,000 vehicles travel into the town centre daily, one quarter of them passing through to other

destinations. Of the lorries entering Bedford, at least 50 per cent. pass through. The problem has been exacerbated by the growth in the size of heavy goods vehicles, making it difficult for them to negotiate bends within the town. Traffic is expected to increase by between 90 per cent. and 150 per cent. by the year 2025. That is not surprising, as Bedford is located within reach of two major universities—Oxford and Cambridge—and is sited near the A14, which is the vital highway to eastern ports. With the growth of new developments in Milton Keynes and Northampton, the volume of vehicle traffic must remain on an upward curve. Birmingham lies 50 miles to the north and London a similar distance to the south.

With Bedford's key location, it is not surprising that car ownership in the town is above the national average and that commuting by Bedford residents to outside areas has increased substantially from 9,000 in 1971 to 14,000 in 1991. The rate of change is apparent from the statistics and it is up to local administrators and the Department of Transport to appreciate the extent and direction of growth so that complete paralysis of vehicle movement can be avoided before developments are overtaken by events.

There is evidence that some firms have left Bedford because of the absence of transport infrastructure and that others are worried by the increased costs involved in dealing with local traffic congestion. Wincanton Distribution gave as a reason for its move to Huntingdon the fact that Huntingdon had a much better transport system and was proximate to the national distribution network.

A 1994 Bedford college survey of 350 local firms found that 20 per cent. of the firms surveyed had considered moving as a result of traffic congestion, 17 per cent. were likely to relocate within three years for the same reason and 13 per cent. had cancelled expansion plans. They are rather surprising findings, but it is apparent to me—as it must be to the Minister—that Bedford is in a straitjacket. I sincerely hope that the Government will help to ease the problem relatively quickly.

Bedfordshire county council is experiencing difficulty recruiting new firms since mobility of operations is one of the leading criteria that they consider before reaching a decision. Bedford has to compete with industry in other counties. Both Milton Keynes and Northampton have new town status and are therefore able to mobilise funds more easily to provide grants to inveigle firms to locate in their areas. That option is not available to Bedford.

In 1994 I attended a lunch at the Hyde Park hotel arranged by the Automobile Association at which a Transport Minister was the guest speaker. He announced that the Government and the Treasury would look favourably on any application in which the private sector was minded to make a significant contribution to major road works. That was the key to a scheme being advanced to enhance priority ratings, thus allowing completion of proposals at a date earlier than had been envisaged.

To complete a major part of the link in the bypass chain around Bedford, three local enterprises have agreed to contribute a substantial part of the cost: Bovis, the construction company; Bedfordia, part of a local conglomerate farm and property developer; and Bedfordshire county council. In view of that, Bedford has subscribed to the conditions laid down by the Minister and I sincerely trust that the upgrading of the route will flow from that sequence of events. Can my hon. Friend the Minister give an assurance today that he will take into account what I have said and tell the relevant Minister and the Treasury that we have fulfilled our part and that we await a return?

It was recently argued in the report of the standing committee on trunk road assessment that the building of roads would spread the congestion of traffic. That proposition does not apply to Bedford, which aims to get rid of bottlenecks which have blighted the town for years and have been exacerbated by the increase in traffic from both within and outside the county.

Bedford requires completion of essential bypasses and improved links with the M1 and with the A1 and A14 routes to eastern ports. That Bedfordians earnestly desire that is evidenced partly by their persistence over the years and partly by the petition that will be presented to the House in due course. Bypassing is essential to solving Bedford's traffic problems, and that means completing the several parts of the bypass rather than deferring them.

Can my hon. Friend the Minister say what volume of traffic the Department expects to be carried on the A14 and A45 to and from eastern ports, and by how much the Department estimates that the number of vehicles using the A6 and A48 will be reduced as a consequence? To what extent has the Department assessed the difficulties created for Bedford by the increased flow of vehicles across too few bridges over the River Ouse and the lack of road infrastructure in the town itself? I have concentrated on the Bedford area's rational road system. The bypass system is also vital, but I shall be constructive and mention other matters for consideration by the Department.

The Bedford area urgently requires two additional stations: one to the south of the river and one to the north would help matters considerably. An improved bus service should also be considered, as increased use of public transport would be useful. I am aware, however, that people like to use their own vehicles, as has been the case for decades. Subsidiary issues such as park-and-ride schemes, improved car parking, highway development within the town, and cycle lanes, are all constructive, but I shall not dwell on them as I wish to concentrate on the major issues. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to make a contribution to the general debate.

10.16 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) for drawing the attention of the House to the support that his constituents have expressed for the Government's proposals for the trunk road network around Bedford and to the Getting Bedford Moving campaign promoted by the Bedford Employers Forum. My hon. Friend brought members of the forum to meet me shortly before Christmas, when they explained in detail the importance of all the schemes to Bedford's economy and to the comfort of its residents. So assiduous is my hon. Friend in his efforts that if I am opened up at some time in the future the word "Bedford" may well be found emblazoned on my heart, along with the names of many towns represented by other hon. Friends who have pressed on me the urgent need for road schemes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North mentioned the large petition that will shortly be presented to the House, which is further proof of Bedford's strong

[Mr. John Watts]

support for important road improvements. It is gratifying to find the people of an important town such as Bedford taking such a keen and active interest in the development of their community and in road planning in particular. It is encouraging to find a community in which residents, businesses and local government are fully behind proposals for improving the road network rather than ignoring the benefits that new roads can bring, as is all too often the case.

The Attorney-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Watts: My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) gives silent but eloquent support to the needs of Bedfordshire for improved road infrastructure.

I know that my hon. Friend is fully aware of our proposals for the Bedford area, but for the benefit of the House I will explain our plans in short detail.

The national roads programme includes a series of integrated schemes aimed at removing through traffic from the town. These proposals will improve the quality of life in the bypassed communities and provide a better climate for local business.

Schemes have been included in the programme to provide a southern and a western bypass for Bedford, a link to the Norse road roundabout on the existing A428 St Neots road from the southern bypass, bypasses for the villages of Clapham and Great Barford, and improvements to the A421 between the M1 and Bedford. We also have proposals to widen the M1 through Bedfordshire and to upgrade the A1 to motorway status. I am firmly of the opinion that the inclusion of those schemes demonstrates a real commitment on our part which will make the trunk road network around Bedford suitable for the 21st century, although I appreciate that my hon. Friend would like it made a little more suitable for the 20th century.

As a first major step towards implementation of this package of schemes, work began in August last year on the construction of the Bedford southern bypass. The £39 million contract represents a significant public sector investment in the Bedford area. We expect the road to open to traffic in the summer of next year and I look forward to celebrating that event with my hon. Friend. Once complete, the bypass will make an appreciable difference to the levels of through traffic in Bedford and to journey times between the A1 and M1 through Bedfordshire, benefiting both local business and residents. To make the advantages of this route apparent, it will be renumbered A421 throughout, from junction 13 of the M1 motorway to the A1 junction at the Black Cat roundabout, when the Bedford southern bypass is completed.

One of the stated aims of the Getting Bedford Moving campaign is to secure priority 1 status for all the schemes that I have mentioned. In April last year my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Transport announced the results of his review of the roads programme, which considered the relative merits of all road schemes on a national basis.

The review examined all proposals in terms of their benefits to the trunk road network and impact on the environment, so that they could be given appropriate priority. Most of the schemes around Bedford were placed in the priority 2 category following the review. This means that they are recognised as sufficiently important to be taken forward but that where there is competition for resources priority 1 schemes will have first call on them. However, that does not mean that no priority 2 scheme can be progressed before all priority 1 schemes have been completed: some priority 2 schemes may be in a state of readiness which allows them to go ahead, while some priority 1 schemes may not be ready to take the resources available.

Sir Trevor Skeet: As I said earlier, if funding were provided, would that not allow priority 2 schemes to become priority 1? The scheme would be ready for development. I do not suggest that all the bypasses be built immediately, but the one around Bedford, a major necessity, certainly should be.

Mr. Watts: I shall deal shortly with the proposal for private finance.

We are making good progress on the statutory procedures for many of our schemes around Bedford. I am pleased to say that the decision following the public inquiry into the Clapham bypass, which gives approval to the scheme, was issued just before Christmas. A start of works is now dependent on completion of the remaining procedures and the availability of funds for the works. The public inquiry into the Norse road link began on Tuesday 17 January to hear objections to that scheme. We are also consulting local people on an option to upgrade the A1 to motorway status through Bedfordshire, which for some journeys provides an alternative to passing through the town itself.

The section of the proposed Bedford western bypass between the A421, which leads south-west from Bedford to the M1 motorway and beyond, and the A428 Northampton road is the only scheme around the town to have been placed in the longer-term category following the review of the road programme. However, as my hon. Friend has made me aware, a consortium of local development interests has suggested that it could provide, at its own expense, a single carriageway link between the A421 and the A428 within the preferred route corridor for the bypass on land in its control, subject to approval of new development on the land on the Bedford side of the link. The initiative is most welcome and accords fully with the Government's desire to involve the private sector in infrastructure projects. Further progress is in the hands of the consortium and would, of course, be subject to completion of the usual local authority planning procedures. I understand that the consortium is currently preparing a detailed planning application for the development, which includes the road, for submission to Bedford borough council, the local planning authority.

The Highways Agency will continue to liaise with the consortium to ensure that its proposals are compatible with our preferred route for the Bedford western bypass and will allow for the possible future addition of a second carriageway in line with the longer-term proposals for the route. Subject to the proposals meeting those requirements, the Highways Agency would not object to any planning application and would welcome the early start of the scheme with private finance to fund it. Private sector involvement will undoubtedly enable a Bedford western bypass to be implemented far more quickly than if the project were to rely on the public sector alone.

My hon. Friend referred to the problems of bridges and traffic flows over them. The Department recognises that traffic flows on the bridges in the town centre are high and that there is a need to provide additional crossings of the Great Ouse for strategic traffic around Bedford. To this end, our schemes will provide three additional bridges: the Bedford southern bypass includes a viaduct over the river at Castle Mill; another crossing in the same vicinity, to the east of the town, will be provided by the Norse road link; and the A421 to A428 section of the Bedford western bypass will provide a crossing at the western side of the town. More importantly, in recognition of the importance of bridges in Bedford, the Government helped to fund Bedfordshire county council's reconstruction of County bridge at a cost of £1.6 million. We shall also be further supporting the reconstruction of Longholme bridge at a cost of £3.5 million. Both are key crossing points of the River Ouse in Bedford.

In addition to promoting trunk road schemes around Bedford, we have committed funding to several local road and public transport proposals during this year's spending round. The county council is promoting a package of proposals for Bedford as part of its integrated transport strategy for the town. This package approach accords with Government policy, and initially we have allocated £300,000 in the next financial year for a number of measures designed to improve the town centre environment, reducing car use and easing congestion, including further pedestrianisation, bus priority schemes and parking controls, all of which my hon. Friend mentioned.

I thank my hon. Friend for raising the subject on behalf of his constituents and I hope that I have been able to demonstrate our commitment to improving the trunk road network around Bedford. In the past 10 years, £31 million has been spent on new trunk road schemes in northern Bedfordshire, and the work now in hand on construction of the important Bedford southern bypass means that the total will have more than doubled by the end of next year.

I welcome the strong groundswell of support for our proposals among the people and the business community of Bedford. I hope that they will continue to make their views known to the local councils and to any relevant local public inquiries. I know that my hon. Friend will continue to advocate strongly the need for these schemes until eventually we are able to deliver them. My job would clearly be much easier if I were able to say yes to rather more of the schemes that my hon. Friends and their constituents want, and if I were less often in the position of having to argue to try to gain their acceptance of schemes that they think that they do not want—but such is life.

My hon. Friend raised a couple of questions on traffic flows. Unfortunately, I do not have accurate figures at my fingertips today, but I undertake to write to my hon. Friend with the information that he seeks shortly after the conclusion of the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 24 January 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRIT

For Islwyn, in the room of the right hon. Neil Gordon Kinnock (Chiltern Hundreds). [*Mr. Derek Foster.*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

Grammar Schools, Plymouth

1. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to close the remaining grammar schools in Plymouth.

The Secretary of State for Education (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): It is for local education authorities to bring forward proposals for changes in the pattern of organisation of schools in their area.

Mr. Streeter: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, because Plymouth is about to become a unitary authority under Labour control, our three remaining grammar schools—all of them centres of excellence—feel very much under threat? Is it not a pity that, despite choosing the best schools for their own children, Opposition Members still seek to deny choice, diversity and excellence to everybody else?

Mrs. Shephard: I am delighted to hear that the three grammar schools in Plymouth are popular and successful, and I hope very much that a change of local government organisation will not put those excellent and succesful schools under threat. The Labour party's stance on choice and selection is a great puzzle for those who follow these affairs. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and the hon. Members for Peckham (Ms Harman) and for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) seem to support parental choice, at least for their own children. Perhaps it is a case of one rule for Opposition Front-Bench Members and another for the rest of the country.

Mr. Jamieson: Is the Secretary of State aware that six grammar schools were closed in Plymouth in the 1980s, a time when there was a Tory Devon county council and a Tory Government and—I might say—a time when the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) was a member of the Social Democratic party and advocating the closure of those schools? Does the Secretary of State agree that the greatest threat to grammar, grant-maintained, primary and comprehensive schools in Plymouth is the severe cuts in their budgets which have been brought about by her Government?

Mrs. Shephard: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman in the slightest. It is quite clear that the greatest threat to excellence and high standards in our schools comes from the Labour party, which has devoted so much time during the past decade to opposing every possible measure which would improve standards in our schools.

Mr. Steen: Is the Secretary of State aware of the outrageous and disgraceful proposals by Devon county council to cut teaching staff in Plymouth grammar schools and others? They also intend to reduce the money which goes to those schools—rather than cut their own bureaucracy—to save some of the £650 million it costs to run Devon county council. Will she ring fence the education budget so that the council cannot do what it is threatening to do?

Mrs. Shephard: To ring-fence any portion of a county council budget is beyond my powers, but I hope that pressure from my hon. Friend and colleagues will prevent that kind of damaging cut in Devon schools.

Further Education Colleges

2. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has received regarding the democratic accountability of colleges of further education.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education (Mr. Tim Boswell): None, though my right hon. Friend has occasionally received correspondence generally on the accountability of colleges of further education.

Mr. Marshall: Does the Minister accept that the removal of democratic control and accountability has made possible the abuse of public funds and the distortion of education priorities, as happened in Derby and Birmingham? If he accepts that, and the report on those two organisations, what actions will he take to rectify the situation?

Mr. Boswell: I do not accept that the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and the independence that we have extended to colleges of further education, which they have warmly endorsed and from which they have benefited immensely, are contributing to their failure or lack of accountability, as precise rules—set out in their instruments of government, the 1992 Act and the financial agreements that they reach with the funding council—secure them.

There have been two cases of difficulty. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering the reports on those two colleges, which have been prepared by independent persons at our request, it would be inappropriate for me to comment now. We are satisfied that the arrangements work well in general. The Opposition have not yet told the nation what they mean by bringing grant-maintained schools under a local democratic framework. That is a slogan, just as the hon. Gentleman's question was.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend realise that, by removing Weymouth college from the democratic control of Dorset county council, the college has been able to expand student numbers, its funding and its excellence, while all those schools that stayed within local education authority control last year received only

1 per cent. from the county council when the Government gave them a 4 per cent. increase in their revenue budgets?

Mr. Boswell: All that I can say is that I am not in the least surprised to hear that news from Weymouth because it is replicated throughout the country. This year, we are substantially increasing funding to colleges of further education and they are benefiting from our policies. That applies as much in Weymouth as in many other parts of the country—Leicester included.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Is not it a fact that colleges of further education have had their governing bodies stacked with like-minded people, often from outside the community that they serve? Have not those governors often put the salaries of a few people at the top of the pyramid ahead of the welfare of staff and students and have not the Government, by their actions, allowed many of those community colleges to be divorced from the very communities in which they have their roots? Is that not further evidence of the fragmentation of further and higher education while this Conservative Government have been in charge?

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman must do a lot better than that to keep his present position. I am not sure how many colleges he has visited, but the plain fact is that every one that I have been to has been grateful for the freedom that we have extended to them. We have also extended the framework and transferability of democratic accountability. There is much more accountability now. The problems at the colleges that were referred to earlier had their origins in the past, long before the independence of colleges. The hon. Gentleman should look and learn a little more about the further education sector and stop knocking it so much.

Mr. Allason: May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to South Devon college in my constituency, which recently won a charter award for excellence and is regarded as having far greater accountability to the local community than it achieved when it was in the hands of the county council?

Mr. Boswell: Indeed, my hon. Friend can rightly draw my attention to that college. I know of its achievements in obtaining a charter mark and being a winner in the further education charter competition. I meet Dr. Keen from time to time and have a great respect for what he has achieved. Surely the greatest tests of accountability are the readiness and willingness of students to select colleges and their obvious achievements when benefiting from their studies there.

Revenue Support Allocations

3. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has received from schools concerned about teaching and staffing redundancies in 1995-96 following consultations on the revenue support allocations for education in the next financial year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My Department has received a number of representations about the local government finance settlement, as is customary at this time of the year.

Mr. Turner: I too have received many representations. Some of the letters that I have come from schools in Wolverhampton and they tell me of the impending crisis for their schools, and for schools throughout the country, unless the Secretary of State wins her battle with the Treasury to increase resources to schools during the next 12 months. In the midlands—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members do not want to hear the truth. Is the Secretary of State aware that, in the midlands, a £70 million shortfall is predicted and more than 1,000 teaching jobs will be lost because of the attendant massive increase in class sizes? Will she call on the Prime Minister to intercede to offset that crisis?

Mrs. Shephard: This year's settlement amounts to £17 billion, which allows for an increase of more than 1 per cent. compared with last year. Under the provisional capping arrangement, local education authorities, including those in the west midlands, will be able to increase spending next year. At the moment, local education authorities are comparing the settlement with their budgets and spending plans. That is not to compare like with like.

Sir Michael Neubert: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Havering has received the worst education settlement in the country bar none, followed by south Tyneside, Northumberland, Gateshead, Stockport and St. Helen's, with which it seems to have nothing in common, whereas the four authorities that have done best are all inner London boroughs? Will she undertake to look into the reasons for that catastrophic quirk and do all she can to alleviate its worst effects on the education of children in our borough?

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend will understand that I cannot generalise on the position within individual LEAs. I remind him that the Audit Commission, for example, has calculated that more than £0.5 billion is held in individual schools' budgets and that LEAs have recourse to their own balances, capital receipts and transfers between budget heads. Of course, all the components of the budget are not yet known.

Mr. Don Foster: Does the Secretary of State stand by the prediction she made in a letter that she wrote to her right hon. Friends just before the Budget? Given that LEAs are expected to reduce expenditure on primary schools by £50 per pupil and on secondary schools by nearly £200 per pupil, does she accept that that will lead to significant cuts in the number of staff and rising class sizes, and that the quality of education will suffer as a result?

Mrs. Shephard: I am not prepared to comment on a leaked letter. As I said, part of the component of budgets will be the recommendations of the School

Teachers Review Body. It has not yet submitted its report. When it does, we shall consider its recommendations, consult and announce our proposals.

Mr. Pawsey: Is my right hon. Friend aware of an organised campaign by local education authorities that is designed to draw attention to inequalities in standard spending assessments? Does she agree that the principal reason for such a campaign is to distract attention from the divisive and confused policies of the Labour and Liberal parties, especially as they relate to a graduate tax, the abolition of grant-maintained schools and the ending of charitable status for the independents?

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend is, of course, right. There are always gloomy predictions at this time of year and there is certainly evidence of a fairly vigorous campaign. In the slightly longer term, however, it will be unable to conceal the divisive and shambolic nature of the Opposition parties.

Mr. Faber: Has my right hon. Friend received representations from Edington school in my constituency, a popular and successful local village school? Is she aware that, in an act of breathtaking hypocrisy last Friday, Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors on Wiltshire county council combined to vote through the closure of that successful and popular school? Is she willing to meet a small delegation of parents from the school who are now desperately worried about the future education of their children?

Mrs. Shephard: I am not yet aware of the case that my hon. Friend has mentioned. It is always a great pity when a popular and successful school is threatened with closure. As part of the appeal against those proposals it will no doubt be possible to arrange for representations to be made to me or to ministerial colleagues.

Mr. Hardy: While it is obvious that the Government will look for someone else to blame, does the Secretary of State accept that she and her Department expect many redundancies, perhaps mass redundancies, to be announced at many of our schools? How does she expect to maintain success in education against that background? Will she urgently look at the situation to avoid schools being placed in grave difficulties and to prevent standards and the maintenance of education being imperilled?

Mrs. Shephard: The STRB has not yet submitted its report, it is impossible to make the predictions that are being made so widely around the country. Whether or not class sizes will have to rise depends on local circumstances. I remind the hon. Gentleman that studies have never shown conclusive evidence of a link between class size and pupil performance. There is no reason to see marginal increases in class sizes as a threat to standards.

Mr. Blunkett: Tell that to the public schools and those who buy private education—*[Interruption.]*—and they will laugh in the the Secretary of State's face.

Given the right hon. Lady's prediction that the teachers' review body would award a pay increase for the coming year that will so exceed the amount that the Government have allocated for education that there will be mass redundancies and increased class sizes, does she agree with her right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer who this morning recommended that, in order to avoid those redundancies, local authorities should emulate the Government, who are to sell off the Treasury building and then lease it back? He suggested that authorities should sell off local town halls and other buildings and use the capital receipts for revenue purposes to pay teachers' salaries. Alternatively, perhaps she will send him back to university to learn the difference between capital and revenue spending.

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman is more than usually imaginative, although the interesting display of his continuing prejudice against the private and the independent sector in education is not equally imaginative—a prejudice not shared, of course, by many of his hon. Friends. The STRB is free to recommend such increases as it sees fit, but I have asked it to take into account affordability. Pay levels should be no more than is necessary to retrain, recruit and motivate staff. The STRB will need to judge the extent to which schools will be able to fund pay increases when it makes its recommendations, without the florid solutions suggested by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about reports circulating the west country this week that at a time when the Liberal-controlled LEA has threatened to cause massive redundancies in our schools, it has created a £17 million reserve for non-statutory administrative functions? Will my right hon. Friend carry out an investigation to see whether that is true, because we cannot possibly rely on the LEA in question to carry out an investigation into itself?

Mrs. Shephard: What my hon. Friend reveals is interesting and one wonders how much of that kind of practice is going on in the rest of the country, particularly in those areas from which the most noise is coming. I shall be happy to look at the details of that case, although I am quite certain that my hon. Friend will not let it rest, either.

Maintained Schools, Bradford

4. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the main criteria she observed in setting the latest capital allocation for Bradford's maintained schools.

15. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues about the capital programme shortfall facing Bradford metropolitan council in relation to education expenditure.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Mr. Robin Squire): In December, my right hon. Friend and other ministerial colleagues and I considered the allocation of annual capital guidelines, ACGs, to all local education authorities with great care in relation to the Government's published priorities, which are as follows: commitments arising from previous ACGs or supplementary credit approvals; identified need for new school places and cost-effective projects to remove surplus places.

Full details are given in the Department's letter of 4 July 1994 sent to all authorities, a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister ensure that, when the Secretary of State comes to Bradford on 1 March, she finds time to visit local authority schools and to discuss with parents, teachers and governors their anger at the way in which, in the past 16 years, the Government have consistently neglected the need for repairs, renovation and replacement of crumbling schools in that city? This year, we have received £5 million, when our real needs are estimated at £40 million plus. The last straw came when, some time ago, the Department allocated a large amount of taxpayers' money to provide a covered-in playground for Bradford city technology college.

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman appears to be slightly confused. First, as he knows, my right hon. Friend is looking forward to visiting Bradford, and during that visit she expects to be able to visit one or more LEA school. Secondly, I am sure that the House would welcome some recognition from him of the substantial success of Bradford CTC instead of the constant carping that we hear. Thirdly, if he was not already aware, he will now be aware that all ACGs, as I mentioned, are allocated by formula and, to the extent that Bradford LEA's bid matches that nationally agreed formula, so proportionately it will receive more money.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman referred to what he alleged to be a poor rate of building money provided by Government in recent years. He should be aware that support for schools' capital increased by 57 per cent. in real terms between 1986-87 and 1993-94. That is a good record, by any standards.

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Minister will be aware, though, that the Secretary of State's visit to Bradford on 1 March will not be the first visit by a Secretary of State. During every previous visit, Secretaries of State promised extra help and support for Bradford when they heard the undeniable case made by Bradford people. I hope that, when the Secretary of State visits this time, she will take away the opinion of the all-party committee on education in Bradford, which says that the need in Bradford amounts to between £70 million and £100 million. I hope that we receive, not simply tea and sympathy, but some of the money that we need.

Mr. Squire: I am sure that my right hon. Friend is delighted to hear of the warm reception that she will receive in Bradford—a warm reception that she receives in all parts of the country when she visits them.

I know that my right hon. Friend will listen carefully to arguments made to her, but the hon. Gentleman must understand and accept ultimately that, if we were to distribute the money under anything other than an agreed formula, he would be one of the first to say that something was wrong, and he would smell some sort of rat. We have to distribute in accordance with a formula. Provided that the arguments that he and his friends in Bradford make are in line with that formula, I am sure that my right hon. Friend will listen carefully.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Can my hon. Friend compare the position of schools in Bradford with that of those in Lancashire? Is he aware that Lancashire county council receives a substantial increase in funding, but, far from handing that over, it has threatened a cut of between 6 and 8 per cent.? Not only that, but—*[Interruption.]*—it has reduced the proportion handed down under local management of schools from 87 per cent. to 85 per cent.

Madam Speaker: Order. It is a good try by the hon. Lady, who mentioned Bradford only once and now is concerning herself, quite understandably, with Lancashire, but I am afraid that she must wait for a question on Lancashire. This is the other side of the Pennines, and both she and I know the difference.

Higher Education Students

5. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the planned total number of students in higher education in 1995-96 and 1996-97; and what were the figures underlying the 1993 Budget statement.

Mr. Boswell: The planned total number of students in higher education in England is 961,000 for both 1995-96 and 1996-97. The figures underlying the November 1993 budget were 941,000 for 1994-95, 963,000 for 1995-96 and 968,000 for 1996-97.

Mr. Purchase: The Minister must know that demand for places is increasing far more rapidly and, that by the policies he adopts, he is denying the opportunity for many putative students to study at university. Does he accept the opinion of the Confederation of British Industry and many others that it is vital that a bigger and bigger percentage of our young people attends university to bring us up to date with the skills that we need for the 21st century?

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman is stronger on assertion than on history. Student numbers have risen by 50 per cent. in the past five years. We are reviewing higher education and taking advice on the future size and shape of HE from interested parties and others who wish to contribute to the debate. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman listen to their suggestions before jumping to conclusions.

Mr. Rowe: About a year ago, my hon. Friend's predecessor told me that the Department was looking at the length of some degree courses. Does my hon. Friend agree that some students attending courses could complete their studies in a much shorter time than that laid down by the higher education institutions that they attend? Will he look again at the possibility of giving those students the opportunity to complete their studies more quickly?

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. It is very much a matter for institutions and their students to consider, as they are responsible for academic courses and academic standards. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is a plain mathematical fact that, the longer the length of a course for an individual, the lower the proportion of students who can be financed with the same given amount of money.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Is the Minister aware that the lack of a relationship between the number of students and the consequent changes in funding has meant that many

students today suffer severe student poverty? Will the Minister undertake a study of the relationship between student poverty and academic success?

Mr. Boswell: It is an interesting fact that every three years there is a student income and expenditure survey. The survey published last year revealed no evidence of widespread poverty. It also found that if students avail themselves of the grant and loan to which they are entitled, they receive as much money to maintain their studies as they did previously. We protect the real-terms value of the total students' support package. While there may be specific cases, it is appropriate to refer them to the access funds. The overall participation of students and the expansion in their numbers suggest that poverty is not a widespread or significant problem.

Truancy Rates

6. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what information the Government's performance tables provide about truancy rates.

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr. Eric Forth): The tables published in November 1994 found that significant amounts of valuable learning time are being lost due to unauthorised absence. In the maintained sector, an average of 11 half-days were lost by every absent primary school pupil and 22 half-days were lost by every absent secondary pupil. Rates of unauthorised absence varied widely between individual local education authorities and schools, as did rates of authorised absence. The latter were published for the first time in 1994.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. In the light of what he has just said, what practical help can he give to head teachers who are experiencing difficulties with truants? Is he aware of a head teacher in my constituency who is trying to deal with a persistent truant who is only nine years old and who could one day become a criminal statistic unless something is done?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend raises an important point that greatly concerns both me and the Department. I am sure that she will be aware that, last year, we supported 80 local education authorities with projects worth £14 million—this year, we supported 90 local education authorities with £15.5 million. We helped them to run imaginative schemes to identify and tackle truancy, and to find how best to deal with it. We will review the projects and disseminate the best of them to all schools. It is vital that all pupils are in school and learning; if they are not, they not only lose out educationally but could develop criminal tendencies, or worse. That is why we lay great emphasis on the fact that all pupils should be in school all the time.

Inner-city Schools

7. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what new grants for education support and training money has been made available to improve standards in inner-city schools.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The GEST programme for 1995-96 will benefit schools in all areas, directly or indirectly. In addition, initiatives to raise standards in schools are eligible for funding from the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Enright: Does not a real cut of £20 million here on top of a cut of £13 million in inspection funds mean that the Government are mouthing things about quality, but will not put their hand where their mouth is?

Mrs. Shephard: No. *[Interruption.]* I think that I disagree with the hon. Gentleman and his rather extraordinary image; I certainly disagree with the sentiment that he has tried to express. The GEST programme for the next financial year provides £250 million for local education authorities and schools to spend on 20 priority areas, including school effectiveness, and on a number of in-service training areas, particularly for primary teachers, concentrating on a grasp of the basics. All those areas will contribute directly to raising education standards.

Mr. David Shaw: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that adequate funding is available under the GEST programme and other programmes for the 100 or so state schools which are located on the route between Islington and the London school at Brompton Oratory?

Mrs. Shephard: I am sure that I can confirm that to my hon. Friend's satisfaction.

Mr. Steinberg: Is the Minister aware that considerably fewer funds are available under the GEST programme now than five years ago, yet the changes in the national curriculum orders mean that schools must perform many more tasks? Will the Secretary of State consider allocating more funds to the GEST programme? Otherwise, it will be a huge failure and teachers will be very disappointed indeed.

Mrs. Shephard: As I pointed out to the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright), a great deal of money—nearly £250 million— is devoted to the GEST programme. I also made it clear that components of the GEST programme are designed specifically to maintain high standards and to provide training for teachers. The hon. Gentleman should look also at the resources that are now devoted to inspection and testing, all of which are designed to increase and improve education standards.

Grant-maintained Schools, Essex

8. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many secondary schools in Essex are grant-maintained.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: There are 69 grant-maintained secondary schools in Essex, more than in any other local education authority area. Two thirds of the maintained secondary schools in the county are self-governing.

Dr. Clark: Is my right hon. Friend aware that grant-maintained secondary schools in Essex are highly regarded by governors, staff, parents and pupils, which contrasts with the county council-run sixth form college in my area where examination results are very poor? Therefore, does she understand that grant-maintained secondary schools in my constituency need to establish their own sixth forms? When will she respond to the applications by King Edmund school, Rochford, and

Greensward school, Hockley, and will that response come in time to put in place the September arrangements for pupils?

Mrs. Shephard: I am aware that grant-maintained schools in Essex are very popular and successful, and I am also aware of my hon. Friend's concern about the proposals for those two schools. I undertake to give him a decision, in all possible haste, about the future of those sixth forms.

Schools Report

9. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the schools in "15,000 Hours".

Mr. Forth: No. It was agreed between all parties before the research began in the early 1970s that the schools would never be identified.

Mr. Bottomley: May I put it to my hon. Friend that, as the agreement was made in 1970—25 years ago—we can expect the names of the schools to come out in five years' time under the 30-year rule, or will the schools' names be kept more secret than Cabinet secrets? While we are awaiting those names, is it not about time that more attention was drawn to the results of the research by Professor Michael Rutter and others, showing that the features of a school—ethos and structure—make a difference, and it does matter to which schools parents send their children? Is it not important that all education authorities re-read that important book?

Mr. Forth: The undertaking of confidentiality was given by the researchers before the schools and teachers agreed to take part in the project. It was not necessary for the Department to know the identity of the schools and the researchers did not provide that information to the Department. Therefore, the Department has kept no official record of the schools that participated and, regrettably, my hon. Friend's ingenious and impassioned suggestion cannot be followed up.

On the second part of my hon. Friend's question, of course a great deal of valuable research has been done, within the Department and outside, on school effectiveness in the broadest sense. We want to know more about what makes a good school: the contribution by the head teacher in particular, the governors, the staff and the parents. We are working hard increasingly to identify what elements make a good school so that we can disseminate that to the other schools and give them the opportunity to improve.

Further Education

10. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what measures she proposes to take to prevent the misuse of public funds in the further education sector.

Mr. Boswell: The chief executive of the Further Education Funding Council for England is responsible for ensuring that public funds are used for the purposes for which they were given. He has a duty to ensure that institutions have proper arrangements for financial management and accounting. The council has also implemented a range of measures to prevent the misuse of public funds.

Mr. Cunningham: Does the Minister accept that there is substantial evidence of abuse by further education colleges, primarily because the regulations governing those colleges are extremely weak? Will the Secretary of State undertake to review those procedures?

Mr. Boswell: I am surprised at that because the Further Education Funding Council has introduced a range of measures. These are enshrined in the initial Further and Higher Education Act 1992, the instruments of governance of the colleges, the financial memoranda between the various colleges and the council and other audit controls which are imposed, and strengthened by the fact that the principal of the college is himself or herself the accounting officer for the purpose and has an important statutory role. If the hon. Gentleman has any specific evidence of malpractice or financial irregularity, I hope that he will draw it to the attention of the funding council. I have none.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will my hon. Friend also examine the good use of funds in the further education sector, in particular the brand new facilities at North West Kent college, which were inaugurated by the Duke of Kent in Gravesend this morning?

Mr. Boswell: I am delighted to congratulate my hon. Friend on that further advance in the further education sector. We are providing an additional 4 per cent. of funding for that sector in the coming year. We are making big demands on it and it is rising to the occasion.

Mr. Beggs: What advice is given to further and higher education authorities to prevent fraud gangs from masquerading as students and getting away with millions by faking student identities to obtain grants?

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the question, although it is more germane to higher education. We and the higher education institutions and local education authorities have been concerned for some time about organised student frauds. The hon. Gentleman may have seen press reports on that matter only this morning and I hope he will have noticed that we have made available from Department for Education funds the sum of £120,000 for better computerised matching of similar, apparently similar or fraudulent entries in our determination to stamp out the problem.

Mr. Bryan Davies: In place of all this ministerial complacency, is it not time that Ministers addressed themselves to the declining morale of the further education sector? Have not Government centralising policies, such as using crude holdback to dictate the outcome of local disputes, reducing local accountability and marginalising the role of staff and students on governing bodies, given rise to the widespread anxiety that further education could join the slippery slope of other public institutions into the quango state?

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman's technique on these occasions is, "If in doubt, say that there is something wrong with morale." I do not know how many further education colleges he has visited recently. I have had exhaustive discussions with many people and staff, as well as at principal level. I find morale generally to be

high and the readiness of governing bodies to involve their academic and profession staff on a professional basis in the activities of college is to be welcomed. I do not accept the picture he has painted, nor do the students whose numbers are increasing in accordance with the target of a 25 per cent. expansion in that sector over the next three years.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the chief use of funds in further education is to provide more places? Does he agree that the increased number of places under this Government should be a source of congratulation rather than subject to niggling criticism of the kind that we have heard all afternoon?

Mr. Boswell: We are not complacent about the record. The safeguards for accountability are in place, and we are determined that the nation should make the best possible investment from the additional funds that we are making available to further education.

11. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals she has for securing an end to the dispute in the further education colleges sector.

Mr. Boswell: The dispute about further education lecturers' contracts is for the employers and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education to resolve. The Government have no plans to intervene.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Minister aware of the immense damage being done throughout the country by the failure of college management to negotiate on the future of further education? Will he join me in appealing to the governing body of West Cumbria college in Workington to meet all the staff in an open forum, to seek a resolution to the difficulties?

Mr. Boswell: I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not expect me to comment on an individual case, unless he thinks that it would be better if Ministers were to run college industrial relations policies. I naturally hope that discussions between staff and governors will always take place, locally and nationally. Although we have no plans to intervene in this case, I understand that the national negotiating bodies are again considering their position. We would like those matters to be resolved, but the basis of progress must be professionalism and efficiency in the delivery of further education.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 24 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Flynn: Was not top Tory John Maples right when he said that Tory Britain means the rich getting richer at the expense of the poor? Does the Prime Minister agree with his Chancellor that the orgy of unashamed greed of top salaries is justified? How does the Prime Minister explain that the wage of one boss of a privatised industry is worth the same amount of money as that received by 20 doctors or 100 nurses?

The Prime Minister: I have set out my views on board pay before and have made it clear that I do not agree with excessive and unjustified increases. No doubt the hon. Gentleman would agree. If he feels that the matter has been badly handled, he might discuss it with the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), who declares an interest in a company that advises British Gas and North West Water.

Mr. Rathbone: When my right hon. Friend is making plans for the Tory manifesto for a Conservative victory at the next general election, will he pay particular attention to policies that touch on and support the encouragement of the family?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I will certainly bear in mind my hon. Friend's suggestion. We are embarking on perhaps the widest examination of the policies that will be right, up to the next century and beyond it, that any party has undertaken for many years. I look forward to contributions from my hon. Friend and many others.

Mr. Blair: If the Prime Minister says that excessive pay awards are a matter for shareholders, and as the Government are the 40 per cent. shareholder in National Power and PowerGen, why will he not intervene?

The Prime Minister: I made it clear from the outset that, having put the company in private hands, we are not going to retain control over detailed decisions within the company. Recently, the right hon. Gentleman and his friends have been speaking about something that sounds much like the beginning of a pay policy.

Ms Church: Yes.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady says yes. I am pleased to hear that she says yes. The right hon. Gentleman had better decide whether the new Labour believes in the free market or in controls and the politics of envy. The truth is that the language is new, but the prejudices are familiar.

Mr. Blair: I shall tell the right hon. Gentleman what we believe in: public services run for the public and in the public interest. We can see whom the Tories represent. While they represent these excesses, the Labour party will speak up for the vast majority of ordinary people. People struggling to pay their bills and worried about their living standards are fed up with the same small group of people playing the boardroom equivalent of the national lottery and awarding themselves huge pay increases, hitting the jackpot week after week at the expense of the public.

The Prime Minister: Well, now we see it: the right hon. Gentleman is becoming a slave to grievance politics. I shall tell him who is concerned about public services—the people who put the services that did not serve the public well in private hands. The result is that prices are falling, investment is rising and consumers are getting better service now, in the private sector, than before. The Labour party's campaign shows just how unreconstructed and envious the Opposition still are. The right hon.

Gentleman makes no reference to the improvements in services. All he is doing is milking prejudice and exposing the fact that the Labour party has not changed.

Mr. Robert Banks: Has my right hon. Friend seen today's most welcome reports confirming that the Samsung Heavy Industries Company from South Korea is to establish a manufacturing plant near Knaresborough in my constituency, ultimately providing up to 600 jobs? Does he agree that the United Kingdom beat off competition from eight European countries because our Government have managed the economy so well? We have an excellent infrastructure; more importantly, we have a brilliant work force in Yorkshire.

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to hear that Samsung has decided to invest in my hon. Friend's constituency. I am only sorry that we did not hear the same sort of support for inward investment when NEC went to Livingston and Black and Decker went to Sedgefield.

The fact is that more inward investment is coming to this country than to any other in Europe because of the policies that we have followed, and because we will not accept the social chapter. People can see that the economy of this country is doing better than any other major economy in Europe. That means jobs for people in this country—jobs that would be lost by the policies followed by the Labour party.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister agree that the life sentence handed out to Private Lee Clegg, although required by the law, is nevertheless shamefully inappropriate, and that this is the moment for him to be released under licence, and the law changed?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, it is not for Ministers to comment on the actions of the court.

There are two points that I can make to the right hon. Gentleman about Private Clegg. The first is that there have been suggestions in recent days of fresh evidence that might cast doubt on Private Clegg's conviction. If so, that evidence should be provided to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He will then consider it and decide whether it is sufficient to refer to the Court of Appeal.

Secondly, after the recent decision, the question arises what should happen to Private Clegg now that his conviction has been upheld by the court. As the House will know, as for all life sentence prisoners there is a process to be gone through before a release date can be set. It will include consultations with the trial judge and the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, and it will take into account the nature of the offence. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will ensure that that process is undertaken both effectively and with due care.

Sir Donald Thompson: Does my right hon. Friend remember that when the Government banned veal crates and introduced the strictest regulations governing the transport of animals, and when they recently introduced welfare regulations covering the rearing of pigs, they did so hoping that Europe would soon follow? Will he persist in that policy?

The Prime Minister: We certainly will persist in that policy. We need a European-wide level of legislation if we are truly interested in animal welfare. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pressed that issue in Brussels yesterday. He secured agreement yesterday to advance the review of European Union requirements, which was scheduled for 1997, and found that there was considerable sympathy for the aim of phasing out the veal crate. I believe that the writing is on the wall for that production system, and there is no one in Europe who can take more credit for that than my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Q2. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 24 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Battle: As the Prime Minister and his Government hold the golden shares in the privatised water companies, why is he allowing Yorkshire Water to force people to have compulsory, expensive water metering, so that families, pensioners and the disabled pay the highest price for their water while Sir Gordon Jones and his directors hoard thousands of shares to themselves and skim off some £829,000 in boardroom remuneration?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to my first answer, he would have known the answer about the golden share. What the hon. Gentleman illustrates, yet again, is that, whenever they can, the Opposition wish decisions to be taken by Labour Members of Parliament. They are in no sense interested in the private sector. They are not interested in putting decisions out to the private sector. [HON. MEMBERS: "Sleaze."] Whatever they may say, they want centralisation and nothing but. [HON. MEMBERS: "Sleaze."] Those Opposition Members who are chanting may well be directing their chants to the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), but they need not chant at me.

Prime Ministerial Visits

Q3. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Prime Minister when he last visited the Ruislip-Northwood Parliamentary constituency.

The Prime Minister: I have not had the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Wilkinson: Had my right hon. Friend been able to visit the Ruislip-Northwood constituency since 28 November 1994, he would have found strong support from local people, backed by their local Member of Parliament, for the view that RAF Northolt, which is frequently used by Her Majesty's Ministers, should develop its services to the armed forces to the full. It welcomes the forthcoming arrival of the Queen's flight, but local residents would not approve of any extension of civil movements to RAF Northolt beyond those already permitted.

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my hon. Friend on one of the most effective pieces of coat-trailing that we have heard in the House for some time. I understand the points that he made and will draw them to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend.

Taxation

Q4. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Prime Minister what was the tax burden on an average income family in 1991; and what is the estimated burden on a similar family in 1995.

The Prime Minister: The answer would depend on a number of factors, such as family size and expenditure pattern, which the hon. Gentleman does not specify, but I can tell him that real take-home pay after tax and inflation has risen by 4 per cent.—about £11 a week in today's prices—since 1991 for a one-earner family on average earnings and is expected to rise further next year.

Mr. Cohen: Despite the Prime Minister's manifesto assertion, "I believe in low taxes," since the previous general election an average family must pay an extra £15.50 a week in tax. Will he give the reason for that whacking increase, especially as public services have deteriorated or been privatised? Surely the Prime Minister should be referred to the Nolan committee for bringing manifesto commitments into disrepute.

The Prime Minister: Were that to be so, after that question the hon. Gentleman would have to join me, for he will know that the Labour party proposes to introduce—in addition to existing taxes—a windfall tax, a payroll tax, a health tax, an entertainment tax and a development tax. That is on top of the intricate piece of accountancy by the Liberal Democrats, on which I congratulate them, which suggests that Labour party plans would already add 5p to the standard rate of income tax. While we head for 20p, the Labour party heads for 30p.

Engagements

Q5. **Mr. Legg:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 24 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Legg: Will my right hon. Friend please assure those of my constituents whose children are at grammar and independent schools that he has no plans to abolish the assisted places scheme or charitable status, or to stop selection? Is my right hon. Friend aware that, although the Opposition wish to abolish such schools, many of their spokesmen have benefited from them?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is quite right. A large number of what I believe are called, in current Labour terminology, "sensible" parents have evacuated their children from Labour-controlled education authorities and sent them elsewhere, including the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Members for Peckham (Ms Harman), for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and for Barking (Ms Hodge).

Mr. MacShane: Cheap.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman may say that it is cheap, but that is what they have done.

Indonesia

Q6. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to pay an official visit to Indonesia.

The Prime Minister: I have no current plans to do so.

Mr. Corbyn: As the Prime Minister has no plans to do visit Indonesia, will he convey to the Indonesian Government the British people's abhorrence of the illegal occupation of East Timor and the death of 200,000 East Timorese people at the hands of the Indonesian army? Will the right hon. Gentleman halt all British arms sales to Indonesia, which have been used to suppress and oppress the people there, and specifically ban the export of the Scorpion personnel carrier which can be used to kill and injure people in East Timor in order to maintain that illegal occupation?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have not recognised the Indonesian annexation of East Timor. That has been our position for a long time and we continue to support the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General to find a lasting solution to the problem. However, there is neither a European Union nor a United Nations embargo on arms sales to Indonesia; nor do I believe that one would be justified.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point or order, Madam Speaker. Tomorrow, Scottish Members table Scottish Questions under the new procedure, but even under that new procedure we still will not have the right directly to question all Scottish Office Ministers. That is extremely frustrating for Scottish Members. Could that be referred to the Procedure Committee for further consideration?

For example, I am sure that today many Scottish Members would have wished to question the Law Officers on whether they had available to them information from the American air force before they initiated proceedings against the current Lockerbie suspects. But even the basic democratic question of "What do you know and when did you know it?" is not available to Scottish Members. Does that not amount to an abuse of Scottish democracy?

Madam Speaker: If I understand the hon. Gentleman correctly, he is referring to Standing Order No. 94B, which does not envisage Ministers who sit in the other place answering questions in the Scottish Grand Committee. The hon. Gentleman has made the point that he may wish to pursue the matter. The only way that the matter can be pursued is by putting it to the Procedure Committee and asking it to consider the matter.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Page 165 of "Erskine May" makes the point that control of the accommodation and services of the House

"is vested in the Speaker on behalf of the House."

I mention that because it may reassure us that we will not find, one of these days, that the building is being privatised like the Treasury building over the road. This is an apt opportunity to make it clear that the Palace of Westminster will not be turned into offices and a hotel by private speculators. Otherwise, the rumour may grow that, if it can be done over the road with the Treasury building, perhaps this building will be next.

Madam Speaker: From time to time, many of us complain about this building—that we do not have sufficient accommodation or that it is not as modern as we would like. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Quite right."] That may be so, but, I would defend this building until my last breath. I shall be the first to the barricades to safeguard it as it stands.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it in order for the Prime Minister perhaps inadvertently to mislead the House and to suggest that I have evacuated my children at any stage to schools outside the local authority, when all my five children have always attended local authority schools in the district in which they reside?

Madam Speaker: I missed the point, if that was the point, that the Prime Minister made, but the hon. Gentleman has put the record straight for himself.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sorry to press you on this matter, but you will remember that three months ago I intervened and asked whether you would rule on occasions when Ministers exploited the children of hon. Members by raising these issues in the House. You ruled that you believed that it was wrong. Today, the Prime Minister has done it in relation to five hon. Members. Would you assert those rulings whereby hon. Members are advised that they should not make such statements?

Madam Speaker: I did not think today that the Prime Minister was exploiting the children of hon. Members. I thought that he was exploiting the hon. Members themselves and the attitudes that they took. I am careful in listening to the exchanges across the House on these matters. I am sure that the House knows that I deprecate the use of families like footballs across the Floor of the House. We have to be careful. It is reasonable, however, for hon. Members on both sides of the House to be attacked politically because we have a platform on which we can reply. That is the way in which it should be done.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Is it another point of order on this matter?

Mr. Bruce *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I have made my ruling. I will hear no more points of order on the matter. The House knows clearly where I stand. The hon. Member said that it was a point of order on this matter. Has he changed his mind? He has thought of another one.

Mr. Bruce: I rose on a point of order in relation to a completely different matter, Madam Speaker. I thought that you had finished and I apologise for interrupting your flow. My point of order deals with access to the House. On Sunday, you may have seen on the BBC "On The Record" programme a picture of people queuing to get into the Gallery of the House. The person introducing the subject said that people had to get in a queue to lobby their Member of Parliament, which is incorrect. I wonder whether you have any powers to keep the fourth estate in line on this matter. Perhaps we should take their passes away for a week or so, so that they would more accurately reflect how people can lobby their Member of Parliament.

Madam Speaker: I shall consider the point raised by the hon. Gentleman. The Select Committee on Broadcasting could consider the matter. I have not seen the programme. I have quite a lot of other interesting things to do on a Sunday evening.

Community Care (Rights to Mental Health Services)

3.38 pm

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for comprehensive services for persons referred to specialist psychiatric services or discharged from hospital following treatment for mental disorder and for connected purposes.

The Bill would give enforceable rights to care and support to mentally ill people in the community. It would also establish national standards for the provision of services and care. Mentally ill people still live at the margins of our society. For too long, our concern and the public resources it represents have been as marginal. We have all had our reasons for that failure.

Professor Kathleen Jones put it well when she said:

"to the politician community care is a useful piece of rhetoric; to the sociologist it is a stick to beat institutional care with; to the Civil Servant it is a cheap alternative to institutional care which can pass to the local authority for action or inaction. To the visionary it is a dream of a new society in which people really do care. To the Social Services Department it is a nightmare of heightened public expectation and inadequate resources to meet them."

Those words are as relevant today as when they were first written 20 years ago, and that is the problem.

There is now unquestioned and universal agreement about what makes care in the community work—agreement that was validated by research in the mid-1960s, and confirmed by numerous studies since then and by the experience of mentally ill people themselves during the past 30 years. The essential elements of community care are stable accommodation, the support of a named key worker, day care and access to crisis services that are available 24 hours a day and not—as, unfortunately, is still too often the case—only from 9 to 5.

Shamefully, whether a person secures the services that he needs, when he needs them and for as long as he needs them, still depends on a geographical lottery. The level, range and quality of provision varies enormously from one district to another. Eligibility varies. Is it any wonder that mentally ill people desperate for help just get lost, sometimes with tragic consequences?

When treatment was provided in large, distant hospitals, society could and did ignore the injustices and, sometimes, even the brutality that that caused. Patients were denied privacy and their own clothing; even false teeth were handed out before meals by charge nurses. But that time has long since passed, and no one seriously proposes a return to policies abandoned by public and professional consent a generation ago.

Today's challenge, which cannot be bucked, is to bring the essential elements of care once found in mental hospitals to every person who stands in need of them. The risk posed by recent tragedies is that public confidence will falter just when the Government and Parliament must be made to face that challenge and deliver a policy that works for all. How can confidence be restored in a policy that depends on the one hand on public acceptance and support, and on the other on the actions and decisions of countless doctors, nurses, social workers and other professionals?

What is needed is a system for care and treatment that can meet the twin concerns of public safety and the need to ensure that individuals are given appropriate and reliable help while living their lives in the community rather than in a hospital ward. Our present legal framework for mental health is out of date; the legislation is hospital-based, and fails to take account of the fact that 90 per cent. of care is now provided in the community. Indeed, our mental health laws work against the very aims of community care, becoming more and more discredited as tragic cases highlight their glaring limitations.

Parliament created that inadequate legal framework, and it is now Parliament's responsibility to change it. In the House, we can legislate for a system within which the various rights and duties combine to provide a safer and more effective service for the mentally ill person, his relatives and the public. We can render more accountable those—from Ministers to individual practitioners—whom society has entrusted with the task of getting the policy to work.

What is needed to inspire both professional and public confidence is nothing less than root-and-branch reform—not tinkering with the details of the present law as the Government propose, or offering some paper-thin charter, which will be the next desperate idea. Numerous inquiry reports have emphasised that people can simply be lost by the services that should be helping them. Only last week, one such report—produced by a committee headed by Sir Louis Blom-Cooper—termed the Mental Health Act 1983 obsolete. The *Health Service Journal*, adding its voice, said that the "outmoded" Mental Health Act is "inadequate" and needs replacing.

My Bill offers a new legal framework. It will impose clear duties on health authorities, national health service trusts and social services authorities to assess and keep under regular review the needs which a person might have for the full range of medical treatment, social care and practical assistance required for life in the community. It will require the Government to establish and enforce minimum standards of community care provision throughout the country, with corresponding responsibility to ensure that those having to meet those standards have the funds with which to do so.

The Bill will define new duties which make health and social work professionals, and the authorities which employ them, accountable to those patients with whom they work and to the public for the decisions which they make on their behalf. Above all, it will for the first time give those who must rely on our health and social care system clear rights to receive the services which they need to have a decent chance of something better than just surviving in the community.

My Bill has the support of every major organisation concerned with the care and support of mentally ill people. Its principles are supported by MIND, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the Royal College of Nursing, the Mental Health Foundation, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Association of County Councils, the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts, the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales, Survivors Speak Out, the patients' organisation, and Unison, the health service trade union.

The Bill also has extensive cross-party support within the House. I hope that it will be given an unopposed First reading by the House and that, in time, its much-needed proposals may find their place in legislation.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Tessa Jowell, Ms Janet Anderson, Ms Jean Corston, Ms Angela Eagle, Ms Liz Lynne, Mr. Ken Purchase, Mr. Alan Howarth, Mr. Michael Clapham, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Mr. Geoffrey Hoon, Ms Estelle Morris, and Mr. Roger Sims.

COMMUNITY CARE (RIGHTS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES)

Ms Tessa Jowell accordingly presented a Bill to provide for comprehensive services for persons referred to specialist psychiatric services or discharged from hospital following treatment for mental disorder and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday March 3, and to be printed. [Bill 37.]

Madam Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: Before we embark on the Second Reading of the Disability Discrimination Bill, the House may wish to know how I view the position of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill presented by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), which is due to receive its Second Reading on Friday 10 February.

Obviously the question arises as to whether the private Member's Bill can properly proceed once a decision has been reached on today's Bill. "Erskine May" states on pages 468 to 469:

"There is no rule or custom which restrains the *presentation* of two or more bills relating to the same subject, and containing similar provisions. But if a decision of the House has already been taken on one such Bill, for example, if the Bill has been given or refused a second reading, the other is not proceeded with if it contains substantially the same provisions".

The Disability Discrimination Bill and the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill clearly overlap in many respects, but in many respects they are incompatible and they cannot be said to contain substantially the same provisions. To the extent that their provisions differ and are incompatible, the House may at some stage have a choice to make between them. I do not consider that it would be right for me as Speaker to prevent the House from proceeding with the Second Reading of the Bill presented by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East if it wishes to do so, even if the Government's Bill has previously been given a Second Reading.

Orders of the Day

Disability Discrimination Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.49 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. William Hague): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Government give a high priority to helping disabled people to live with dignity and independence. During the past 15 years, much has been done to further that aim. The new access to work programme has enabled a wider range of disabled people to obtain and keep employment, by helping them to overcome barriers at work. The introduction of access requirements to the building regulations has had a substantial effect on social, recreational and employment possibilities for disabled people. The number of disabled children educated in mainstream schools has increased steadily, great progress has been made towards an accessible transport network, and spending on benefits for the long-term sick and disabled has more than trebled in real terms.

Despite what has been achieved, the Government recognise that discrimination still occurs. Disabled people are still liable to be afforded less favourable treatment throughout a whole range of activities—whether when applying for a job, or trying to get a table in a restaurant. For example, a few years ago, Scope conducted an interesting experiment, in which job advertisements were responded to with two curriculum vitae, which were identical in every way, except that one revealed a disability. The study concluded that an able-bodied applicant was much more likely to receive a positive response to an application.

The Government have always made it clear that they are committed to ending the irrationality with which disabled people are all too often treated and regarded. It is utterly wrong that disabled people are restricted, or excluded from some aspects of life. We all must come to terms with including people with a disability in our work, travel, study and leisure—all the more so because our ageing population will bring with it an increasing number of people with some kind of disability.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The Minister quoted the case of someone being discriminated against when applying for a job and thus clearly gave the House the impression that such discrimination was not acceptable to the Government. If it is not, and he nods, why should the Bill make it acceptable for companies employing fewer than 20 people?

Mr. Hague: The provisions in the Bill will cover 83 per cent. of employees who work in firms employing 20 or more people. There are reasons why we want to exempt smaller firms from the employment requirements and I will come to those.

The Bill is the most tangible evidence yet of the Government's commitment to disabled people. It establishes Britain as leading the way in Europe. In time, it will bring about the dramatic changes to which I shall refer. It will involve millions of people in taking positive action, its implications for what individuals and businesses must do are more far-reaching than existing sex and race legislation, and its effects will be felt across the board, in all aspects of life. It will give disabled people a right not to be discriminated against in employment, and a right of access to goods, facilities, financial services and the transport infrastructure.

As our White Paper made clear, however, our proposals go much wider than the areas in which legislation is necessary. The accompanying measures, on transport and education, and the consultation on domestic dwellings complete the most comprehensive package to deal with such matters proposed by any Government.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The Minister mentioned accompanying measures to deal with education. In an answer to me last Tuesday, the Prime Minister said that the Bill applied to education, yet one clause deliberately excludes 12 areas—mainly on the basis of the funding authority involved—so it is difficult to know which educational institutions will be covered by the provisions. Will the Minister confirm that those are not covered and clarify whether they will be covered by some other provision?

Mr. Hague: As the hon. Member knows from the White Paper and from my statement to the House on 24 November 1994, the Government are proposing a number of education measures that are separate from the scope of the Bill. As he should also know, its employment provisions will apply to educational institutions, so the Prime Minister was right to say that aspects of the Bill apply to education, just as he was right to say that aspects of it apply to transport.

Part I defines disability for the purpose of the new law. Opposition Members have implied in their reasoned amendment that we have defined the concept of disability too narrowly. But a wider definition that stretched the concept of disability too far would lack credibility and be open to abuse. Our definition is the right one, because employers and service providers will understand it, and it will therefore make the Act operable.

Part II concerns the employment right. The new employment right is broadly on the lines of present anti-discrimination provision for women and ethnic minorities, but with the additional requirement on employers to make reasonable adjustments to overcome any practical constraints imposed by a person's disability. The right covers all aspects of employment: when disabled people apply for work or take up employment and when people become disabled during their working lives. It will replace the outdated and unworkable quota scheme. Like that scheme, it will cover a broad range of physical and mental disabilities.

The Bill provides for codes of practice to be issued, which will help employers in deciding whether an adjustment is reasonable in a particular case. They will need to take account of the cost of the adjustment and its usefulness in overcoming the practical effect of the disability. Most disabled people who want to work need no or only very modest help.

[Mr. Hague]

The new right will apply to employers with 20 or more employees—a point made by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley)—and include 83 per cent. of all employees.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The Minister said earlier that most disabled people who want to work need no or very little help. On what authority does he say that?

Mr. Hague: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be eager to agree with me. I say it on the basis of experience in the United States, where employers found that "reasonable accommodation", which is their equivalent of our term "reasonable adjustment", cost nothing in 43 per cent. of cases because it involved just moving the office furniture around or doing something sensible and practical like introducing different working hours. A large proportion of other adjustments cost very little. So I am entirely justified in saying that—

Mr. Tom Clarke *rose—*

Mr. Hague: I must get on with my speech, but if the hon. Gentleman needs further elaboration, let him ask.

Mr. Clarke: I promise the Minister that I shall be as generous and give way to him at least twice.

Given that the Minister has just said that those measures cost nothing, which was an important statement on behalf of the Government, why are the Government being so mean?

Mr. Hague: It is most comforting to know that the hon. Gentleman will give way to me twice, but it is not comforting to see that he cannot reconcile the various statements that I have made on this matter. It can be simultaneously true that, while many adjustments cost nothing, some cost something. Some employers will have to pay a bill to finance a reasonable adjustment, and I see no inconsistency between those positions.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hague: I must now make a little progress, but I shall try to give way to the hon. Gentleman a little later if he wishes. Many other hon. Members wish to speak in the debate.

The exemption for small firms reflects the Government's recognition that it may be more difficult and burdensome for smaller firms to get to grips with the new right. There will, however, be provision for the threshold of 20 employees to be changed by way of regulation and the Government will keep the level under review as experience is gained of the new right.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hague: I shall give way first to my hon. Friend and then to the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson). I shall then make a good deal of progress with my speech.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend spoke of the undesirability of imposing a burden on business. I do not want to be unreasonable, but should not we expect business men to behave as decently as other people? Does my hon. Friend recall that Oliver Twist's first cry on being born in the workhouse advertised to the inmates "the fact of a new burden having been imposed on the parish"? Does my hon. Friend sometimes feel, as I do, that we need a new Dickens to describe the absurdities and horrors of our complacencies?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend describes the position in an interesting and literary way. We can think of those matters as burdens but also as opportunities for employers and service providers, many of whom will find that including disabled people brings benefits. We must recognise, however, that there will be a cost implication for many employers and a cost to goods and service providers—in their case we expect it to run into hundreds of millions of pounds. We cannot wish away the fact that the Bill's provisions will represent an additional cost for many people.

Mr. Hanson: Does the Minister expect that his hon. Friends will table amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Race Relations Act 1976 to provide a 20-employees exemption? If he does not, why is he treating disabled people differently?

Mr. Hague: I cannot anticipate what amendments may be tabled to the Bill, let alone to previous Acts of Parliament. It is important to recognise that the Bill expects more cost and positive action on the part of employers than that expected of them to overcome other cases of discrimination. As I have already said, the Government have provided that the threshold of 20 employees may be changed through regulation. We shall keep the level of that restriction under review.

Part III contains the access provisions. Service providers will be required to change policies, practices and procedures that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to make use of goods. They will also be required to provide auxiliary aids or services—such as induction loops—or remove physical barriers to help disabled people gain access to goods, facilities and services. Those requirements will lead to a huge leap forward in the accessibility of goods and services to disabled people. We have listened carefully to the representations made during our consultation exercise and we have responded.

We have consulted in particular on insurance. We have decided that a statutory provision needs to be made for the insurance industry. We are taking powers to prescribe that insurers may treat disabled people differently only where that is based on sound evidence. My officials, together with their colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry, are discussing with the Association of British Insurers and Lloyd's a statutory framework to end discrimination against disabled people.

The Bill is drafted in such a way that indirect as well as direct discrimination can be dealt with. We have adopted a definition of discrimination that leaves disabled people with practical solutions to the real problems that they face—however they are categorised. A situation where dogs were not admitted to a cafe, with the effect that blind people would be unable to enter it, would be a prima facie case of indirect discrimination against disabled people and would be unlawful.

The proposals amount to huge change. While recognising that that change will be welcome to disabled people, it must also be acknowledged that many in the

business sector will be apprehensive. The business community is entitled to know as precisely as possible what is expected of it. The courtroom is not the place for such matters to be decided—it is up to the Government to make the information available. The Bill shows that the Government are prepared to face up to that responsibility, and it has been drafted to provide for maximum certainty.

One characteristic that sets the Government's Bill apart from alternatives which have been proposed is that it includes provisions that will allow the Government to tie down as precisely as possible what employers and service providers will have to do to comply with the law, as well as providing for maximum flexibility of approach.

The Bill will allow us to specify exactly what is meant by terms such as "auxiliary aid" and "reasonable alternative provision". We will be able to specify particular instances when it would, or would not, be reasonable for service providers or employers to take a particular course of action.

Crucially, we will also be able to make explicit precisely how much money a service provider needs to spend in any particular case on making his service more accessible. Under the Bill it will not be up to the courts to decide whether a business would be subjected to "undue hardship"—whatever that might mean, it is certainly a recipe for uncertainty and dispute.

As a consequence, we are able to tie down the cost of our proposals for access to services. The reason why the maximum cost of the Government's proposal can be estimated at around £1.3 billion is that, unlike other Bills that have been presented, it is not open-ended—it is not a blank cheque. Having consulted further, we will be able to set a limit which is appropriate to the needs for disabled people and realistic for business.

The need for certainty is why there will be a further round of consultation before the regulations under the Act are laid—to ensure that the detailed proposals are easily understood, affordable and fair.

We shall consult on the contents of the code of practice for employers, which will draw on the extensive experience of the Employment Service's placing, assessment and counselling teams in helping disabled people and their employers overcome any practical effects of their disabilities in a job. We shall consult on what it will be reasonable to expect those in each service sector to do to provide an accessible service. We shall also consult on the financial limit.

The employment right, a provision that replaces an existing requirement on employers, is likely to commence by spring 1996. Aspects of the access provisions, such as the prohibition on refusing to serve a disabled person, will also commence in 1996. We shall start as much as possible as soon as possible. However, the more stringent duties on service providers, such as the duty to make physical alterations, represent totally new departures. It is likely, therefore, that a phasing-in period of perhaps five to 10 years will be appropriate to ensure that businesses have sufficient time to gear up for their new responsibilities. That issue will also be the subject of consultation.

I know that we shall hear this afternoon about the exclusion of education and transport vehicles from the right of access. The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) has already referred to it. Their exclusion has been a focus of criticism, yet it would be flying in the face of common sense not to accord special treatment in those areas.

The Education Act 1993 made provision for a biennial survey of the accessibility of schools—due to report this summer—which may help to identify areas where better access may be needed. In tandem with existing programmes of improvement, the Government will also bring forward proposals to encourage providers of education to devise imaginative, cost-effective projects aimed at increasing accessibility.

The potential interaction between proposals to include education in the Bill and the 1993 Act is unclear, but it would certainly cause severe difficulties for local education authorities. There would be conflicts between the responsibilities of the local authority as set out in the 1993 Act and the idea that adaptations should not cause the provider "undue hardship"—a stipulation that is very difficult to define in terms of schools and local education authorities. The provisions would undermine local authorities' planning role and increase overall costs.

The inclusion of education might have the effect of not allowing schools to teach children with special needs separately, preventing them from benefiting from supplementary help or from gradual inclusion into mainstream tuition. It would replace a carefully worked out system, which was established as a result of a great deal of consultation, with a set of provisions inappropriate to efficient education.

As for public transport vehicles, there is only one sensible way to require accessible vehicles, and that is on a replacement basis. To fix a timetable for the manufacturers of all types of transport to adhere to would be folly, and could lead to services being withdrawn. Instead, we shall require all new buses to be of a low-floor construction, to match new rolling stock that is already built to an accessible design, and the fully accessible designs of purpose-built taxis, which have been available since the mid-1980s.

It is obvious nonsense to suggest that excluding transport vehicles from the Bill denies disabled people access to transport. The Government's record on initiatives in that area is second to none. For example, all new licensed taxis in London are already wheelchair-accessible. By 1 January 2000, all taxis in London will be wheelchair-accessible. More than 60 other licensing authorities have mandated for all or part of their fleets to be wheelchair-accessible. Other improvements include the accessibility of the new light railway systems and the inter-city network, ranging over to the orange badge scheme and the contribution of Motability to the independent personal mobility of disabled people.

The key is that those people who argue for the inclusion of transport vehicles appear to have ruled out any thought that different treatment might be appropriate in certain areas. Most sensible people will think the "one size fits all" approach to be rigid and counter-productive.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Does the Minister accept that the argument that he just made is simply incorrect? Those who supported the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill have argued consistently that consultation on the codes of practice in that Bill would enable those issues to be explored in great detail, and the

[Mr. Roger Berry]

Minister is not here arguing for special treatment for transport. The case that he just made is not for special treatment for transport.

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman recognises that I am not arguing for special treatment for transport, and I am pleased to have his recognition of that. I am saying that there are practical and sensible ways of bringing about radical change in the accessibility of our transport systems in this country—change that is already well under way—without legislation. The most flexible, sensible and practical way to do it is outside the scope of legislative requirements.

We have seen significant improvements in access provision across all transport areas, but the benefits of those developments have sometimes been lost because of inaccessible infrastructure. That has often been the weak link in what is otherwise becoming a more accessible service. Transport infrastructure is covered by the right of access to goods and services. The measure will help us in securing the fully accessible transport system which is our ultimate aim.

The Government's approach is the right one—it also presents the perfect opportunity for Parliament to discuss and frame legislation to ensure that disabled people get the Bill that they deserve. I believe that the Government's proposals are clear, in that they give people specific obligations and rights in a way that the Bill presented by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East would not. They are workable in that they provide for flexibility and practical solutions to distinct problems—the hon. Member's Bill does not. They are fair in that they end discrimination while considering the interests of others—the hon. Member's Bill does not. That is why I will be asking the House to support this Bill and not the one that he has presented to the House.

Part IV deals with the national disability council. The Opposition's amendment claims that the Bill provides only an ineffective enforcement procedure. I do not accept that argument and I think that the analogy with the existing commissions is flawed.

To a much greater extent than for women, or even ethnic minorities, the problems faced by disabled people in securing fair treatment in society are individualistic. Disabilities pose—or are wrongly perceived to impose—specific practical limitations on what a disabled person can do. Overcoming such problems requires practical, individually tailored solutions. I do not believe that it is an area where the bringing of class legal actions has substantial relevance.

Only a small minority of sex discrimination cases—fewer than 10 per cent.—which are resolved in the courts are supported by the Equal Opportunities Commission. As for the much-vaunted test cases, we believe that there is a better way of reviewing and keeping the law up to date without any of the horrific legal costs that such cases can accumulate. We recognise that the effects of the Disability Discrimination Bill, when enacted, will need to be sustained and reviewed to ensure that it is having the intended effect and that changes in society's attitude and behaviour towards disabled people need to be kept under review so that discrimination can be countered effectively, now and in future.

That is why we need the national disability council. It will work closely with existing organisations representing the interests of disabled people. Its primary duties will be to advise the Government on measures relating to the elimination of discrimination and the drawing up of codes of practice to help with the interpretation of the Bill. The question of who should sit on the NDC has yet to be decided, but it will almost certainly include members of representative committees and organisations, business representatives, and disabled people themselves. Another reason why disabled people will be well protected under the legislation is that there will be, in the sector of service provision, somewhere for them to turn if they feel that they have been discriminated against—to go alongside the existing support network for employees.

The Bill makes provision for the establishment of an advice and support service to help disabled people secure their rights and to promote the settlement of disputes arising under the right of access to goods and services. We intend that the advice and support should be locally available so as to be of maximum benefit to disabled people and easier to use than the centralised service offered by existing commissions in other areas.

My Department will support the advisers with detailed guidance on the right of access. There will be procedures to help disabled people to set down the details of their complaint so as to make plain the precise legal provision that they think has been infringed. Their complaint would then be put forcefully to the trader accused of discrimination.

We have begun discussions with the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux on the possibility of helping citizens advice bureaux to be better able to advise and support disabled people and to provide the service that we have in mind. Those discussions will address such issues as the detailed nature of the services, the possible involvement of disability organisations in ensuring that staff are properly trained and can provide an effective service, the degree to which citizens advice bureaux are accessible to disabled people and how any deficiencies may be remedied.

However, in those cases where legal redress is sought, the county court's power to award an injunction will be extremely important for the purposes of the Bill. Although damages will be available, what disabled people want is an increasingly accessible environment and a change in people's attitudes. That is our objective in bringing forward the Bill and that is what it will provide. Our enforcement strategy is the right one in the circumstances.

Mr. Barnes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: I have already done so, but I will give way to the hon. Gentleman once more in acknowledgement of his involvement in these affairs.

Mr. Barnes: I have written to the Minister about the role of the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service upon which he is now elaborating. The letter suggests that we are not very far down the path in the process and that all the ideas in the Government's legislation must be developed considerably and then finalised. Surely there is a difference between a private Member's Bill which tries

to set up some structure or arrangement and Government legislation which should tell us exactly what their plans are.

Mr. Hague: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are well down the track in developing our plans. I have been able to announce to the House today considerably more progress than I set out in my letter to him—I know that it was written yesterday, but I thought that it would be better to inform the House of Commons of our proposals rather than leak it to the hon. Gentleman by letter last night. That is why I have set out our plans to the whole House today.

We are well down the track in our discussions. We are taking the sometimes painstaking time and trouble to ensure that the system works and will provide a locally available source of advice and assistance for disabled people. I think that it is worth taking that time and trouble because the prize is considerable: if the service works, it will provide tangible help to large numbers of people.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Is not my hon. Friend trying to make what is reasonable and normal become acceptable and commonplace?

Mr. Hague: Yes. I am trying to frame our legislation in such a way as to require people to do things differently and also to change attitudes in the country without creating a backlash against the objectives that we are trying to secure. That is why we have framed the legislation in that way.

I make special mention of two aspects of the Bill which I propose to amend in Committee to take account of representations made since the Bill was published. Firstly, the Bill applies to Great Britain, with power to extend its provisions to Northern Ireland by Order in Council. It has always been the Government's intention that those new rights should apply throughout the United Kingdom. We also want them to take effect in Northern Ireland from the same date as elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

We expect hon. Members from Northern Ireland to be able to take part in any discussion of the Bill's provisions. However, a number of hon. Members from Northern Ireland—including the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), who is in the Chamber now—have sought stronger assurances on those points. To avoid doubt, the Government have decided to extend the Bill to cover Northern Ireland from the outset. The necessary amendments, including any local provisions required, will be tabled in Committee.

Secondly, some hon. Members have said that the sale and letting of property should be covered specifically in the Bill. The Government agree in principle. We will need to consider the details of how the legislation might be framed, and I will address that matter during the Committee.

I believe that attitudes to disability and disabled people are changing. In the world of work, people are starting to appreciate that disabled people have strengths and weaknesses in the same way as everybody else, and that an individual's disabilities are not nearly as important as his or her abilities. In the service sector, people are beginning to realise that making services and facilities accessible to disabled people is pure good business sense.

The Bill shows that the Government are determined to play a major role in maintaining that transformation of attitudes. We are determined to tackle the frustrations which disabled people encounter in attempting to do the things that many of us take for granted, and we are determined to do so across the board.

We have listened to disabled people and their representatives and we have listened to employers. We have built on the Government's already impressive record of helping disabled people by producing a Bill which represents an historic advance for disabled people. It establishes a new right not to be discriminated against in the field of employment, it establishes a new right of access to goods and services, and it establishes a new national disability council. It is a Bill of which we can be proud, and I commend it to the House.

4.19 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I beg to move, To leave out from 'That' to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

> That this House declines to give the Disability (Discrimination) Bill a Second Reading because it believes that the Bill is not an acceptable or enforceable measure to ensure civil rights for all disabled people because its employment provisions would extend to less than five per cent. of firms, because it fails to provide for a comprehensive definition of disability or for a Disability Rights Commission to work towards the elimination of discrimination, because it specifically excludes access to the means of public transport and because it fails to make unlawful discrimination in the sale and letting of premises.

I begin by thanking Madam Speaker for her very clear statement on procedure at the beginning of the debate. Whatever the decision of the House today, Opposition Members look forward with confidence to 10 February when we shall support the Bill presented by my hon. Friend for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) because we realise that that is the only civil rights Bill before the House this Session.

The Bill that the Government have laid before the House today is not so much a measure to help disabled people as a measure to help Ministers get out of the hole that they dug themselves last year. Their Bill is, above all, a public relations exercise. They certainly need to improve their public image, but it will take a good deal of positive publicity and a much more positive Bill than this one to undo the damage done by the shambles that we witnessed last Session.

Since their obstruction in the House of disabled people's civil rights, the Government have spent £1 million on advertising, trying to project a more positive image, but as 6.5 million disabled people, their families and carers know, the image and the reality are very different. The Bill before us today shows that the Government have moved less far than they would pretend and nowhere near so far as disabled people want.

Last week, I heard the Minister claim, as he did again today, that he has brought about strong and wide-ranging legislation to deal with discrimination against disabled people. What we have before us, however, is neither strong nor wide ranging: it is weak and narrow and, worst of all, it actually introduces a new discrimination between different groups of disabled people, as the Minister confirmed today. It is a Bill of half measures and unenforceable concessions. The Minister said that his Bill represented a great stride forward for the Government in their approach to disability, but it is no such thing: at best, it is a great step sideways. Indeed, in terms of the employment of disabled people, it represents one step forward and two steps back.

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

As the Government have at least entered the debate, we should remember where they were when they began. In 1990, Her Majesty's Government told the World Health Organisation that they were

"not convinced that the goal of integration and equality can be particularly advanced by any all-embracing or generalised law proclaiming the rights of disabled people."

In the same year, the Department of Employment—I understand that an Employment Minister is to reply to the debate—also expressed misgivings about the very idea of disabled people's rights when it said:

"disability, unlike race or sex, can be relevant to job performance".

The same document stated:

"Anti-discrimination legislation is unlikely to be effective in achieving policy objectives and might be counter-productive by making a constructive approach by employers less likely."

That was said against all the evidence of the American experience. It was not even an argument that persuaded President Bush who, unlike the Minister, seemed to see the benefits rather than what the Minister described today as the burdens involved. It is from such a backwoods of indifference or even hostility to the rights of disabled people that the Government have begun to emerge. It was not until January 1992, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) presented his Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, that the then Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) told the House:

"We all know that there is still too much unjustified discrimination against disabled people."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 1251.]

Until that time, the Government were unwilling to recognise the problem. They have shifted their position because the pressure of public opinion has left them little choice.

The history of efforts made by Members of both Houses goes back many years. Lord Ashley presented a Bill while a Member of this House 14 years ago. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) also made several attempts. Lord Longford and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe made memorable contributions to winning a majority in Parliament for civil rights for disabled people.

Last year, the pressure finally grew too great even for the present Government to withstand, and the Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) dragged the Government kicking and screaming into the debate. Right hon. and hon. Members were lobbied extensively by their constituents, and thousands of people came to Westminster to lobby their elected representatives. My hon. Friend's Bill won overwhelming backing by organisations of and for disabled people, received its Second Reading by 231 votes to nil and returned from Committee even stronger than before.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): I was a teller when the Bill received its Second Reading and I recall that some Conservative Members who are here today to say that the principles behind that Bill were wrong nevertheless voted for its Second Reading.

Mr. Clarke: I share my hon. Friend's recollection. As he reminds the House, the true number in favour of the Bill was 235.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): I was present on that occasion and I recall that the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) said that he was prepared to emasculate the Bill—not his words, but I paraphrase his remarks—to remove the onerous conditions that it would apply to businesses.

Mr. Berry: That is cobblers.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend, from a sedentary position, makes the right reply: the observation was, indeed, cobblers and unworthy of the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant).

After the Bill's Second Reading, the Government chose to frustrate the will of the House. The right hon. Member for Chelsea had his chance to prove that Government recognition of the need to act against discrimination was more than skin deep, but he did not take that chance because he was not allowed to do so. Since then, we have seen more of the same—a Government with no real commitment to or understanding of the issue giving ground reluctantly under pressure from all parts of the House and the country

The Government were under such enormous pressure that last July Ministers offered to open formal consultations. Whatever they were told by those whom they consulted, the Government were clearly intent on preventing another civil rights Bill coming before the House if they possibly could. That is why we have this half-hearted Bill before us today, which still leaves disabled people as second-class citizens.

The fact that the Government have presented a Bill of their own, however inadequate, nevertheless represents a victory for civil rights campaigners and is a substantial climbdown from the positions taken by Ministers and certain Conservative Members in the past. Today we have evidence of the Government's profound embarrassment on this issue. They now grudgingly accept that anti-discrimination legislation can be effective in achieving policy objectives, that it does not make a constructive approach by employers less likely, and that it can advance the goal of equality for disabled people. But the Government's Bill does not embrace the demands that disabled people's organisations are making on behalf of millions of people—demands which are reflected in our reasoned amendment.

After the evasions of the past, the Minister said last week that it was time for the Government to make a statement on discrimination against disabled people, just as the Americans, with their Disabilities Act, have done in the United States. That is what the Minister claims that the Bill will do, but the statement made by this Bill falls a long way short of the far-reaching and comprehensive statement of principle that a majority in both Houses wanted.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It is all about money.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend, who makes an enormous contribution to disability issues, reminds us of the Tory argument of cost. He will be reassured to learn that I intend to return to that later.

The Bill says that disabled people have the right to equal treatment in employment. Only a week ago, the Prime Minister—no less—told my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) that this was not a limited Bill because, as he put it, the Bill

"carries rights for disabled people when they are unfairly discriminated against in employment."—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. 581.]

The Prime Minister could not have chosen a better example to show just why this is such a limited Bill, taking away with one hand while making limited concessions with the other.

The whole truth is that the Bill carries rights only for some disabled people when they are unfairly discriminated against in employment. If a disabled person happens to work for a small firm, that person gains no rights at all. If the job for which he or she applies is with a firm employing fewer than 20 people, the right to equal treatment simply does not apply. The Prime Minister highlighted employment because, we are told, that is the centrepiece of the Government's legislation. They have given this area pride of place, while relegating some others, such as education and transport, to the White Paper, and excluding others, such as discrimination by landlords, altogether.

I did not regard today's rather weak comment on the latter subject by the Minister as falling even into the category of the sort of mild concessions offered elsewhere.

Mr. Hague: I must ask the hon. Gentleman to accept that it was not a weak comment but an agreement by the Government to include sale and letting, if that was what he was referring to, in the Bill. They will be included.

The hon. Gentleman has mentioned education. Perhaps he can clear up any confusion which might arise from the Opposition amendment—it does not mention education—and confirm whether it is Labour party policy to include education in any right of access, and also tell us what assessment he has made of the public expenditure consequences of so doing.

Mr. Clarke: I find it astonishing that the present Minister, of all people, should refer to education when he did not even include it in his consultation document last July. Not once in our debates has he referred to the fact that fewer than one in 1,000 such teachers has access to schools. Nor has he referred to the fact that the Bill does nothing for further and higher education. Just to reassure the hon. Gentleman, I stress that I am happy to support the measures for education in the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood and I hope that, as a result of today's debate, the Minister, too, will find them acceptable.

Let us be absolutely clear: what the Government propose in employment will not outlaw discrimination. In relation to large companies, the proposals will merely change the legal rights that disabled people already have. I shall return to that point later. Meanwhile, the Government are saying for the first time that discrimination on the part of small firms is perfectly in order. That is not a great stride forward: it is not a stride forward at all, and it sends out all the wrong signals to employers. Instead of saying, "You must not discriminate against disabled people," the Government seem to be saying, "You should not discriminate so long as you can afford not to do so." In the words of the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation:

"Small employers will not be covered by the Act and will therefore be free to discriminate."

A disabled job applicant or employee will not receive a guarantee of legal protection against discrimination under the Bill—none whatever. He or she will be told, "If you want legal protection, you must work for a large firm." If the job is provided by one of the 96 per cent. of firms that are exempt from the Bill, that is just too bad.

Mr. Hague: I thank the hon. Gentleman for fulfilling his promise to give way to me twice.Why does he think that the US Congress decided to exempt firms with fewer than 15 employees from the employment provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act?

Mr. Clarke: I think that the former Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, the right hon. Member for Chelsea, will have read at his leisure the excellent book written by Victoria Scott, entitled "Lessons from America". If he has now received the answer, I hope that in time the present Minister will receive it as well. If the Minister and his hon. Friends behind him have any doubt, I advise them to read the responses, which were also about implementation. If the Minister does not understand that now, I do not have much faith that he will understand it in Committee.

This goes to the heart of our objection to the main thrust of this thoroughly inadequate Bill. What disabled people want is a right to equal treatment, not mere concessions. But the Bill means that only concessions are on offer. The Government have conceded that there should be no discrimination by certain classes of employer, but they have not provided a right which applies equally to all disabled people. They are discriminating between one group of disabled people and another.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The hon. Gentleman is making a big song and dance about firms with fewer than 20 employees, but they are already exempt from the quota arrangements, so there is no change in the position for them. The hon. Gentleman has missed the point altogether. A report produced by the Trades Union Congress last summer referred to its concern about the lack of job opportunities in the public sector. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that some Scottish district councils and Scottish health authorities do not employ any registered disabled people at all? The TUC pointed out that a further 100,000 people should be employed in the public sector to meet the quota.

Mr. Clarke: Of course I welcome the views of the TUC, and I very much regret that the Government do not. I also very much regret that they do not even take on board the views of the Confederation of British Industry, which described the Government's proposals as "out of harmony". Perhaps just as importantly, the Employers Forum on Disability—not, I believe, a body affiliated to the Labour party—said:

"There should be no exclusion from the Bill's provisions on grounds of an enterprise's size. It cannot be right for a disabled person to be discriminated against just because an enterprise has fewer than 20 employees. Just as small companies are covered by race and gender legislation, so they, too, should be included in this Bill."

[Mr. Clarke]

If the hon. Gentleman and the House have any doubts about the importance of that representation, I point out that among the numerous organisations represented by that august body are Barclays bank, the Benefits Agency, Boots, the British United Provident Association, the City of Westminster, the Inland Revenue, Reuters and many others.

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): Are not small businesses the fastest-growing sector of industry today, with about 30 per cent. of employees being employed in small businesses? Does not exempting those businesses from the responsibility of employing disabled people therefore exclude a large section of industry?

Mr. Clarke: As is so often the case, my hon. Friend is right. Small firms employ 36 persons in every 100. That is one of the arguments that persuaded the Americans to set a timetable, and also one of the arguments which persuaded almost everybody who submitted views to the Minister to agree with my hon. Friend. It is interesting that not once in his speech did the Minister refer to any specific representation on that point from any organisation or professional body.

It is not even that the Bill is the result of several qualifications by employers. In response to the very consultation exercise that I have mentioned, the CBI told the Minister that the cut-offs and exclusions for small firms would be out of harmony with the general thrust of the proposed legislation. They are certainly out of harmony with the needs of disabled people. The Bill makes no positive provision for the vast majority of firms, which employ a third of the national labour force; it tells them simply to please themselves.

The failure to provide rights equally to all disabled people is the essential difference between the Bill and the kind of measure that we want to see. We want a civil rights Bill which is effective, enforceable and comprehensive. What we are offered is a piecemeal measure which will be effective only in certain areas, which is full of ifs, buts and maybes, and which will lack the clout to ensure that it is fully implemented in practice. In the words of the "Rights Now" campaign, which has worked so hard to achieve a real measure of civil rights for disabled people, the Bill is ineffective, unenforceable and piecemeal.

The kind of measure that we shall support when the opportunity arises will start from the principle that no one should suffer discrimination on the grounds of disability. That is what the House and the nation want to see. That is what Americans, Australians and Canadians already have, and that is the road down which Britain should go.

The Bill is fundamentally flawed because the statement of principle on which it is founded is that equal treatment should be provided only by those who can afford it. We had an example this very day at an industrial tribunal in Skipton this morning. A young man suffering from cerebral palsy was considered by his large employer, the Skipton building society, not to be communicating properly, so he was dismissed. In the opinion of the young man and his family, the company was guilty of constructive dismissal and they rightly took the matter to a tribunal. Sadly, the proceedings this morning were adjourned until next week until it is known whether the family can afford representation. What kind of equality in human rights is that?

The Government's basic premise is that disabled people do not have equal rights but instead should be grateful for whatever concessions the Government choose to offer.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): Has the hon. Gentleman just made a commitment to a future Labour Government introducing legislation along the lines of the private Member's Bill? If so, has he consulted his hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) about the cost implications?

Mr. Clarke: I have given way generously and I do not propose to do so again, unless it is to the Minister, to whom I am prepared to give way more than the twice that I promised.

I have had discussions with my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East, although they were unnecessary because at the last Labour party conference, on live television, my hon. Friend confirmed that the next Labour Government will proudly present such a Bill.

People who suffer discrimination because of disability are, sadly, not confined to those with an actual disability. Prejudice, by definition, is not restricted to the precise legal and medical definition in the Bill. Too many of our citizens know that it is enough to have a history of medical problems to suffer discrimination, and many refuse to accept that that should be the case in a modern society, but that is not enough to benefit from the limited legal protection that the Bill provides, as we saw in the case that I mentioned earlier.

MIND, the National Association for Mental Health, tells us that in its experience discrimination on the basis of a history of a past mental illness is one of the most common instances of discrimination, but such discrimination will not be covered by the Bill. An employer, landlord or service provider may discriminate against people because they appear disabled or because of some condition that they have suffered from in the past, but the law will not act on the victim's behalf unless he or she can prove disability under the Bill.

Schedule 1, remarkably, runs to two and a half pages, seeking to define who is or is not disabled and who will or will not benefit from the limited protection against discrimination that the Bill is supposed to provide. So narrow is the Government's definition of disabled person that they even need to include in schedule 1 a paragraph asserting that people already registered as disabled will continue to be regarded as disabled under the new legislation—hardly a massive step forward. As the "Rights Now" campaign has pointed out, people with histories of mental illness will be able to claim legal protection against discrimination only if they can show that they have not recovered from that illness—hardly a comprehensive measure against discrimination.

In the same spirit of half-hearted concessions, the Minister continues to set his face against the creation of a disability rights commission. That is the over-arching and most critical weakness—and my heavens, there are many—in the Bill.

Employment again provides the best example. With regard to larger companies, the Prime Minister told my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East again last week, that the Bill gives disabled people

"the right to complain to an industrial tribunal when they feel that unlawful discrimination has occurred."—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. 581.]

What the Prime Minister failed to mention was that the law at present requires large firms to provide a quota of places for disabled workers—a provision that the Bill will abolish.

We all know that the quota has been honoured more in the breach than in the observance.There is a case for enhancing and enforcing the quota as Scope, formerly the Spastics Society, recommends. To abolish the quota when introducing its intended replacement, before the new system has even been set up, is hardly a great stride forward for disabled people's rights. Indeed, it is a great step backwards. I have seen no evidence that any of the organisations representing the disabled or any of the professional associations welcome the abolition of the quota system in those circumstances.

Let us consider the new system at the heart of the Bill—the mechanisms that are supposed to render quotas unnecessary by ending discrimination against disabled workers employed by larger companies. As Scope said, one good thing about the quota was that the onus was on employers and the Government rather than on disabled people themselves. Under the new system, the onus will be on a disabled person to seek redress through an industrial tribunal. There will be no independent statutory body to back such a claim and no legal aid will be available to improve the chances of success.

In the case of employment discrimination by large firms, the Government's proposals will merely replace one ineffective system with another. The Government passed up the opportunity to bring about real change, not only by excluding smaller firms from their legislation, but by failing to back up the legislation with a body that has real powers. A comprehensive civil rights Bill must, by definition, have at its heart the means for disabled people to enforce their rights. The Bill before us lacks any such mechanism. It is not just an opportunity to create enforceable measures that has been missed: it is worse than that.

The Government's Bill is designed around the concept of an advisory council because the driving force behind the Government's measure is the spirit of mere concessions, not the assertion of civil rights that disabled persons are entitled to experience. If the Government wanted to give the full force of law to the rights of disabled people, they would wish to do so in a way that would be effective. If they want to throw a sop in the direction of disabled people's rights, they will be happy to create an advisory talking shop and other powerless structures, which is what they plan to do in the Bill. The Minister talks of bureaucracy even as he creates structures without power.

Disabled people must have the legal means to sustain the rights conferred on them by Parliament. It is not enough to say that this is the law and the courts will enforce it if one can afford to take the risk of raising litigation. The opportunity exists to give those rights the backing of a body with powers designed for that purpose, but the opportunity is not being taken by the Government in their Bill. The national disability council that the Minister proposes would not be such a body: it would be empowered to consult and to advise, but it will not be empowered to do any more than that. It is explicitly and specifically denied that power.

The Government have said that, under the Bill, the council's responsibility will be

"to investigate any complaint which may be the subject of proceedings."

The Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission, by contrast, have precisely those powers. They have a remit to pursue people who break the law. That is a major disincentive to people who would discriminate—and that is how it should be. As the Government well know, from the point of view of an employer or service provider who would prefer to discriminate against a disabled job applicant or customer, the prospect of being challenged by a powerful and independent commission, acting with the full majesty of the law, is a good deal more intimidating than the prospect of being taken to court or to an industrial tribunal by one individual, assuming that the individual concerned can afford it.

The provision of investigative powers to a commission has further implications. The Commission for Racial Equality told the Minister:

"The Commission's investigative powers have enabled it not only to uncover incidents of discrimination, but also to highlight examples of 'good practice' in its promotional work and have informed the development of its Codes of Practice".

A commission with powers to investigate discrimination is also in a much better position to fulfil the rest of its duties. An advisory council with no such powers is not directly engaged in implementation of the law. It therefore cannot be active in promoting the rights of disabled people, but must remain on the sidelines while implementing and interpreting the law is left to lawyers and those who can afford access to them.

The Minister offers locally accessible services of advice and conciliation, which are of course welcome, but conciliation has no force without a legal mandate behind it. A law without the means of enforcement is barely a law at all. It is merely a voluntary code of practice which can be broken with impunity.

The Government's Bill focuses on employment, but excludes one third of the work force from its provisions. It claims to outlaw discrimination, but lacks the independent and effective body which could enforce equal rights. Instead of a comprehensive approach, based on civil rights, it offers a piecemeal approach designed to head off more far-reaching change while making as few concessions as possible.

The Bill's faults do not end there. As the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation pointed out:

"The long title of the . . . Bill is drafted restrictively, so that it refers solely to employment and the provision of goods and service. This leaves out large areas of social life".

On transport, the Government have chosen to concede to disabled people a right of access to premises, but they say that vehicles must be dealt with separately. A citizen therefore has the right to go to a station, but no right to get on the train. There is no good reason for such a split.A serious effort to prohibit discrimination in transport could readily include both vehicles and premises in the same measure, as the civil rights Bills that have come before the House have done, and as organisations such as Mencap argue should now be done. Of course, we should be flexible and allow access to be built in for vehicles at the replacement or renovation stage, but we should set a

[Mr. Clarke]

timetable for doing so and we should start from the premise that disabled people have the right to catch the train and not just to watch it leave the station.

In education, too, the Bill fails to deliver. It has nothing to say on that subject, and the Government's White Paper issued at the same time is not much better. The Government will provide a right of access to new schools and to extensions, but not to existing schools, as we know from the Education Act 1993. If the Government were busy building new schools, that might be more significant, but that is not happening and the vast majority of our children will continue to be taught in old school buildings, the majority of which do not even have toilets that are suitably adapted for disabled children to use.

The Bill has nothing to say about discrimination in the sale and letting of premises. Despite the Minister's statement, there is nothing in the Bill on that. We know, however, that such discrimination exists.

The Bill also has nothing to say about removing discrimination in the exercise of civic rights and in the fulfilment of civic duties, so nothing will be done about the appalling position whereby disabled citizens have to be carried into polling stations to vote for their elected representatives because the returning officer is not obliged to make polling stations accessible.

The Government make recommendations about changes to community care. It is a measure of their failure in that area that for the past nine years they have had an Act on the statute book—the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation Act 1986—which could have prevented the release of people into the community who then find that no community care is available. Half of the Act has not been implemented, and nothing in what is now proposed begins to deal with the real crisis that the Government's mishandling of care in the community has caused.

Supporters of the Government's measure have a good deal to say about cost, and some of them have done so today. That seems to be their chief concern. Last year, the Government produced a wholly spurious figure of £17 billion as the cost of implementing the civil rights Bill then before the House. Those figures were utterly discredited by the "Rights Now" campaign and others, who found numerous examples of double counting and gross overestimates. The Department of the Environment's contribution to that costing admitted that it was a "speculative guesstimate"; yet it accounted for more than half the supposed cost.

The Government have introduced a Bill of their own which allegedly goes more than halfway to ending discrimination, and which includes a compliance cost assessment of a mere £1.5 billion. The kindest description of that assessment might be "creative accountancy". It would be more useful to have a cost benefit analysis which balanced the cost of improvements against the wider economic benefits of involving disabled people fully on equal terms as employees, customers and citizens.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: I will, but for the last time.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman has spoken of community care, and about costs and benefits. Is he aware that discussions between the Rowntree Foundation and York city council have revealed that more than 60 per cent. of the council's budget for disabled facilities grants in 1993-94 could have been saved if the owner-occupied houses involved had been built to accessible lifetime home standards? Is that not one illustration of the fact that anti-discrimination legislation should be seen as an investment rather than a cost or a burden?

Mr. Clarke: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. He has made a constructive contribution, and I am sure that he will continue to do so as he reflects on how he will vote in the Division.

A recent study by the "Rights Now" campaign calculated that the cost of under-employing disabled people was between £2.75 billion and £5 billion, taking into account the tax revenues forgone and the welfare benefits which, as the Americans and others have already found, could have been saved. Other enormous benefits would accrue from effective measures to improve access to goods and services, but nowhere does the Government's thinking reflect that.

It is difficult to take Government claims about cost too seriously. I recently asked the Minister for an account of expenditure under the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986—a measure that I know very well. Although the Act has been on the statute book for nine years, the Government are incapable of providing figures to show what it has cost. Patently unable to calculate the amount spent on an Act of Parliament, the Government still claim to have estimated accurately the cost of a proposed Bill. I believe that the onus of proof in regard to cost and benefits lies with those who oppose comprehensive civil rights, but the Government have adduced no convincing argument so far.

The Government's Bill is plainly a bad Bill. Its motivation is crystal clear: it is designed to block the passage of one infinitely better, as the Government have been doing for 13 years. Ministers should go away and try again; they should return to the House when they have endorsed the principle of civil rights for disabled people, and when they are ready to support a Bill that is enforceable, effective and comprehensive. Until they do, they will not have the support of Opposition Members, and they will not win the support of the 6.5 million disabled citizens who have waited for far too long.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Just under five hours are available for the debate, and no fewer than 20 right hon. and hon. Members hope to catch my eye, including those who will make the winding-up speeches. I hope that, if hon. Members who are fortunate enough to be called early bear that in mind, I shall be able to call most of those who wish to speak.

5.3 pm

Sir John Hannam (Exeter): This is a momentous day for me, and, I believe, for disabled people. We are debating legislation that will actually reach the statute

book—legislation presented by the Government, with a commitment to eliminate discrimination against disabled people.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) was wrong to imply that this Bill resulted purely from the activities and events of last July. It was 18 months ago, in the summer of 1993, that the Prime Minister set in motion the events that led to it. The House may recall that, following a meeting with leading members of the all-party disablement group, he asked the then Minister for Social Security and Disabled People to begin a series of discussions with members of the group to discuss steps that could be taken to remove discrimination.

Throughout the ensuing months—during the remainder of the summer, and into the beginning of last year—a series of meetings took place at which it became apparent that, while there was no disagreement about the principle that discrimination existed and should be removed, there was basic disagreement about how best to achieve that objective. The then Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott), articulated—as he had to—the Government's view that progress could best be achieved on a Department-by-Department basis by means of education and exhortation: the piecemeal method, as we called it, which both main parties had used for some years.

Along with my colleagues in the all-party group—and, as it turned out later, a large majority of Members of Parliament—I believed strongly that a comprehensive anti-discrimination approach was necessary, and that the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill was the right vehicle for that approach. We and the Government were rather like two trains heading in the same direction but on parallel tracks, quite likely eventually to bypass our common objective. That was what concerned me at the time.

As one who admires his Government for the tremendous progress that they have achieved in helping disabled people to live with increasing independence, I vowed that I would do all that I could to ensure that the Government managed to introduce their own legislation in the current Parliament—or, failing that, that such legislation would be a manifesto commitment.

That is why today is a momentous day for me. Even during the dramatic events of last spring and summer when we were fighting to make progress with the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, I sensed that the battle within the Government over the principle was being won, and that we were on the verge of a breakthrough. That breakthrough came with the announcement of a full consultation period with the promise of legislation at the end, either by Government or in a private Member's Bill. I argued strongly against the latter course: we all know how difficult it is to get a Back Bencher's measure of such size and importance through all its parliamentary stages.

At last, however, the smoke screens were being blown away: arguments that comprehensive legislation was not necessary, that the costs were too high—the ridiculous figure of £17.5 billion was suggested at one stage—or that business organisations were against the idea. In fact, the Confederation of British Industry and the Employers Forum on Disability were in favour, as was the Law Society. The Bill is a marked advance on the consultation paper, and is accepted by all disability organisations as such. I am immensely thrilled: I believe that it represents a landmark for disabled people, and that it is positive legislation.

Before I deal with the Bill and the role of my hon. Friend the Minister in it, let me express my thanks and admiration for what was done by the previous incumbent, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea, who held his office for many years. Throughout the difficult period leading to last summer's confrontations, he never ceased to give full support to the cause of serving the interests of disabled people. Although, because of various events, he was not able to deliver the final legislative package, and although timing was not on his side, his heart was in the right place, and he never failed to offer constructive help and advice to the all-party disablement group.

I strongly support the Bill, and all the documents from the disability organisations suggest that they do as well. However, like most new Government Bills of this nature, it has its deficiencies, especially in comparison with the all-embracing provisions of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. The House must recognise those deficiencies, and we must try to improve the legislation. The disability organisations have made that clear in their representations to all hon. Members.

Mr. Berry: Which disability rights organisations support the Government's Bill in preference to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill?

Sir John Hannam: As we are dealing with Government legislation, and as representations from all the disability organisations sensibly concentrate on that legislation—as does the all-party group—it has not been a question of choosing one Bill or the other. To be fair to the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), however, all of the organisations have made clear the division between the two Bills and which Bill they prefer. I am concentrating my attention on the Bill that we are debating today. It is not a question of the House arguing the pros and cons of the two separate Bills. I have supported both Bills, and I shall continue to support the concepts of both.

Mr. Berry: The hon. Gentleman suggests that disabled people's organisations support the Disability Discrimination Bill. Is not it relevant to note that every organisation both of and for disabled people prefer the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill? Can the hon. Gentleman name a single organisation of or for disabled people which does not support the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill?

Sir John Hannam: A letter from the National Association of Citizen Advice Bureaux to Members states:

"The CAB service welcomes the introduction of measures to tackle discrimination against disabled people. For too long disabled people have had to rely on voluntary approaches. Legislation is desperately needed. However, it is disappointing that the need for legislation is recognised only in a limited number of areas. The CAB service hopes the Government will take the opportunity to introduce further measures on transport and education."

That is the gist of what we are arguing about today. If the hon. Member for Kingswood can name any Government Bill in this area which has been totally satisfactory to the House in its initial stages, I would very much welcome hearing about it.

[Sir John Hannam]

It is right for the House to concentrate on the Disability Discrimination Bill, and to make it more effective as it passes through its stages in the House. Many questions have been asked, the answers to which will—more than anything—determine whether we have got it right.

For example, will cinemas, restaurants or taxis be able in future to ban blind people or people in wheelchairs? The answer to that—if we are getting the legislation right—has to be no. Will buildings and meeting halls be able to ban certain groups, not because they lack access but because they are considered to be undesirable? The answer must be that they cannot under any circumstances be allowed to continue that policy. Will disabled people continue to be rejected from serving as magistrates or jurors, and will they find that they cannot vote in elections or attend county courts?

We have heard about the importance of the county court procedures in the provisions in the Bill, as my hon. Friend the Minister mentioned. The NACAB briefing points out that, in a survey that it carried out in 1993 of 22 representative schemes in county courts,

"only one bureau reported any provision for people who are visually impaired, only two were aware of any provision for deaf people, six said that there was no provision for wheelchair users and twelve bureaux reported no accessible toilets in the courts."

We must make sure that courts are properly accessible and that they provide for disabled people.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Regarding tribunals, if, sadly, there is to be no legal aid, is it not important that some support and help is given to disabled people to enable them to communicate in those circumstances? Is not that particularly important for people with sight and hearing impairments?

Sir John Hannam: I agree, and I was heartened by the Minister's comment that, following the legislation, a series of regulations and a review of the codes of practice will be put into effect which will outline the intent behind the legislation.

Another important area is the fire and safety precautions. Disabled people are often excluded from buildings because of fire and safety precautions. There needs to be a full-scale review of health and safety legislation and codes of practice so that provision for disabled people is taken into account.

The fact that businesses would have to take reasonable steps to remove physical barriers and to provide auxiliary aids is good news, and it was welcomed by the Access Committee for England in its representations to us before the debate. The lack of a right of access to transport and vehicles and the exclusion of further higher education provision from the welcome new right of access to goods and services must be looked at again, especially when we debate clause 12.

The Minister has performed a Herculean task in translating the consultations with more than 1,000 different organisations into positive proposals and the White Paper promise which declares that the Government aim to set in hand a programme to review the effectiveness of legislation in meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities. That could offer a splendid opportunity for a code of practice which would cover not just goods and services, but colleges of further education and institutes of higher education. Will my hon. Friend the Minister carry out a review such as is implied in the White Paper in time to put recommended amendments into the current legislation? That would be extremely helpful.

While on the subject of education, I agree that the disabled students allowance provides an effective package of support for students who are undertaking higher education courses for which a grant is available. Is not it time, however, to resolve the problem facing part-time students who are not eligible? Many disabled students have to be part-time students because of their disability, yet their equipment, personal support and study costs are basically pro rata the same as full-time students. Testing for the allowance results in the parents of disabled students being penalised to the extent of being required to contribute up to £5,800 before any allowance is payable, as compared with £2,065 for parents of non-disabled students.

Disabled people who take a second degree course and who took their first degree course prior to becoming disabled often find that, when taking the second course or retraining, they are not eligible for the disabled students allowance. I have raised those anomalies in the hope that the review that is promised in the White Paper will look into them, because the Government could remove a lot of discrimination which affects disabled students.

I come now to the employment proposals. An obvious area of concern and trepidation lies in the abolition of the quota which, for all its weaknesses, provides a measurement with which to work. I personally would rather have a strengthening of the quota alongside the new rights in the Bill, at least until we can be sure that the rights are working.

Incidentally, I was pleased to receive a letter from my hon. Friend the Minister today which followed on from a point that has been raised about the disablement register. My hon. Friend reassured those concerned that the register will be discontinued, and that the arrangements which are there for those on the register to be accepted for disability recognition purposes for the legislation are purely transitional.

In any case, I would like an effective monitoring system of the employment of disabled people to be put in place, as well as a rethink—others have called for that—on the exclusion figure for firms employing fewer than 20 people. I was again reassured to hear my hon. Friend state that the figure can be changed by regulation as we see how it is working. I do not see the logic of that figure. It is larger than in other countries with similar legislation, and it will certainly exclude about 90 per cent. of firms in Devon, where we have small businesses predominately.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend agree that there does need to be a figure, whether it is 20, 80 or eight? There is no point in forcing companies to introduce facilities for the disabled if, in doing so, they are driven out of business. *[Interruption.]*

Sir John Hannam: That matter was fully considered last year. It was a matter of getting the right figure. *[Interruption.]* I think that that was all that my hon. Friend was arguing about.

I agree that the object of the legislation and the discussions which will take place is to try to arrive at a satisfactory figure. The Americans went through the same

process and found that, by setting their own terms, they were able to achieve a massive removal of obstacles to employment without great cost. We must look now at how the measure will work. If it is merely a question of protecting small businesses from unreasonable expense and bureaucracy, surely the Bill contains a safeguard. It uses the term "reasonable adjustment", which would protect businesses from excessive demands on their resources. A protection is built into the Bill and we should consider the figure carefully as the Bill progresses.

As I understand the Bill, small employers will be required to employ a disabled person only if he or she is the best candidate. If any alteration to the workplace can be readily achieved, they will also be able to seek support from the access to work scheme, which I commend. A small firm can refuse to consider a disabled candidate, even if employing that person would not cause the firm to incur costs.

We could be sanctioning overt discrimination and excluding disabled people from any commercial or industrial enterprise that is beginning to get under way—something that the hon. Member for Monklands, West mentioned. Most new jobs are created when new firms are in their early stages. Both the Confederation of British Industry and the Employers Forum on Disability question the 20-employee threshold, as do all organisations for the disabled. I hope that we can reconsider the issue, especially as two fifths of all disabled people work in small firms.

My final suggestion is on enforcement systems. My hon. Friend the Minister dealt at some length with his reasons for the national disability council and the local tribunal system. I understand the pressures on him to avoid setting up an expensive and bureaucratic enforcement system. As the Bill proceeds, however, I hope that he will reconsider the matter. Given the restrictions on legal aid for industrial tribunals and the need for more than just an advisory organisation, we may conclude that something stronger will be necessary to underpin the pillars of this legislation.

In his down-to-earth manner, my hon. Friend the Minister has achieved tremendous progress by drawing agreement from the various Departments and consulting widely with more than 1,000 disability and other interests. I congratulate him, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, who has been backing his efforts to the hilt. Parliament now faces a push-me-pull-you, Dr. Dolittle situation, with two proposed disability anti-discrimination measures. No one can have fought harder than I for the private Member's Bill last year, but now the Government have tabled a Bill that, as the CBI states,

"marks the start of a new era for the rights of disabled people"—

something that we can put on the statute book. I will support the Second Reading of this long-fought-for legislation and I hope that the House will also give it its full support.

5.22 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): It was fascinating to hear the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) talk about the Government's opposing factions on this issue. I am sure that he will recall the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott), to whom he has paid tribute today, telling him and me, over and over again, that this is a seamless Government. That explains why my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), in an excellent speech, said today that the former Minister was very clearly acting for the Government as a whole when he fell under very strong criticism in this House in the last Session.

For reasons that will be well understood in all parts of the House, I want briefly now to put this debate into historical perspective. It was as long ago as 1979, as the first Minister for Disabled People, that I appointed a committee of inquiry into unfair discrimination against disabled people—chaired by Sir Peter Large—which began the national debate of which today's proceedings are the latest phase.

The committee reported in 1982 to Sir Hugh Rossi, one of my early successors as Minister, in favour of making it unlawful to discriminate on grounds of disability. Since the committee reported, every attempt to give effect to its recommendations, from both sides of the House, has been met by the Government with prevarication, dissimulation and systematic obstruction. They have had to be dragged, kicking and screaming, to a grudging acceptance that legislation is today an imperative necessity. Almost by common consent, it is also scandalously long overdue.

The Government's treatment of the issue ever since the committee of inquiry report has been disgraceful. That is not only my view but that of many Conservative Members as well. In 30 years here, I have witnessed only four personal statements of unreserved apology by Members for misleading the House. The first was from a Member of Parliament who, in the mid-1970s, misled the House over his role in the Poulson scandal. All of the remaining three, including one from the then Minister himself, were for misleading the House in debates on the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, starting with the personal statement that Robert Hayward, then the Member for Kingswood, had to make for seriously misleading the House very soon after I drafted and first promoted the Bill in 1991.

As the House knows, that Bill was ably sponsored by my hon. Friend, the new Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), when he subsequently won a high place in the private Members' Bill ballot in 1993; and it is being sponsored again now, with both considerable skill and total commitment, by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes).

The Government quite dishonestly gave the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill a price tag of £17 billion—a totally bogus, indeed preposterous figure. By misrepresenting the Bill as requiring all existing buildings to be made fully accessible, they added £6 billion to the cost of compliance and by saying, just as perversely, that it required full access to public transport within five years, they added another £5 billion. Many other examples are available of their blatant disregard for easily ascertainable facts in order to inflate the cost of the Bill. Yet they breathed not a word about the estimate by Touche Ross of a loss to Britain's travel industry, due solely to lack of access and facilities for disabled people, of many billions of pounds. Nor did they say a word about all the other benefits of ending the exclusion of disabled people from so much of the economic and social life of this country.

In his statement on 24 November last, and again today, the Minister heaped praise on the Government for proposing what he called an "historic advance" for disabled people. As a more seasoned practitioner, I most strongly counsel him against any further resort to that

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

grandiose claim. In truth, the Government have blocked, for over 13 years now, what would have been a really historic advance, long craved by the disabled people of this country. They want not this Bill but what the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill offers: not second-class rights for second-class citizens but full civil rights and equal citizenship. As the Minister must know, they and their organisations see this Bill's proposals as a travesty of those in the Bill that I drafted, in close consultation with them, more than four years ago.

The extent of the travesty is spelt out with striking clarity in a detailed comparison of the two Bills in the excellent submission from Scope—formerly the Spastics Society—for today's debate. Does the Minister question that comparison? If he has not yet seen it, I commend him to read it with all urgency. Let him also ponder Scope's admirably concise description of his proposals, in saying:

"We are looking here at a Bill of ifs, buts and maybes".

Is it really thought worthy of Britain's disabled people to offer them a Bill so described by so universally well regarded and authoritative a voice from the disability movement?

The Minister says that he recognises that disabled people want an end not only to discrimination but to condescension and patronising attitudes towards them. But is it not both condescending and patronising for any of us here to decide what they should want and what they deserve? How can we possibly tell them, without being at once condescending and patronising, that they deserve less than what non-disabled people already enjoy as of right? My answer to that question, ever since the 1970s, has been that unfair discrimination against disabled people is morally wrong and that what is morally wrong ought not to be legally permissible in this country. In fact, it was my answer to that question which led me to appoint the committee of inquiry into discrimination against disabled people 16 years ago.

I spoke about the Government's grossly distorted estimate of the cost of complying with the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. To take the most charitable view of their conduct, their distortion suggests that they are not very good at compliance cost assessments. That calls seriously into question their assessment of the cost of this inadequate Bill. But what no one here or anywhere else can question is the fact that the Government have already arranged to recoup from disabled people much more than the Minister's costing of the Disability Discrimination Bill. As proof, I need only cite the effect on disabled people of the Government's drastic cuts in invalidity benefit.

As the House knows, that benefit will be replaced on 13 April by a new incapacity benefit, which pays less, is taxable and more difficult to claim. The Government now spend £8 billion on invalidity benefit, which is to be cut by no less than £2 billion even though, in the same period, every other major item in the social security budget, except unemployment benefit, is set to increase. Many disabled people on invalidity benefit now face a cut in income from about £77 to £46 a week. That puts into context the Government's so-called "extra spending" on this Bill.

I turn now to some of the specific points about the Bill of particular concern to disabled people and those who work with and for them. They complain bitterly, as the Minister must know, of his substitution of the National Disability Council—or "talking shop", as they see it—for the Disability Rights Commission for which the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill provides.

The Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation states:

"The Government's Bill cannot avoid comparison with the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, or with equivalent laws addressing race and sex discrimination. Measured against these standards it falls short on three vital counts: it is neither comprehensive, effective, nor enforceable".

With other major disability organisations, it condemns the fact that small employers—who employ an estimated one in three of this country's work force—will not be covered by the Bill and will remain, as we have heard this afternoon, free to discriminate. How can the Minister justify that when the CBI, the leading organisation representing British industry, opposes the exclusion? Let me remind him again of the report of the Employers Forum on Disability, which states:

"It cannot be right for a disabled person to be discriminated against just because an enterprise has fewer than 20 employees".

There is widespread condemnation also of the Bill's failure to cover education and the means of transport. Their exclusion is not only condemned by disabled people but ridiculed by employers who insist that discrimination, not least in the employment field, cannot be solved in isolation. As one big employer with more experience of running a major enterprise than any Minister in the present Government put it to me:

"To end discrimination in the labour market, you mustn't only protect disabled people there but also achieve full equality of access for them to transport and training, among many other facilities and services".

In that employer's view, "piecemeal change" in this policy area is an attempt to divide the indivisible and a total waste of both parliamentary time and taxpayers' money.

I also want to quote here the Royal National Institute for the Blind on the Government's failure to produce an enforceable Bill. It said:

"Too much legislation has fallen into disrepute through not being enforced effectively, if at all. Parts of the 1944 Disabled Persons Act and the 1986 Disabled Persons Act are notable examples".

The RNIB explains clearly why it wants no more time-wasting in protecting disabled people from unfair and unmerited discrimination, which it identifies as a major factor

"in determining that only 17 per cent. of blind people and only 31 per cent. of partially sighted people of working age are actually in work".

Those figures shout of unfair discrimination against blind people.

Yet the most withering of all the criticisms I have seen of the Bill is that it will actually increase discrimination against disabled people. The abolition of the 3 per cent. quota, with no more adequate substitute, is widely cited as justifying that charge, as is the Government's

"complete failure to understand how disability discrimination operates".

They are the words of "Rights Now"—among whose affiliates is the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People—which also attacks the Bill's

"pointlessly complicated and over-restrictive definition of discrimination".

Its submission to the House goes on:

"The Bill contains a host of defences and potential justifications for discriminatory treatment which are not present in the legislation on sex and race. The accumulated effect of these loopholes will render it almost impossible for a disabled person to challenge discrimination."

"Rights Now" wants the enactment of the comprehensively all-party Bill which the Government have been obstructing since I first promoted it in 1991—nothing more and nothing less. Britain's 6.5 million disabled people have already been made to wait far too long for its enactment and the bounden duty of this House today is to make 1995 the year of full civil rights for them. Without those rights, they are doubly disabled. The handicapping effects of their disabilities are made even harder to bear by gratuitous social handicaps for which there is no justification whatsoever. "Rights Now" wants the reasoned amendment to the Government's Bill to be approved this evening and the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill to succeed on 10 February.

As I have argued, disabled people want not second-class rights for second-class citizens but the same rights as everyone else and equal citizenship. On both sides of the House, let us now make that happen.

5.37 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me a short time to speak this evening. I promise that I shall not take long, because the subject is important to so many hon. Members.

First, I declare three interests. I have been invited and have taken on the chairmanship of the International Year of Tolerance. Our committee has decided that our key theme will be tolerance of difference, especially tolerance of disability. It seems to us that the least tolerated group in society these days is people whose motor functions or other impairments cause them significant long-term difficulties. I hope that we may be allowed to debate that matter later in the year to see how we have progressed.

I also declare an interest in that I chair an organisation called ADAPT, which was begun by the Carnegie trust. It stands for Access for Disabled people to Arts Premises Today. In our three or four years of existence, we have mobilised and enabled the expenditure of £3 million worth of funding, virtually all private, with some support from the Department of Heritage. That work has given me great insight.

I also chair a new organisation, Blind in Business, which was formed by some young men who suffer from significant sight impairment and who found it tough to enter the world of work. The House will therefore appreciate that my real interests in the Bill relate to access, particularly access for people with physical difficulties, the world of work and tolerance.

I should also like to put on record the fact that I introduced the Access to Employees' Records Bill—which did not reach the statute book—because I believe that it is lack of information which causes personnel officers to make errors concerning people at work.

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): I was interested that the hon. Lady mentioned access, because one of my constituents was denied access to the Tate gallery because she is a wheelchair user and there were already six people using wheelchairs in the gallery. My constituent was left feeling extremely humiliated. Does the hon. Lady agree that it is not the Government's Bill but that proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) which will most succeed in meeting my constituent's needs and the needs of many other people with disabilities?

Miss Nicholson: I believe that ADAPT will be most successful in meeting that lady's needs as fast as possible, with the support of the Department of National Heritage. For example, one of ADAPT's first targets was the Royal Albert hall, which, when we first started work with the chief executive, provided just six places for disabled people out of 6,000 seats. After considerable persuasion, the management capitulated magnificently and undertook to redesign the hall. It recently won one of our awards both for that superb adaptation and for its future plans.

I cannot resist telling colleagues that, for the past three years, the awards given by ADAPT have been funded by British Gas. The withdrawal of that modest sum of money coincided exactly with the hyper pay rise given to its chairman and chief executive. I wrote a letter to British Gas on that very note and perhaps we will once again receive that modest sum for more ADAPT awards.

I am delighted to learn of the constituent of the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), and I shall get hold of the Tate gallery immediately and do something about it.

Private initiative, as ADAPT has proved, has been enormously successful. Half the board of ADAPT is made up of people with physical disabilities and the other half by people who make decisions that affect those who go to the theatre, the cinema, art galleries and public libraries. When we started work we were told that we were attempting an impossible task and that, if it were possible, it should be done by the Government anyway. We were told that we should not even start to try.

Several critical articles appeared in the press, and we were subject to severe recriminations from others involved in work with disabled people. We were told that the work could not be done; that the Government should have done the work and, if we commenced, that the Government should provide the total funding.

Our reply was, "That's life. We are going to start anyway." The fact that ADAPT has found £3 million at a time when not much free money is floating around is no mean achievement. That mixture of maximum private effort and minimum Government involvement means that tasks involving cultural change are completed faster. That is at the heart of today's Bill.

In terms of the world of work, I should like to pay a warm tribute to the work of the late Ron Leighton, who was a Member of the House. I was extremely fortunate to be a member of the Select Committee on Employment when he agreed to consider the question of employment for disabled people. He was a wonderful Chairman of that Committee, because when I put that idea to him he took it up and made it go forward with a will. We produced a report on the subject five years ago and I am glad to note that many of our recommendations form part of the Disability Discrimination Bill. For that reason I pay a warm tribute to Ron Leighton.

I also pay a strong tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott), the former Minister for Disabled People. I believe that his work provides an historical record of the way in which our society

[Miss Nicholson]

approaches more positively the problems of disabled people. He carried out remarkable work for many years. I also commend particularly Geoffrey Lord, who was the secretary of the Carnegie Trust for many years, and who is now the honorary director of ADAPT. He initiated the work on access for disabled people to arts premises and public libraries.

It is a great pity that this vital Bill is being treated in such a traditionally adversarial manner. It, above all legislation, would benefit from a harmonious approach. It will impact upon the lives of millions of people who are citizens of the United Kingdom today and many, many millions more who have yet to be born. When it comes to disability, co-operation is infinitely more fruitful than adversarialism.

I believe that the Bill and other associated legislation, which has been introduced by other hon. Members on both sides of the House and for which I have a high regard, affects a much vaster section of the population than has been recognised in the debate so far.

The phrase "the disabled should live with dignity and independence" has become a common one. It is an excellent phrase, because we all wish to live with dignity and some of us prefer independence. I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that that phrase should now be extended, because I believe that disabled people, in common with everyone else, want freedom, in particular freedom of choice and freedom of movement.

In the past, it was physically impossible for those with disability to achieve such freedom, but new scientific and engineering advances now make infinitely greater freedoms—far greater than anything previously possible in the history of mankind—possible for people with physical impairment. Perhaps the Government's greatest gift to those with physical disabilities is to offer those freedoms through judicious expenditure and legislation, by the carrot and stick approach and by energising private citizens and companies to achieve that goal.

Real freedom rests not just on economic freedom, but on a cultural disregard for difference. I hate the word "disabled" because it immediately sets up cultural barriers which we then have to work so hard to dismantle and pull down. But I do not for a moment take cultural disregard to mean acceptance of the plea of ignorance.

I was struck by a strong and upsetting example of such ignorance at a recent Ministry—I will not say which one—which launched a scheme for disabled. It took place in a grade 1 listed building. As chairman of ADAPT, I am familiar with such buildings, because we are always told that they are impossible to adapt properly. I think that Pugin would have been proud of us; it is astonishing what one can do if one has the will and even a modest sum of money. Determination is the key.

When I got to the first floor of that grade 1 starred listed building where the Ministry was hosting the so-called "excellent" initiative for disabled people, I was concerned to discover, as I had anticipated, that there was no lift, while half a dozen people in non-electric wheelchairs were at the bottom of the stairs. I sought out the senior civil servant and asked him what could be done. I pointed out that the initiative was supposed to be for the disabled people and drew attention to the poor people at the bottom of the stairs.

He was a good person and replied, I believe through ignorance, that there were at least three methods of getting the people in the wheelchairs up the stairs. When I asked him what they were, he said that they could be carried up the stairs, to which I replied, "Oh. Thank you very much". Secondly, he said that it might be possible for those disabled people to walk up the stairs, to which I replied, "Really?" I am afraid that I then left the Ministry. That was an example not of cultural disregard but of ignorance. That is a blight on all our social attitudes to people who are different, which we must examine carefully and rigorously.

I mean by "cultural disregard" acceptance of difference in the tolerance of normality in our society. We should strive for that, if only because the effects of difficulty of personal movement, for example, are widespread in all sections of our society. In ADAPT, we find that it is just as tough for young mums to get into the theatre with pushchairs and babies as it is for elderly people with zimmer frames and the wheelchaired able-bodied.

I did some research on sight and hearing in the House of Commons Library recently, and the Library staff gave me figures showing that about 26 million people in Britain wear spectacles. One could say that, 100 years ago, before all those excellent spectacles were available, all those 26 million people would have been, in today's terminology, "disabled" because they would not have been able to see well enough.

The Library staff investigated hearing for me—a vastly under-researched subject. They extrapolated some figures and gave me the normal cautions about extrapolation of statistics, but, on best guesstimates from the House of Commons Library, 23 million people have a hearing loss significant enough to warrant a hearing aid.

I feel that the fine, upstanding, generally Anglo-Saxon male in the advertisements is not the norm in terms of physical ability for any of us, except for perhaps a short period in the lives of exceptionally healthy men, and that most people have some type of problem. Nowadays, many problems may be solved by science—with glasses, hearing aids, or electric wheelchairs—but let us not lose sight of the fact that people with physical difficulties are far more widespread throughout society than we may imagine.

Therefore, I suggest that we should not always listen only to membership organisations that represent people with a specific disability. Some time ago, one of the organisations for the blind told me that not more than about one blind person in 10 belonged to any of the registered blind societies that we know of. I do not know if that figure was correct, but I believe that, here in Parliament, naturally, we hear the views from membership organisations to the exclusion of the great number of people—the greater number of people, I think—who do not belong to those organisations. The difficulty of definition to the Minister, therefore, is vast. How should we proceed, when we are speaking about such an enormous tranche of our population?

I vastly admire the munificent provisions for the disabled which the Government have made in health and social security, which are so numerous that I shall not name them. However, I believe that, outside that social and health provision, people seek as a priority access to the places that people with normal motor functions have

access to easily, including Parliament. One of the most difficult places in which to hold a meeting of people with wheelchairs is this very building.

Those people seek access facilities so that they can be normal like everyone else, and they seek fairness at work, especially in the gateway to obtaining work, which is the job application scrutiny procedure. That is why I am very happy indeed with so much of the focus of the present piece of legislation on accessibility and on work.

In the spirit of harmony, I shall mention three thoughts that the Minister will perhaps do me the kindness of taking away and considering.

First, although the advisory body that the Minister proposes will be very helpful, surely we should work towards a more difficult goal—the establishment of an organisation for equal opportunity for all our citizens. If a woman came to me who was disabled and non-white, where would I send her—to three different organisations? That is an extraordinary thought. It is ludicrous. Surely we should have one organisation offering equal opportunity for all our citizens. I would back that with advisory outreaches for people with special needs, such as people with disabilities.

I ask the Minister to consider that difficult topic. I appreciate its sensitivities because the two organisations that already exist would believe that they were being downgraded. However, the disabled are far larger in numbers than any of us can necessarily recognise in the context of any legislation, and fairness for all our citizens should surely be our goal.

I would therefore reject the Minister's proposals if he was suggesting the creation of another organisation similar to the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality, because I do not want that structure to become entrenched. I would prefer one organisation for any problem of that type.

Secondly, on the very difficult question of legislation affecting companies, I am unhappy that there is a numerical limit on fair treatment. I believe that we are discussing imposing a social need on companies, and that, if we wish to progress down that path, a social fund to right company discrimination should be created. That means that we need a long-term plan, to be implemented as the country can afford it. Would the Minister care to consider a longer-term plan for disabled matters at work, irrespective of numbers employed in a company, while accepting that it cannot be carried out immediately?

Thirdly, the Minister's task is the more difficult because the outreach of his work affects all Departments. I ask him to consider tasking the Government to take on a new voluntary commitment—it need not be statutory, but I am sure that it would be carried out in our system of benign legislation—that all Bills that this place passes should be put through the mesh of his Department's basic needs for people with disabilities before final assent.

I shall give a simple example of what I mean. In ADAPT, we have felt strongly that one of the most important matters affecting disabled people and access to the arts is the way in which organisations that are appointed to distribute the profits from the national lottery may carry out their work. Although the lottery is outside the terms of the Bill, we believe that, taken together, the Bill and the national lottery represent the biggest single opportunity to advance the cause of disabled people's rights that we have ever had in the United Kingdom.

As those two functions are so inter-related, we want the people who are responsible for making decisions about grant applications for the arts, heritage and general charities to ensure that moneys will be given only when it can be demonstrated that disabled people will share in the improved facilities. That is the type of suggestion that the Minister could take up if he had a commitment, in general terms, from the Government that all legislation should be put through the mesh of his Department to consider how it could affect disabled people for the better. My suggestion would not cost the state a penny more, and what a difference it would make, not only in actuality but in cultural attitude.

It would always be difficult for any Minister for Disabled People to bring forward a Bill that would satisfy everyone, but I beg the House to approach the Bill in the spirit of harmony and tolerance. The Minister and his predecessor have done a fine job. I want the legislation to succeed; it is the best first building block for the future that the Minister could have brought to this place.

5.58 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I wish I could say that it gives me great pleasure to speak in the debate, but I am afraid that it does not. I find myself in the awkward position of not wanting to bury the Bill but not wanting to praise it. It is typically badly drafted, and can be open to a great deal of secondary legislation. Moreover, it is timid, and it certainly does not go far enough. However, I suppose that it is something, and something is better than nothing.

At least the Bill is a Government Bill. At times last year, other hon. Members and I gave up the idea of the Government proposing legislation, especially after the disgraceful tactics that were used by some hon. Members to get rid of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. Now the Government appear to accept the need for civil rights legislation to be enshrined in law to a certain extent—but only to a certain extent. They seem to accept that legal protection against discrimination is needed, but again, only to a certain extent.

Such legal protection would allow disabled people to take their rightful place in society. It seems amazing that, in this day and age, we should be talking about anyone's rightful place in society, but that issue lies at the heart of today's debate, just as it was at the heart of last year's debate and of other legislation on civil rights for disabled people that was brought before the House.

Disabled people want to be given equal treatment to other members of society, not different treatment. That is not much to ask and it is the least that they can expect. The fact that the Government had to be dragged kicking and screaming to present even this meagre Bill might lead one to assume that disabled people were asking for something outlandish, not basic human rights.

If one gives the Bill even a cursory glance, one sees that the Government are still not totally committed. That is why I shall support the reasoned amendment. Over the past few days, I have been worried and in two minds as to whether to support the reasoned amendment. I thought that it might be seen as gesture politics and might split the consensus that built up last year during the passage of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I believe that it may do that, and I am sorry. Having read the reasoned amendment, I can see nothing in it to dispute. I wish that the Government had taken it on board and gone further,

[Ms Liz Lynne]

but they have not. The reasoned amendment will be a shot across the Government's bows and, for that reason, I shall support it.

I contacted a number of disabled people's organisations and a number of disabled people before I took my decision at the weekend. Every one of them wanted me to support the reasoned amendment—that was the bottom line. When I heard disabled people and disabled people's organisations asking me to support the amendment, who was I to say that I could not? After all, the Bill is for disabled people, who have a right to a voice in the debate. They do not have a voice here today, but we can express their opinion.

I shall now discuss the Bill in detail. I believe that its definition of disabled people will leave out various individuals, such as those suffering from the HIV virus. It could possibly exclude some multiple sclerosis sufferers and those suffering from myalgic encephalomyelitis or epilepsy. I do not know why the Government did not take on board the definition in the American legislation for disabled people which speaks of people who are discriminated against by reason of bodily or mental condition. That would be far more satisfactory and I do not know why the Government resisted it. I know that the Minister said that he had not made up his mind on that, and I sincerely hope that he will listen to the arguments and take action to close the loopholes in the definition.

Even if the Government had got the definition right, which would have taken us forward, as other hon. Members have said, there remains a problem relating to employment. Firms employing fewer than 20 people will not be covered by the Bill, despite the fact that the Bill states that reasonable adjustment will have to be made. Even the Confederation of British Industry has stated that it cannot see why the Bill contained that qualification. If the CBI, which has always supported the Government, believes that, I do not know why the Government have not taken that approach.

Many small firms in my constituency and across the country employ many people—not as many as large companies, but still a large number. Such firms are often more accessible to disabled people because they are situated in their locality. The 20-employee rule will lead to discrimination on a massive scale.

The other day, the Prime Minister seemed to think that the issue of transport was included in the Bill, but I am sure that the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People and the Secretary of State are well aware that that subject is not included in the legislation because the Minister himself has said that he will introduce appropriate provisions. What sort of measures will he introduce, and when will he introduce them? The Bill refers to accessibility to bus and railway stations, but not to vehicles. It seems incredible that disabled people will arrive at railway stations and bus terminals and be unable to get on the buses or trains.

Last year, I conducted a survey of new train operators. We rang all of them and asked what facilities they had available for wheelchairs and electric buggies. Only one of the new train operators could take electric buggies. The rest had limited spaces for wheelchairs and most of them stated that two wheelchairs could not travel in the same carriage. The majority of the operators could take only one wheelchair per train. My survey related to newer stock—with reduced spaces—not older stock. It is therefore clear that something must be done about that problem.

Another problem raised was that of unstaffed stations. A disabled person may arrive at a station, which is fine, but if there are no staff on hand, it becomes extremely difficult for that person. It will become even more difficult if the privatisation process goes ahead, especially with through ticketing. If a disabled person turns up at a station and wants a through ticket, he will be told that he cannot get one and will have to go to a shop or other outlet to purchase a through ticket. That problem must be given careful consideration—the Bill's failure to tackle it is a grave omission.

Another grave omission from the Bill is that of education. In a written reply, the Secretary of State for Education said that new schools would have to be accessible from September onwards. He did not know the date from which other schools would have to be accessible—it is more likely to be 100 years than 10 years. That is why I should have liked the Bill to contain the phrase "within a practicable period". I am not saying that there should be a defined time scale, but if the Government had stipulated that access should be given within a practical period, we would know that they were bearing the subject in mind.

One of the Bill's worst aspects involves enforcement. I know that the Minister has explained why he wants to set up the national disability council—that is fine as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. Why should ethnic minorities and women be represented by proper commissions with teeth, while disabled people are not? I do not think that the Minister has given a proper explanation to the House and I hope that he will take the opportunity to do so later. Disabled people will be at the mercy of the legal system and will not be entitled to legal aid. If disabled people are discriminated against, they will be unable to fight their case successfully—a commission could have taken their case up for them.

The Bill contains numerous deficiencies, but I acknowledge that it is a welcome step in the right direction. However, the Government must not award themselves laurels and then be allowed to rest on them. Disabled people should congratulate themselves on having pushed the Government so far. The Minister said that it was a feeble Bill because he wanted to take people with him. He has said that in the past, but it is an insult to the British people, who do not believe that it should be a feeble Bill and cannot see why disabled people should be discriminated against. The Minister may laugh, but at a meeting of the all-party disablement group he said that it was a feeble Bill because he wanted to take people with him.

The Minister also said that the Bill constituted an historic advance. It is not an historic advance, but a small advance. An historic advance would be made if legislation on civil rights for disabled persons were introduced. The Bill wastes the potential of disabled people. It should involve disabled people's basic human rights. If the Government could accept that, there would be no further arguments. That is why I shall vote for the reasoned amendment.

We need proper legislation on civil rights for disabled people, who deserve no less. Disabled people want to be treated as equal citizens, not second-class citizens.

6.8 pm

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): Over the past year or so, we have had a number of debates on this important issue, during which there have been, rightly, a number of impassioned pleas for disability legislation. I make no apology for supporting such legislation in principle, but I make it absolutely clear at the outset that I give the Government's Bill my unreserved blessing. I believe that it is a big step forward and I shall expand on the reasons later in my speech.

It is a great pity that the Labour party has tabled a reasoned amendment which declines to give the Government's Bill a Second Reading. If we were persuaded by the Opposition parties' arguments to vote for the amendment and against the Bill's Second Reading, the Bill would fall and we would be back to square one, facing the perils of private Members' Bills and the difficulties that we encountered last Session.

In view of the genuine attempt to build a broad coalition across the Chamber in support of the legislation proposed by the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), I was disappointed by the speech of the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke): it was churlish and did nothing to persuade me to vote with the Opposition parties.

I agree—as I hope other hon. Members do—with the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), who said that discrimination is morally wrong. Of course it is; that is why we are having this debate and why we had earlier debates. All hon. Members want to make progress in this area and put a significant measure on the statute book.

I had the pleasure of serving on the Standing Committee that considered the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill last Session. I wished to serve on that Committee because I supported—and still support—the underlying principles of that legislation. However, having read widely on the subject, I recognised that there were concerns as to whether that legislation was affordable and workable. I hoped that the Government would move amendments in Committee to make that Bill acceptable and to put it on the statute book last Session.

I was very disappointed—I shall resist the temptation to say more than that—that the Bill did not make progress on Report. I think that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) was put in a very difficult position. He has always been committed to the principles of such legislation and I pay a warm tribute to his work over the years in looking after the needs of the disabled.

It is fair to say that, until a few months ago, few of us believed that the Government would introduce their own Bill. Before the summer recess, we were given the impression that, although the Government were engaged in consultation, there were likely to be separate private Members' Bills dealing with different aspects of this important subject. I was very pleased when the Queen's Speech made it clear that the Government intended to introduce legislation on this subject.

Unlike a private Member's Bill, Government legislation stands a real chance of making it to the statute book. That is a key reason for supporting the Government's Bill tonight. We can all engage in gesture politics and say, "We will not accept this; we will go for broke and the civil rights legislation." Hon. Members can make a lot of headlines and receive a lot of credit from voluntary and lobby groups by doing that, but at the end of the day, there is no legislation on the statute book. I would rather put legislation in place and, if it does not work, I will knock loudly on the door and press my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government to strengthen it.

I pay tribute tonight to my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, who spoke on behalf of the Government. I was impressed by his determination to make progress on this issue after the summer recess and by his presentation to the all-party disablement group. I thank him for trying to put this important Bill on the statute book.

I wish to compare the Government's legislation with the private Member's Bill from last Session. Many people in disability lobby groups are disappointed that the Government have decided not to introduce a full-blown civil rights Bill. Those groups are also concerned about the establishment of a national disability council rather than a commission. I can understand their concern, but I believe that we should give the national disability council the benefit of the doubt.

I do not want to get into a fierce debate about it tonight, but I do not believe that the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality have been sure-fire successes. In the early days, they created much resentment—the last thing we want to do is to create resentment in disability matters.

I was impressed by the Minister's arguments in his speech to the all-party disablement group when he talked about using the legislation to change attitudes. I stress that it is a sign of failure when one has to resort to the courts to resolve difficulties. I hope that the Bill will lead to a change in attitude and performance by employers and others.

We have heard a lot about employment rights this evening. I have no doubt that too many employers engage in discriminatory practices—they might not even recognise that they are discriminatory and come up with all sorts of excuses for not employing someone. Therefore, I welcome the right to non-discrimination in employment proposed in the Bill.

I share some of the reservations that have been expressed about the Bill's exemption of small employers. However, the Bill provides powers to change the figure through regulations. I hope that the figure in the Bill will be lowered if it is demonstrated that smaller employers are discriminating against disabled people. My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) reminded us that 40 per cent. of disabled people are employed by small companies—an important point to bear in mind.

I turn to access to goods and services by disabled people. I must admit that I thought that the changes to the building regulations which were introduced a few years ago would lead to greater change. I am glad, therefore, that the Bill provides rights of access for disabled people. It is difficult for them to gain access to too many shops, restaurants and public buildings.

Of course it is important to ensure that the costs of adapting buildings for disabled access are within reasonable bounds, and the Bill goes a long way towards keeping those costs at manageable levels. I am very pleased that the compliance cost assessment was published before today's debate—I shall not comment on the previous compliance cost assessment for the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Kingswood.

[Mr. David Congdon]

This legislation attempts to put sensible bands on those costs, and I was disappointed by the somewhat hostile reaction to that provision in a recent leader in *The Daily Telegraph*. Based on 750,000 businesses using cost limits of £500 or £1,500 per business, the compliance cost assessment showed a likely maximum cost of between £375 million and £1,125 million. The figures could be far less than that because buildings can be adapted fairly easily.

The measure which makes it illegal to refuse to serve disabled people is particularly important. However, I flag one concern on which the Minister could perhaps comment in his winding-up speech—clause 14(3), which relates to circumstances in which less favourable treatment of disabled people is justified.

One of the conditions under which discrimination can be justified is if there is a danger to health or safety. I am no lawyer—that could be an advantage or a disadvantage in today's debate—but I am worried about the classic situation which I have raised in previous debates when someone wants access to a cinema where there is room but the manager says, "I am allowed only one or two disabled people in wheelchairs because it might lead to difficulties in the event of a fire." We need to address that, too often it could be used as an excuse to deny disabled people access, and we must avoid that.

In the White Paper, the Government rightly make great play of the Education Act 1993 with the extra powers which it gives parents and, we hope, results in better access to schools for pupils with disabilities. I had assumed that the earlier Education Act 1981, which was the hallmark Act in terms of education for children with special needs, would have done just that and that there would not be many schools today from which young people were excluded because of a particular disability. I certainly urge the Government to look at that aspect very closely. If the biennial review which is included in the Bill for examining schools and their degree of access shows access that is not being achieved, they must introduce further measures.

It cannot be right to deny youngsters the opportunity to go to a suitable school simply because no one will put in a ramp or a lift. Lifts are slightly more difficult than other pieces of equipment to install, but some schools—particularly primary schools—do not need them. An imaginative approach and the will to open up schools to youngsters with disabilities are needed. Too often, physical access is used as an excuse, and a disabled youngster ends up going to a special school. I commend to the Government the earlier report produced by the Spastics Society in conjunction with Coopers and Lybrand which suggested that 75 per cent. of schools could be adapted at a relatively small cost. I urge Ministers to think again on that matter.

I very much welcome the Bill. As I said earlier, a few months ago I did not believe that the Government would introduce such a Bill and I welcome their determination to get it on the statute book. I hope that it will be scrutinised carefully in Committee to make sure that any alleged loopholes are plugged. It is a major step forward and it is a pity that it was not recognised as such by the hon. Member for Monklands, West.

6.22 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): The hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) referred to his difficulty in voting for the reasoned amendment, despite his many reservations about the Bill. I remind him that he would have no such difficulties if he came back to the Chamber on 10 February in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), who is proposing precisely the legislation that it appears from his speech he requires.

I shall confine my remarks to two age groups in which I take a particular interest, as well as a general interest in the disabled—the young and the old. I shall discuss them in reverse order. In a number of respects, the Bill fails to protect them in matters that touch importantly on their rights and their quality of life.

I refer first to the older members of society. I see in the Bill opportunities lost to make inroads into agism, which is another cause of discrimination in society. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) told us that there are 6.5 million disabled people in Britain, 63 per cent. of whom are over 60. In other words, the majority of disabled people are over 60 and they all have the right to live their lives to the full without discrimination. They also have the right to work. One might ask, "Are they still seeking work at that age?" Certainly, any man over 60 is entitled still to be seeking work. If the pension age is to be equalised at 65, many women may also need to work, given the changing patterns of work and concern for their pensions in old age.

There is less concern generally about the disabilities of older people. People tend to express more concern about disability in the young; they simply accept disability in older people as the natural process of aging. Thus, the Bill is open to criticism in that the definition of disability that it offers is too narrow. It refers to long-term impairment that restricts a person's ability to carry out day-to-day activities, but the aged are disabled by their very age, which affects, for example, employers' perceptions of them.

The protection of the Bill should, therefore, extend to those who are perceived to be disabled, although they are not physically or mentally disabled. For example, when an employer makes a judgment that an older person is disabled from carrying out the requirements of a job merely by reason of age, that employer is making presumptions about older people.

The concept of reasonableness referred to in clause 5 is of great concern to those who have an interest in the rights of older people. Reasonableness on the part of an employer when judging whether a person is fit to do a job is too vague and subjective, particularly with reference to older people.

Also with reference to employment, clause 7, to which a number of hon. Members have referred, and which exempts businesses with fewer than 20 employees, works to the detriment of older people. Those are precisely the businesses, often locally based, in which older people commonly seek employment.

The Minister mentioned that 83 per cent. of disabled people are covered by the Bill. I very much doubt whether 83 per cent. of older people are covered by the Bill.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe told us that two fifths of all disabled people are known to work in businesses employing 20 people or fewer. One

may deduce that that applies to at least two fifths of disabled older people, and I would guess rather more. Therefore, as a number of hon. Members have said, the exemption in clause 7 should be narrowed, removed altogether, or replaced.

On access in general, I also refer to the exclusions from transport and education, which are contrary in the Bill. Both are extremely important to older people, but I shall concentrate on transport. The Minister's gradualist approach ignores an important consequence of Government public transport policies. Perhaps Conservative Members do not use buses, but if they visit any conurbation such as Merseyside, they will see clapped-out buses dashing around competing for business. Most are inaccessible to the disabled.

As a consequence of privatisation, buses are in use longer and not replaced so frequently. They remain in service, with all their inaccessibility to older disabled people in particular. Incidentally, the British bus production industry has been decimated as a by-product of Government policy. Many older disabled people will be dead before they see the benefits of the Government's gradualist approach to public transport accessibility.

There is a wide variation among local education authorities as to the number of pupils aged five to 15 who are referred to segregated special schools. Figures for January 1992 from Barnardo's show that in Barnsley and Cornwall, one pupil in 200 was referred to a segregated special school, whereas the figure for Lambeth, Hackney and East Sussex was five times higher. That is a prima facie case of discrimination based on residence. Does that matter? Yes. I concede that segregated special education should be available by choice, but disabled children should also have the choice to be educated in mainstream schools.

The hon. Member for Croydon, North-East referred to the Education Act 1981, which is engraved in my memory because I was an education chairman at the time. That legislation was introduced with the mantra, "within current resources". It never was resourced, and that has been much of the problem with special education provision ever since.

Children who are denied mainstream education are deprived of experiences that would help them to live a fulfilling life and play a full part in society. Research suggests that deprivation affects their self-concept. They are certainly deprived opportunities of socialisation. They must frequently travel long distances to attend special schools, which further prevents them participating properly in their own communities.

That denial also affects society in general—non-disabled people. Many hon. Members present know the story of the individual who looked down pityingly on a disabled person in a wheelchair and said, "Man, you've got problems." The disabled person looked up and said, "No, but I think you have." The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) referred to cultural disregard. Some people have a problem accepting the existence, role, rights and abilities of disabled people. I remind the House of my earlier remarks about perceptions of the older disabled.

In respect of exclusions affecting special education, the Bill works against the spirit of the legislation stated by the Minister, of altering society's perception of disability. He referred to the Education Act 1993, but the provisions that he cited have insufficient bite to justify the Bill's omissions. It should contain targets and timetables for local education authorities to make incremental improvements to existing education premises and their facilities for the disabled.

There may be difficulties, but faith can move mountains sometimes. Sadly, there were many cases of thalidomide children on Merseyside. The much-maligned Liverpool city council managed to adapt a mainstream comprehensive school on the city's inner ring road, to cater for all those thalidomide children. Impressive achievements can be made with will and determination.

The Bill's major weakness is the proposed national disability council. It will be advisory and will be charged to produce codes of practice, to consult and to provide costings—but it will have no powers. That is unlike the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality, which presumably it is supposed to mirror. That is illogical.

In the play by Euripides, Hippolytus gave the ultimate excuse for hypocrisy:

"My tongue has sworn, but my heart is unsworn."

I hasten to emphasise that I do not accuse the Minister of duplicity. I accept his sincerity, in stating his commitment to changing social attitudes through the Bill. I commend him for that aspiration, but I shall turn my quotation from Euripides on its head. Although the Minister's heart may thus be sworn, his tongue does not speak with sufficient strength to underpin his sincerity. There is insufficient force and detail in the Bill to do that. For that reason, I shall certainly enter the Lobby to support the reasoned amendment. I look forward also to returning to the Chamber on 10 February to support my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East.

6.38 pm

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): I was grateful for the little lesson in the classics from the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara), and I am glad of the opportunity to speak in support of the Bill. I have long had an interest in the subject, as honorary president of Mencap in Frome and as honorary vice-president of Action Aid for the Disabled in my former constituency of Newport, West. I follow also the activities of the all-party group, so I was pleased to hear strong support for the Bill from my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) earlier this afternoon. It served to underline my view that this legislation is a positive step forward for disabled people. Indeed, had it been on offer more than 12 months ago, I believe that it would have been welcomed by the Labour party—although its members might not care to admit that today.

I find it extremely disappointing to note that the Opposition seek to oppose the Bill's Second Reading by means of a reasoned amendment. That amendment would not just deny the Bill a Second Reading, but it would do so on grounds that are good debating points for Committee but rather short of substance when it comes to opposing the entire legislation.

For all the emotion that emerged in the debate on the private Member's Bill last year, there has been steady progress in recent years in advancing the rights of, and opportunities, help and benefits for disabled people. Education has played an important part in that process. There has been great progress in the way in which public services, architectural designs and a range of other

[Mr. Mark Robinson]

activities are provided for disabled people, in the community and in the workplace. I think that, confronted with the achievements of the past two decades, people 20 years ago would have been dubious about the possibilities of making so much progress.

This Bill carries the process forward. As the Minister said, it should not be seen as an isolated measure; it is part of a package outlined in the recent White Paper. There is much to be said for introducing legislation such as this in a properly staged and managed way. It makes sense to secure progress in a structured manner. After all, it is not just a question of forcing the public and businesses by means of legislation to uphold certain standards of conduct. It is also a question of educating people, so that the proper treatment of disabled people gains ever wider acceptance in the community—that is happening already.

Hence there is a case for concentrating on larger employers with the resources to deal effectively with such legislation. The United States Congress, after considerable thought, decided to exempt companies with 15 or fewer employees. I believe that we were wise to follow a similar path, at least for the time being. We can always return to the issue if the need arises.

Mr. Berry: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the relevant clause would allow the figure to be increased as well? It has been suggested that it might come down from 20, but it might also go up.

Mr. Robinson: There is always the opportunity for the Government to change their mind. The figure might change in Committee: who knows? The important thing is to establish the principle, which is what the Bill rightly does.

A new law can easily be brought into disrepute if it is quickly found to be unenforceable. We must therefore ensure that this legislation is practical, sensible and readily accepted in the workplace.

It is also wise to provide a measure of flexibility if the responsibilities demanded by the Bill are to be properly implemented. When I visit new buildings or projects in my constituency, one of my first questions is always, "What facilities have you got here for disabled people?" I am rarely disappointed; usually a lot of thought goes into ensuring that the facilities in public buildings, voluntary sector buildings and businesses are appropriate to the needs of disabled people. Of course, people will always have different definitions of what should be provided, but in the main progress is positive.

The comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) about the desire for access expressed by disabled people struck a chord with me. Arriving at a public place or in the workplace and being forced into a stressful entry always entails a degree of humiliation. As one of my constituents said at the well-attended Mencap annual general meeting in Frome last Friday night, disabled people feel demeaned and second rate when they are denied. That applies across the board—to access, to attitudes and to the constant fear of being talked down to or patronised.

A great deal of what happens to disabled people is demeaning but could not possibly be put right by any discrimination legislation. We must not be misled into thinking that passing legislation will provide all the solutions, and we must not allow it to turn into an excuse for not doing more. There must be a concerted drive, beyond this or any other legislation, to educate people about the disabled, demonstrating to them that disability does not disqualify a person from leading a perfectly normal life. That sort of education goes well beyond legislation. It extends to attitudes at work, in schools and in public offices.

Some time ago I was delighted to visit a project under way at St. Arthur's school in Wincanton in my constituency. The project is known as the Monday club—*[Laughter.]* I thought that hon. Members might find that strange. I certainly raised my eyebrows when I was told I was to meet the Monday club without knowing exactly what that would entail. In any case, in that project students work with disabled people for one hour a week. The reaction among the teenagers was highly encouraging. When I spoke to them individually, they all admitted that their attitudes to disabled people had been altered by their experience with the project. Such work in schools is immensely valuable in the process of changing attitudes right across the spectrum.

I give a warm welcome to the Bill. I am certain that it will emerge from Committee further improved. That is why I hope, once it has got through its ritual denunciation, that the Labour party will work constructively with the Bill once Opposition Members have had their pound of flesh in the Division Lobby tonight.

6.47 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): There are 500,000 disabled people in Wales, for whom this legislation is very important indeed. No doubt they, like many hon. Members, would like it to go quite a bit further. If the legislation moved in the direction of the provisions of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which we shall have the chance to consider in a couple of weeks' time, it would be relevant not just to disabled people but to countless thousands of others for whom the facilities to be provided are of direct significance.

I am glad to speak in this debate. I should be even more pleased if the Government had adopted the anti-discrimination legislative approach incorporated in a number of Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bills which I have sponsored in recent years. The Bill does not meet the objectives spelt out by the Government in their consultation paper, on page 9 of which we read:

"The Government accepts that measures to end discrimination must be comprehensive."

Regrettably, the Bill is not comprehensive, although it is a step in the right direction. Paragraph 1.9 on the same page states:

"The Government is introducing wide-ranging anti-discrimination legislation".

But this Bill is fairly narrow. That is not to say that the parts of it which bite are not worth having, but it would have been far better if it had adopted the general approach of the other Bills that have been introduced on the same subject.

We need comprehensive legislation. The principle of non-discrimination should be inviolate. Either we believe in discrimination or we do not. If we do not, we should legislate against it. If we believe that it is applicable in law in some areas, it should be applicable in all areas. Discrimination should not be allowed or tolerated in any circumstances. It is just not good

enough to say, for example, that it will be outlawed for 83 per cent. of employees, but allowed for the remaining 17 per cent.

The position of companies employing fewer than 20 workers is unsatisfactory. As I understand it, the legislation in Australia and New Zealand has no such exclusions. Some hon. Members argued the American case, and one can equally argue the experience there. If a worker in a company employing 20 people has his or her rights with regard to disability safeguarded, what happens if suddenly there is a redundancy in the company and it then employs fewer than 20 people? Does that person lose his or her basic human rights, as recognised in the Bill, by virtue of the fact that there has been a redundancy? That seems totally unsatisfactory and unacceptable.

A letter from the Employers Forum on Disability—I dare say that other hon. Members have also received a copy—tells us:

"There should be no exclusion from the Bill's provisions on grounds of an enterprise's size. It cannot be right for a disabled person to be discriminated against just because an enterprise has fewer than 20 employees."

That is something that we should take good note of.

In rural areas, such as the constituency that I represent, the vast majority of companies have fewer than 20 employees. That means that disabled people will have fewer civil rights in rural areas of Wales, Scotland or, indeed, England than in urban areas. That cannot be right. It cannot be conceptually right and it should not be the way in which we make progress on these matters.

I will deal now with some of the other problems of the Bill. On definitions, clause 5(4) contains the words "unsuitable for the employment". No definition is given of "suitable" or "unsuitable". It is totally open-ended.

Clause 5(1)(b), refers to an employer. It means that there can be an exclusion if

"it is reasonable, in all the circumstances of the case, for him to hold that opinion."

That is a terribly subjective provision and cannot be a reasonable basis on which to make law.

I am also concerned about the position of those who may have long-term disabilities, perhaps HIV. Schedule 1 on page 27 of the Bill states that if a person has a progressive condition but

"does not have an impairment which has a substantial adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, he shall be taken to have such an impairment if that is the expected effect of that condition."

In other words, if the expected effect of a condition in the fulness of time is disabling, that can be considered as a reason to exempt that person from the provisions of the Bill.

Again, that cannot be right. Steps should be taken to ensure that people who are currently—and will be for the foreseeable future—capable of undertaking work should not be discriminated against because of some long-term effects. After all, we all get older and eventually become less able than we were when we were younger.

For some people, the situation is even more serious. The Alzheimer's Disease Society states:

"In its presents form the definition excludes from protection against discrimination, those people who can be identified by predictive genetic testing as being at risk of becoming disabled due to genetic causes."

Therefore, if science moves forward and more people can be predicted to have the potential of being disabled in 10, 20 or 30 years' time, they will fall outside the purview of the proposed legislation. Again, that cannot be right. We are told by the Genetic Interest Group in a letter from its director, Alastair Kent:

"Our concern is that the Bill as it stands unfairly discriminates against people who have a genetic disorder but who are at present healthy—in other words, people who are pre-symptomatic for a genetic disorder."

I am sure that the Government have not thought through the implications adequately. If the Bill proceeds to Committee, I hope that they will look carefully at the implications and at conditions which may not currently exist but which can be predicted, because if people choose to predict them they can be used as a basis for discrimination.

On goods and services, the time scale of 15 years is too long. Questions need to be raised about the financial limits indicated in the Bill. Will the services include insurance services, particularly for those with learning difficulties? Will they include the needs of deaf people, for example, telephone systems, entryphones and emergency systems? Will services be included for blind people such as information in Braille? Will they include services to help with the difficulties that blind people experience with their guide dogs, for example, in taxis or restaurants?

I believe that all those areas must be clarified, because without general anti-discrimination legislation it becomes questionable as to whether loopholes might be created. I am concerned that a loophole might be created with regard to certain health and safety considerations and whether it will be a let-out for people who should be applying the legislation.

I deal now with education, to which a number of hon. Members have referred. It should most certainly be within the purview of the Bill. If the Education Act 1993 meets the objectives of anti-discrimination, there is no problem in having it built into the Bill. If it does not, it most certainly should be written into the Bill to ensure that people who need that safeguard are not left out, that they do not fall between two stools. No child should be denied access to mainstream education. I believe that it is discrimination if that access is denied. As I understand it, the disability allowance would not be available for disabled part-time students. To that extent, discrimination is built into the Bill if it does not take on board the position of those students.

A number of hon. Members applied themselves to enforcement. The main difference between the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill and the Disability Discrimination Bill is that in the latter all that we have is access to the industrial tribunal system and some conciliation systems on a local level. No doubt those are very much to be welcomed, but the problem with industrial tribunals is that there is no legal aid.

That means that a well-off disabled person—I suppose that there are some—will have access to legal redress, while disabled people who are poor will be

[Mr. Dafydd Wigley]

prevented from getting their rights. That cannot be right. If we are talking about principles of anti-discrimination legislation, the Government should look again at that question. It must be addressed or the Bill will be seen as a toothless charade and the Government will lose the opportunity to do something really worth while.

There are a number of other problems in the Bill as it stands. There are problems for those with learning difficulties. Clause 14(3)(a)(ii) says that the conditions are that

"the treatment is reasonable because the disabled person is incapable of entering into an enforceable agreement or of giving an informed consent".

That is an extremely demeaning approach. Does a disabled person with learning difficulties lose his or her rights because he or she is incapable of giving an informed consent?

The whole approach in the past has been to ensure that there can be representation on behalf of those people to ensure that their wishes are taken on board. Exemption will take their rights away from them. That is nothing less than a specific discrimination against people with learning difficulties which has been built into the Bill. It surely cannot have been the Government's intention, but that is what we face, and Mencap feels strongly that that provision should be deleted.

There are other specific problems. Why are the voluntary organisations exempted, particularly when they may be the contractual suppliers of services to the public sector? In those circumstances, the rights of disabled people should be built into the legislation.

Schedule 1 requires registration, but in recent years there has been a move away from the stigma that goes with registration. To that extent, we are missing an opportunity. The Bill also refers to "clinically well-recognised illness". What on earth does that mean? If it cannot be defined, how will the courts be able to apply the law?

I hope that the Government will approach the Bill's Committee stage with an open mind to accepting drastic amendments. I hope that the Bill will be amended to adopt lock, stock and barrel the provisions of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. However, it seems possible that the long title has been drawn in a way specifically to avoid that. That is why I shall be voting against the Bill today. If it is not amendable in that direction, there is a serious problem.

Massive parts of the civil rights approach need to be transplanted into the Bill to make it acceptable. The Government have come some considerable way in the past two years, under pressure from all sorts of directions, to recognising the need for legislation. I now implore them to make the Bill comprehensive, enforceable and unambiguous. Then, and only then, will it achieve its objective of anti-discrimination legislation.

7.1 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) has a long and honourable record in the House of speaking for the disabled. I support his remarks on those groups who suffer from genetic disorders. I, too, have received such representations.

The hon. Gentleman described the Bill as a step in the right direction, but it is a great deal more than that. It is a massive move forward. It is a landmark Bill and this is an historic day. There has never been a day like this when the Government have put forward a Bill that will do so much for the disabled. The Opposition are mistaken in opposing it.

There has never been a Bill like it, certainly not in peacetime. The 1944 legislation was introduced during the war. The civil service exempted itself from that. I hope that it will not exempt itself from this Bill. I see that there are more civil servants in their Box today than there are Opposition Members on the Back Benches, which shows the complexity of the Bill.

The Government should be congratulated on introducing the Bill. I am sorry that the Opposition will seek to divide the House. They are mistaken to do so. They are churlish not to acknowledge the Government's tremendous record. In financial terms alone the Government's spending on the long-term disabled has trebled in real terms since 1979 to a current figure of £17 billion per annum.

The number of those who claim the various benefits, such as the invalid care allowance, has risen from 5,000 to 200,000. When the mobility allowance was introduced by the Labour Government in 1976, it was phased in over four years, during which time there were only 5,000 recipients; compare that with the 320,000 people who benefit today from the disability living allowance.

The Opposition are churlish in their approach. They seem to have committed themselves to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which would cost many billions of pounds. I do not know whether they have come forward with an actual cost, but the Government's sensible and wise Bill has been costed at a modest figure which can be accepted.

I am surprised that the Opposition spend so much time attacking the provision exempting small firms with fewer than 20 employees. That has always been so with the quota. When Labour was in power it made no attempt to alter it. There is a perfectly logical reason. Some firms may employ disabled people in proportion to their size, but small firms cannot employ half a person.

The Employers Forum on Disability says that 60 per cent. of small firms of 10 people or fewer already employ a disabled person, so that is not where the problem is. The problem is much more with larger organisations, particularly in the public sector. The TUC produced an interesting paper showing than an extra 100,000 people could be employed, and quoted 42 health authorities and local authorities which employed no registered disabled person.

The Bill is a triumph for the Government and a personal triumph for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister and his wife, Norma Major, have a great record of campaigning for the disabled, particularly for Mencap, in their constituency and now nationally. Mencap is one of the many organisations which have commended the Government on the Bill's objectives.

I congratulate the former Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott), and the present Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on their work in making the Bill possible. I also thank them for speaking to members of the Conservative disability group committee on what I think is a unique telephone

conference hook-up. Members of that committee are based all over the country and cannot travel at all easily. Both my hon. Friends have helpfully participated in those unique hook-ups.

That committee was also well received when it visited Ministers to discuss the arrangements that their Departments make for the disabled. We have had a number of such visits, including to the Department of Transport, whose arrangements are outstanding. In particular, Anne Frye has an outstanding record in making provisions for the disabled in that Department.

In the Department for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), the Minister of State, has made an outstanding contribution. Just a week ago a delegation visited the Department of the Environment to see my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, who has been responsible for an outstanding consultation paper which has just been published. Within the Department of Employment the placement, assessment and counselling teams, PACTs, have an excellent record in placing more and more disabled people in employment.

Mr. Barnes: I offer my services as promoter of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which I shall be introducing on 10 February, to the Conservative disability network which has had discussions with Ministers on the content of the Bill so that we may debate the alternative provisions contained in that comprehensive legislation.

Mr. Thurnham: One of the major deficiencies of that Bill was the lack of consultation with interested parties. If the hon. Gentleman had listened to what people had said about the Bill he would know that it is impractical. For instance, the proposals on small firms are impractical. The Labour party always seems to favour a bureaucratic solution. It was Mr. Leo McKinstry, a former Labour councillor and adviser to two Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen, who, only the other day, among a number of interesting points that he made, said:

"That's what Labour is good at: creating bureaucracy."

That is exactly what the hon. Gentleman's Bill would end up doing. It would also be a lawyer's beanfeast.

One of the Government's most commendable actions is that of setting an example. I should like the code of practice for civil service employment to be extended much more widely throughout the public sector. Organisations such as the BBC fall far short of what can be done in the public sector. It employs only 0.3 per cent. under the old quota arrangements. Most hon. Members would agree that the BBC could set an example and employ more than its quota.

I ask Ministers to extend the civil service code to the public sector, where a great deal more can be done. The Trades Union Congress paper was especially interesting in that respect. I recommend hon. Members to consider how an additional 100,000 jobs could be created in the public sector. That is where the deficiencies exist. They do not lie with small firms, many of which are employing more than their quota.

I have had discussions with Department of Employment officials in my constituency. They say that, when they try to place someone with disabilities in a job, they do not at first go to the town hall or health authority; they go to private employers, who they know have a record of doing what they can to employ disabled people. The Government should set an example not just in the civil service, but throughout the public sector because there is no doubt that a great deal more can be done, with 12 local authorities and 30 health authorities not employing any registered disabled people. Those organisations will say, "Ah, we employ disabled people who are not registered," but that applies across the board. There is something wrong if they are not already employing people who are registered disabled.

It is more than 12 years since my wife and I adopted Stephen, who is severely mentally and physically handicapped. During those 12 years, we have noticed a great improvement in the general facilities and equipment which are available. In so many ways, access is a great deal easier, pavement kerbs have been dropped, and one can go so much more readily into hotels and restaurants. Of course, he enjoys going on holiday and travelling a great deal. Sun Rise Medical is just one of many firms that produce far better wheelchairs than were available years ago. From personal experience, I can say that attitudes and conditions have much improved.

The Bill is exactly the right way forward for the country to gain a much more ready acceptance of our aims. It will avoid the backlash and negative reaction that could have resulted from some of the Opposition's proposals. I ask the Opposition to think again before dividing the House this evening on such an excellent Bill; it should be commended by every hon. Member.

7.11 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (Lancashire, West): I should like to start by saying how much I agreed with everything said by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). He has pinched about half my speech—you might say mercifully, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and that will shorten the proceedings somewhat.

The Bill should be entitled "Disability Discrimination (Exceptions) Bill" because it is far more remarkable for the areas of personal and civil activity that it excludes from its coverage than for those that it includes. It is in the nature of that exclusion that the real trouble with the Bill lies.

After so many years of struggle over the issue of civil rights for disabled persons and, in particular, after the disgraceful talking out last year of the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), it is tempting to accept the Government's Bill at least as a gesture towards public opinion. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, it may need extension and improvement, but it is a start in the right direction. As it stands, however, it will be an immense obstacle to progress. In the words of one outstanding campaigner, Rachel Hurst:

"This Bill will set back the cause of disabled people by 20 years."

It is important that the Bill is fundamentally amended and that the many Conservative Members who support disabled persons' campaigns realise why it should be amended to incorporate much of the purpose of my hon. Friend's private Member's Bill.

I refer for brevity to the explanatory and financial memorandum at the start of the Bill. We are told in the first paragraph:

"The Bill introduces a right for disabled people not to be discriminated against when applying for employment or when employed".

[Mr. Colin Pickthall]

That is simply not so. The second paragraph states:

"The Bill also introduces a right of access for disabled people to goods, facilities and services, which will require service providers to adapt their policies"

and so forth. That is simply not so. In both cases, greater accuracy would be served if the word "some" were inserted; the Bill would then read: "a right for some disabled people not to be discriminated against in employment matters", and "a right of access for disabled people to some goods, facilities and services".

The exemptions in the Bill amount to the exclusion of about 96 per cent. of businesses in the United Kingdom from the parameters of the legislation. There is some dispute about the figures and about the proportion of the work force involved, but a substantial proportion of the work force is left out of the Bill's provisions.

As has been pointed out, the Government's policy has been consistently to encourage the growth of the small business sector as a proportion of our economy. The Bill sets the smaller end of that sector, businesses with 20 or fewer employees, on one side. There is not even talk of phasing in. The under-20 sector, if I can call it that, makes no contribution in the Bill.

The Bill makes specific the figure of 20 and we have had some brief exchanges about that. I think that the Minister was trying to imply that it could be increased by order, but of course it could also be decreased. The exceptions in the Bill include huge swathes of civil and social activity, most notably all existing education provisions—as far as I can tell—and all means of transport. Numerous smaller exceptions exist which, added together, further debilitate the Bill.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon mentioned a number of those exceptions, but, in addition, clause 14(3)(b) contains a qualification to the excellent clause 12(1)(a). Clause 14 states:

"a provider of services is justified in treating a disabled person less favourably"

if that treatment is

"necessary in order for the provider of services to be able to provide the service to other members of the public."

That caveat could be ruthlessly exploited in terms of, for example, queues that were holding up a service in a particular place.

Clause 14(4) makes it clear that the regulations will exclude insurance services. I noted that the Minister said that the Government were talking with the insurance and financial services sector to try to do something about that, but the clause specifically seems to presage the exclusion of insurance services from coverage by the Bill. That is one of the elements of discrimination that is most frequently cited by disabled people and their organisations. The Leonard Cheshire Foundation document, which I assume all hon. Members have received, has numerous examples of strong complaints about that.

Clause 28(3) excludes from the Bill

"any act done for the purpose of safeguarding national security."

That could cover a multitude of sins. On top of such specific exceptions, the Bill contains dozens of references, hints, nudges and indicators of how the regulations will further undermine what purports to be the intention of the Bill.

What the Minister announced on television as a revolution in favour of disabled people proves, on examination, to be a squeak of good will, strangulated by the Treasury and by the fear of incommoding businesses and public services. I do not underestimate those sectors; they obviously must be taken into account. With appropriate phasing and funding, the revolution could be achieved. Employers are by no means universally hostile. Last autumn, Mr. Robin Gilbert, the Confederation of British Industry director of employment affairs, said:

"we need a new and effective framework of law in this area which opens up opportunities for people with disabilities so that they can make a fuller contribution in the workplace and as consumers".

He is not the only business person to have the breadth of vision to understand that a significant shift of access to employment for disabled people will ultimately pay for itself in national terms, as well as achieve its main purpose of enhancing the lives of up to 6.5 million of our fellow citizens.

Earlier, I mentioned education and transport. It seems clear that, in the mind set of perhaps a majority of people, disabled people are odd, discomfiting or somehow insufficient, a view that much of this Bill and all of the private Member's Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood seek to tackle. That mind set is formed in youth at school, or at least it is not corrected at school.

There can be little doubt that anyone is disabled by virtue of exclusion from a school or college because of, for example, mobility difficulties. The exclusion in clause 12 of virtually all education services from the Bill's provisions is astonishing, contrasting starkly with the treatment of the same sector in the private Member's Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood. The second half of clause 12 of the Government Bill is totally exclusive, whereas clause 12 of my hon. Friend's Bill was totally inclusive. That, I feel, symbolises the difference between the two Bills.

The Minister claimed that the policy of "mainstreaming" in schools pursued by Government and local authorities—and by many schools themselves—was addressing the problem, and there is no doubt that much good work and many better intentions have emerged. Colleges in particular, largely impelled by the need to secure student fees from almost every possible source, have done a great deal to improve access.

I remember with horror having to lift a wheelchair user and his wheelchair—with the help of three of my students—up four flights of stone stairs to gain access to certain classrooms in the college at which I then taught. Much begging-bowl work had to be done with local businesses and others to get a lift put in; but such problems are slowly improving. The hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) spoke extremely well about the need for access provision for, in particular, part-time students, so I shall not rehearse those arguments again.

Under section 21 of the Education Act 1993, local education authorities are obliged to survey schools for such purposes on behalf of the Department for Education. In my own LEA, Lancashire, the vast majority of schools are not adapted for disabled access. Over the past few years just over 100 have been so adapted—out of a total of just over 700—but in almost all cases that has been done to cater for the needs of individual statemented pupils with specific difficulties. Although every effort is

made in the process, it cannot be guaranteed that the adaptation will suit a subsequent student with a different special need.

The severe constraints on LEA spending in recent years have made progress in that direction very problematic; this year's swingeing cuts are making it impossible. Lancashire, for example, has had a total cumulative shortfall of £75 million in its education standard spending assessment over the past three years, and simply cannot sustain a realistic adaptation programme. It is all very well to plan full access for new schools, but—like other authorities—Lancashire has hundreds of Victorian schools with flights of stone steps and inaccessible toilets. At the present rate at which my LEA is allowed to replace those schools, replacing them will take just over 800 years—although I do not suppose that that will bother any of us.

Many—probably most—schools remain at least partly inaccessible to disabled people. Of course that cannot be corrected overnight, but a framework in law that would ensure its correction over a finite period should be enshrined in any legislation. It should, for example, be possible to ensure that all school premises that are entirely on the ground floor are made wholly accessible in quite a short time, and SSAs, credit approvals and grants should allow LEAs and other authorities to achieve that.

Schools and colleges that are multi-storey or have scattered campuses should be set a more generous target, with phased funding. Until that is achieved, or at least projected, for many parents of young people with disabilities choice of school, or even preference, will remain a cruel myth—and I have not even mentioned the continuing revenue consequences of what we are discussing.

The example of my constituent Nicky Crane is a case in point. Nicky is a multiply disabled 12-year-old whose parents insisted that he be "mainstreamed" in his primary school. An heroic effort by Tarleton county primary school enabled him to achieve that, and to be astonishingly well integrated in the school. During the search for a secondary school place, Nicky stayed for an extra year at the primary school. The nearby high school is multi-storey, and the Cranes' demand for a place there for their son put both the school and the LEA in terrible difficulties. I know that it is not the Minister's function to deal with the details; I am simply trying to describe the huge problems caused to people such as the Cranes by disability discrimination.

The costs of the boy's proper care and teaching, in terms of capital spend and the on-going revenue implications, were enormous, and the situation has now reached deadlock. Naturally the parents dug in their heels, and in the interim the boy's progress has been halted or even reversed. I am talking not of an urban area but of a rural area where provision is scattered, and there is no other reasonable choice of secondary school. I strongly endorse what the hon. Member for Caernarfon said about the special difficulties that the Bill poses for rural areas.

If such bitter, even tragic, struggles are not eventually to be scattered across the country, we shall need a framework of law involving realistic proposals for funding and timing. It is not acceptable for disabled students to be seen simply as a financial problem. Attitudes to disabled people that are revealed in discriminatory employment practices and automatic exclusion from some services have much of their origin in attitudes learnt in childhood; the Bill should try to tackle that, but it does not.

The means of access to vehicles is also excluded from clause 12(5)(b). The Minister may know of the number of trains that are currently inaccessible to most physically disabled people. One side of a station close to where I live, Burscough Bridge, is currently inaccessible to people with mobility difficulties; unfortunately, the waiting room and ticket office are sited on that side. Clause 12(3), which deals with infrastructure, might well cure the problem, which is welcome, but a second problem remains: the platforms at Burscough Bridge are several feet lower than the steps on to the trains.

It is a moot point whether that problem comes under "access to . . . place" or access to

"the use of any means of transport",

but no doubt that can be examined in Committee. I do, however, have a wonderful photograph of my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)—who, although he is not the tallest of men, is physically fit and active—trying to step on to a train at Burscough Bridge. He has one foot on the step of the train, and it is above the level of his waist. I have seen elderly people sitting on the carriage floor swinging their legs down to try to reach the platform. Nothing in the Bill tries to tackle that problem, which exists throughout the country.

I have tried to illustrate with examples some of the problems experienced by disabled people in my constituency—problems that I have observed for myself. The Bill specifically rules out solutions to those problems. Despite its "curate's egg" nature, it is a massive con trick that will not fool those who are most desperate for proper and inclusive legislation. Its language is reassuring and accommodating, and the Minister has presented it with charm; but the actuality of what it sets out to achieve is pathetic. It could constitute a monumental barrier to essential progress in the achievement of civil rights for disabled persons—and, indeed, its timing suggests that it is intended to constitute such a barrier.

7.29 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): The hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) said that the Disability Discrimination Bill was a con trick, while the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke)—who opened the debate for the Opposition—said that it was weak and narrow. I believe, however, that the Bill is both broad and practical.

I support the Bill for three reasons. First, it continues the strides made by the Government on behalf of the disabled. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) said, it is a landmark Bill and, as a consequence, it should not be belittled. Secondly, the Bill is fully in line with what I believe conservatism is all about—helping those who are less able to help themselves, but rewarding ability. The Bill enhances opportunities and rewards merit, and the two are not mutually exclusive. Thirdly, the Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) said, is a practical measure to get legislation passed for the disabled.

I have been concerned that a myth has been growing during the debate about the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill which was promoted by the hon. Member

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

for Kingswood (Mr. Berry). In no way do I deprecate anything that the hon. Gentleman has done on this subject, and I commend the motives of the actions which he has taken in the Chamber during the past few months. Following on from a discussion that the hon. Gentleman and I had in the Chamber today, I would like to quote what the hon. Gentleman said on 29 April during a debate on a motion proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) to allow more time to debate the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I shall quote three extracts from the hon. Gentleman's speech which put the matter into perspective.

He said:

"As supporters of the Bill, we went out of our way to table amendments to address the concerns that the Government had raised".

All that was right and proper. He later said:

"However, the key point about costs is that the Bill specifically ensures that, if any provision would cause undue hardship to an enterprise, firm or business, that provision would effectively be waived. Undue hardship specifically relates to the cost of adaptations that might be necessary."

Again, that is fair and reasonable. Later still, the hon. Gentleman said:

"As we have specifically said . . . the timetable for those changes should not be set out in the Bill but should be for the Secretary of State, subject to parliamentary approval".—[*Official Report*, 29 April 1994; Vol. 242, c. 510-527.]

My point is that we should get the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill into perspective. Some of the arguments made by Opposition Members might make one think that it is an all-embracing Bill, yet some of the criticisms which hon. Members make about the Disability Discrimination Bill also relate to matters enshrined in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

Mr. Barnes: The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is wide-ranging and comprehensive, but it is obvious that all the rights contained in it cannot be put into practical application overnight. Therefore, it contains provisions for a commission to operate a dynamic role over time to extend and develop the measures. The Bill is not restrictive and limited in the way in which the Disability Discrimination Bill, which the hon. Gentleman supports, is.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman clearly did not hear what I just quoted. There were many let-out clauses in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, and many of the issues were completely unenforceable.

Some hon. Members have spoken about clause 7, which deals with the exemption for firms with 20 employees or fewer. My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) said that clause 7 could be discussed in Committee. I believe that that is so. The question whether the criterion is the number of people employed or the turnover of a company should also be discussed.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) said that Australian and New Zealand legislation specifies no limit whereby firms might be exempt, and hon. Members may recall that the United States has a limit of 15 employees. I would remind the House, however, that the legislation in Australia and New Zealand is substantially weaker than that proposed by the Government today. I believe that this Government, and all Governments, have a duty of care to ensure that the safety net for those who are unable to help themselves is of a fine enough mesh that no one slips through. I believe, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East said, that it is indeed a landmark Bill.

I would have preferred the Bill to be retitled Opportunities for the Disabled Bill, rather than what I would call the politically correct Disability Discrimination Bill. The civil rights lobby fails to recognise that positive discrimination—however well-meaning—is wrong. People want to be employed because of their ability, rather than because of their disability. *[Interruption.]* I suspect that hon. Members agree with that, and the hon. Member for Kingswood is showing assent.

In a debate on this subject last year, I made the point that I have a researcher who suffers from a disability. I make the point again that he would want to be employed because of his capability, and not because of his disability. Positive discrimination, or the politically correct term "affirmative action", merely promotes resentment among the work force and, far from changing prejudices, reinforces them. Political correctness has worked against my researcher. He now works for a lobbying company since being employed by me.

Mr. Berry: The hon. Gentleman should choose his words carefully.

Mr. Fabricant: I am choosing my words carefully—for my researcher's sake and not for mine. For fear of the media, the lobbying company told my researcher that he could not keep his House of Commons pass. *[Interruption.]* As a consequence, he is now unable to use the parking facilities for the disabled here. When I met him—*[Laughter.]* I am amazed that hon. Members find this funny. When I met him yesterday in Central Lobby, he was exhausted because of his enforced walk on sticks. I believe that that makes a mockery of the so-called anti-sleaze campaign being waged by the Opposition.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I do not make light of the difficulties with which the hon. Gentleman's researcher must cope. The point that I am making, and which the hon. Gentleman ought to be aware of, is that—as far as I know—lobbying companies do not issue passes for this place, and at no time should they do so.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood me. I issued the pass because he was my researcher. However, the lobbying company—his employer—was featured on a television programme on Sunday called "On The Record." He himself was not featured.

Mr. Pickthall: Who is this person's employer—the hon. Gentleman or the lobbying company?

Mr. Fabricant: The researcher works for the lobbying company, but in his spare time he also works for me. *[Interruption.]* That is right and proper. I have no connections with the lobbying company whatsoever, and the researcher does no work for me that is relevant to his lobbying company. There is no problem or conflict of interest whatsoever.

When the lobbying company was approached by the BBC, it ordered him—wrongly, in my view—either to give up the pass that I had issued him or to give up his

job. That was absolutely wrong. He still works for me in his spare time, but he has lost his pass. That is political correctness working against disabled people. It is McCarthyism.

Mr. Barnes: The hon. Gentleman is making a case for the Bill.

Mr. Fabricant: It is indeed a case for this Bill. [HON. MEMBERS: "The Civil Rights Bill."]

I accept that an advisory body in the shape of a national council for the disabled could be a good thing, but I have some reservations. It must be made clear that the council will not become yet another costly and unwieldy organisation that spends its time meddling in our day-to-day affairs. In an era of deregulation, it is good that the Government are not imposing unfair burdens on businesses and that is why I welcome clause 7.

Sadly, ensuring that disabled people are not denied opportunities open to others cannot happen overnight. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, a change of attitude is necessary. It will come about, not through the passing of politically correct measures that impose impossible burdens on business, but by creating a climate of persuasion, through education in schools and at the workplace. The hon. Member for Kingswood recognised that when he produced his Bill, as I pointed out when I quoted some *Hansard* extracts from earlier this year.

The practical measures proposed in the Bill should do much to continue to change attitudes towards the disabled and to enable them to live still more valued and creative lives in our community. For that reason, I commend this constructive Bill to the House.

7.40 pm

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): I welcome this debate and the fact that the Government now recognise the strength of feeling in support of equal rights for disabled people.

What has happened, since the Government killed off the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill last year, to bring forth, first, a ministerial statement, then a consultation document, a change of Minister and a White Paper and now, the Bill? The Government realised the strength of feeling in support of equal rights for disabled people, and the credit for that must go to all the people and organisations that raised public awareness on the issue. I pay special tribute to the "Rights Now" campaign and the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People.

I welcome the Government's recognition of the gross injustice of discrimination against disabled people and the need to do something about it. I also welcome their recognition of the fact that education and persuasion on their own are not sufficient to deal with the issue, and their agreement that legislation is workable and necessary. I do not welcome the Bill, however, and I am not being churlish—an accusation that was levelled at some of my colleagues.

There are massive differences between the Government's Bill and the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. Essentially, the problems with the Government's Bill are that it is not comprehensive and will not be effective or enforceable. Reference was made to the position of the all-party disablement group. It is true that the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam), with whom I have worked closely on the issue for some years as one of the co-chairs of that group, expressed support for the Government's Bill. I must place on record, however, that the view of the all-party disablement group, of which I now happen to be secretary, is more accurately reflected in our submission on the Government's consultation document. The overwhelming majority of members of that group, of all political parties—I stress that—supported the civil rights approach.

Many hon. Members have dealt with the first problem, so I shall be brief. The Bill is certainly not comprehensive; it fails to deal with discrimination in a number of respects and provides for exemptions. Hon. Members have mentioned education and transport because, last Tuesday, the Prime Minister said that they were covered by the Bill. The Minister's device of saying that when the Prime Minister referred to education and transport, he merely meant that the employment provisions of the Bill would apply to those sectors, was ingenious, but it did not fool anyone because the Prime Minister's full answer to the question can be read in *Hansard*. He dealt with the employment provisions before he identified education and transport as sectors in which the Bill dealt with discrimination.

Clause 12 excludes education and means of transport. I never carelessly charge that the House has been misled and, naturally, if the Prime Minister had implied anything contrary to clause 12, he would have been incorrect. Clause 12 excludes education, the means of transport and some other areas.

I am pleased that the Minister said that exclusions relating to the renting and purchasing of property will be reconsidered, but clause 12 excludes other things, including civic rights, and contains a general provision to enable whatever exclusions the Minister might want. The Bill is not comprehensive if it provides for exclusions.

The employment provisions also show that the Bill is not comprehensive; on the contrary, it is discriminatory. Companies that employ fewer than 20 employees are to be let out. Why? I cannot understand it, nor can the Confederation of British Industry or those who responded to the Government's consultation document.

The red book that I have here—a red book that I find more interesting than the other one to which reference is often made—contains important information about what those consulted on the Government's measures said. In answer to the question, "Should small firms be excluded?" 84 per cent. of consultees said no. That percentage was exceeded only by the percentage of employers who said no—91 per cent. Frankly, I cannot comprehend why the Minister chooses to ignore that response.

Clause 7 deals with exemptions for small businesses and subsection (2) states:

"The Secretary of State may by order amend subsection (1)"—

which refers to 20 employees—

"by substituting, for the number of employees for the time being referred to there, a larger or smaller number."

I hoped that the assumption was that the Minister wanted to apply the measures to all firms and that we might start at 20 employees and work down, but the Bill allows him to start at 20 and work up. It is bad enough that one third of employees are to be excluded, but the Minister is giving himself the power to exclude the majority.

The Bill defines a disabled person as someone who has

"a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his"—

[Mr. Roger Berry]

or her—

"ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities."

The Government are saying that discrimination is okay and acceptable if impairment is not substantial, and it is fine if it is based on short-term impairment. Discrimination on the basis of past, perceived or expected impairment is also acceptable. I do not believe that that is so, and that is why the definition of disablement needs to be amended for the purposes of the Bill. It should not be lawful to discriminate against someone who has a previous history of mental illness, or is HIV positive and perceived, or expected, to be impaired.

Enforceability is a key issue because the new rights—however limited—will be effective only if they are enforceable. Rights that cannot be enforced are frequently worse than no rights at all, simply because they obscure the true nature of discrimination—one gets the impression that measures are being taken to deal with discrimination, which we all recognise exists, but the situation is not significantly improved if one cannot enforce them and it could be made worse.

Mr. Fabricant: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. If he uses that to argue in favour of his original Bill, rather than this Government Bill, however, does he not accept my earlier quotations, in which I proved that his Bill contained so many opt-outs that it suffered the same deficiencies—his term, not mine, as that is what he implies they are?

Mr. Berry: Of course I agree with the quotation which the hon. Gentleman cited earlier, because I uttered the words in the first place.

One of the fundamental differences between the Government's Bill and the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is the fact that the national disability council proposed in the Government's Bill is no substitute for the disability rights commission because it will not have similar powers to investigate and enforce to those of the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Campaign for Racial Equality. Under the Government's proposals, disabled people will find it extremely difficult to enforce their rights. Legal aid is not available for tribunals and is pretty difficult to get for anything else.

On enforcement, we must ask why disabled people are treated fundamentally differently from people who suffer discrimination on grounds of gender and race. The Government say, "Well, it is too bad. In any case, we are not happy about the Equal Opportunities Commission or the Campaign for Racial Equality." The White Paper says that the purpose of the national disability council is

"to advise the Government on the progress being made to tackle discrimination against disabled people"

and

"to advise the Government on measures to reduce or eliminate discrimination".

I should have thought that the Government had received all the advice that they need. Organisations of disabled people and many others have been offering advice for years and years. They want the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. If the Government want advice on what disabled people want, they should listen to the "Rights Now" campaign, which represents every major organisation for disabled people—some 50 organisations, which I do not have time to list. They should listen also to the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, which represents another 100 or so organisations and 300,000 individuals. It is understandable why those groups feel that the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is the correct approach.

When the Government consulted on their proposals last summer, a number of us asked why they did not consult on the civil rights Bill as well. They refused to do so. Nevertheless, the responses to their consultation document—the red book—show overwhelming support for the civil rights Bill. Of those who mentioned the civil rights Bill, 98 per cent. supported it. Why would the Government want to set up a national disability council to tell them what they already know—that what disabled people want is proper anti-discrimination legislation?

Support for that civil rights approach has come from every organisation of and for disabled people, the 98 per cent. of those who refer to civil rights legislation in the Government's consultation exercise, the all-party disablement group and a clear majority of Members of Parliament. I remind hon. Members that not a single vote was cast last year against the civil rights Bill. Not only did it pass Second Reading by 231 votes to nil, but at no stage on Second Reading or in Committee was a vote cast against a single clause. We all know how the Bill was blocked. It was not because we lost the votes or the arguments.

Hon. Members must determine their position on the Government's proposals and the reasoned amendment. I hope that they will support the amendment in the names of my right hon. and hon. Friends and support the Second Reading of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill sponsored by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) on 10 February. By their actions today and on 10 February, hon. Members can help bring about civil rights for disabled people. If not, we shall demonstrate that, collectively, we are part of the problem.

7.53 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): I welcome the Government's frank recognition that discrimination against disabled people in our society is extensive, utterly unacceptable and demeaning to us all and that the Government should act to eliminate it.

To exclude people with impairments and disable them from playing the full part that they might is to disable our society and ourselves. It diminishes, or should diminish, our self-respect, for we are members—limbs—one of another in our body politic. By discriminating, we maim our humanity, with incalculable consequences. We also rob ourselves of our economic potential with consequences that are, at least approximately, calculable, although they should be calculated on a proper cost-benefit analysis rather than a one-sided, solely negative compliance cost basis.

Our public debate and the Government's view have developed a long way in the past year or so. The credit for that must go, above all, to the disabled people who have carried the banner of the "Rights Now" campaign. They, with other committed supporters—it gives me pleasure to mention the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), whose speech I follow—have insisted that, in Parliament and Government, we should face our responsibilities.

I also acknowledge that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) needed no persuasion on that. His task, on which he was determined, was to persuade others. Since my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People succeeded him in office, he has acted with alacrity and skill to gain acceptance in the Government of much that needs to be done.

I welcome, therefore, the determination that the White Paper and Bill express to end unjustifiable discrimination in employment and the provision of goods and services, as well as to monitor and ensure that good advice is available to the Government. If the Bill, even as it stands, becomes law, disabled people's prospects will be significantly improved. I hope, however, that in its passage through Parliament, it will be amended to carry us further forward.

My hon. Friend states in the White Paper the Government's "one central objective" as being

"the elimination of discrimination against disabled people".

That is exactly as it should be; but the Bill fails to meet that objective in a range of important ways—notably, by offering too little on education, transport, and civic rights and duties.

I welcome the enlargement of the Bill's scope to include the sale and letting of property, which my hon. Friend the Minister announced this afternoon. What we need, however, is a resounding new clause at the head of the Bill to establish a general duty not to discriminate unjustifiably against disabled people in any sphere whatever.

We must improve the definitions in the Bill. The Government have made a morass in schedule 1, where they set out on the impossible task of specifying the meaning of disability. Rather than attempt to enumerate or describe the conditions and contingencies that amount to impairment, my hon. Friend should have accepted the broad definition used in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which draws on the hard-won experience of other countries, notably the United States of America, which are ahead of us in this matter.

My right hon. and hon. Friends used to intimate, as an objection to anti-discrimination legislation, that it would provide a field day for lawyers. Schedule 1, by using expressions such as "clinically well-recognised illness" and

"circumstances in which . . . an effect which would otherwise be a long-term effect is to be treated as not being such an effect",

will be a positive paradise for lawyers and, by the same token, infernal for disabled people.

I am particularly concerned that the definitions in the Bill will not protect from discrimination people who have a history or reputation of mental illness and people who are HIV positive.

Is my hon. Friend aware of the concern, which was powerfully expressed by the Huntington's Disease Association, a body with which I have had some involvement over the years, the Alzheimer's Disease Society and the Genetic Interest Group, representing more than 100 charities, that paragraph 7(2) of schedule 1 specifically excludes from protection against discrimination people who do not yet show symptoms of a disease but are likely to do so in time because of genetic factors? The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) touched on that subject.

Does my hon. Friend the Minister recognise that that provision will discriminate appallingly against people who have to expect eventually to suffer from a terrible disease such as Huntington's and whose life is difficult enough without being exposed to discrimination in the labour market? Does he realise that that provision will powerfully discourage people from undergoing predictive tests? If those tests produce the feared result, people will at least be able to receive the appropriate medical treatment and plan their lives in the light of the knowledge that the tests provide.

I very much regret that, at this stage, my right hon. Friends do not propose to bring businesses employing fewer than 20 people within the requirement not to discriminate. The concept of reasonableness in the Bill provides the necessary safeguards. It simply cannot be right that people's basic rights as citizens and members of our society should depend on who happens to employ them. It is unimaginable that we would say to an employer who wanted to operate a racist recruitment policy, "Okay, since it is only a small business, you can indulge your prejudice," and that we should enshrine that in law. We should insist no less on basic decency where disabled people's employment is concerned.

I note that it is provided that the threshold of 20 may be changed by regulation. If the Department of Trade and Industry were to pluck up its courage, perhaps we might match the Americans at 15. That, too, would not be good enough. We should straight away match the Australians, and I believe the New Zealanders, who do not allow discrimination in employment in businesses of any size.

I am willing, of course, to contemplate reasonable phasing-in periods. The access-to-work scheme, properly funded by the Government, should also be permanent. We must, however, be determined on this matter of a threshold, because it is in smaller businesses—the most rapidly growing sector, as the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) observed—that discrimination is most often found. It is simply wrong to establish in the law of the land that unreasonable, unjustified discrimination may be condoned anywhere.

It seems that the Government find it peculiarly difficult to reconcile themselves to establishing a disability rights commission with the role and powers to match those of the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission. It really is time that those bodies were redeemed from the demonology of my right hon. Friends' imaginings. They do important good—not by means of for ever meddling and bullying, as certain folklore tells us, but because, by their very existence and by virtue of powers which they rarely use but hold in reserve, they guard against discrimination. A national disability council, such as the Government propose, with powers to advise and draw up codes of practice, but with no powers to investigate and enforce, will be quite insufficient.

All too often, disabled people, whose means are most often less than those of the generality of our fellow citizens, will not be able of themselves to sustain the legal rights created for them in the Bill. There will be no legal aid to assist them in taking cases to industrial tribunals. If this proposed law against discrimination is not to be hollow, it is imperative that a disability rights commission is created with power truly to champion disabled people,

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

individually and in class actions, which, notwithstanding my hon. Friend the Minister's view, could be of great value.

Everyone wants to proceed by good will and conciliation, but we cannot sufficiently depend on that. Powers of enforcement would need to be used only occasionally, but their latent existence is indispensable if we are to overcome prejudice.

My last contention is that the Bill should incorporate provisions to amend the National Assistance Act 1948 to remove the bar to local authority social services departments making cash payments to disabled people, so that, if they wish to do so, they can manage their own budgets for personal and domestic care. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has agreed in principle to remove that obstacle to independent living, but, presumably for reasons of bureaucratic demarcation, the Bill does not so provide.

I recognise, of course, that the detail of a model scheme needs to be worked out carefully, but good progress has already been made. At the request of a number of us, members of the Association of Directors of Social Services submitted a scheme to my right hon. Friend last summer. Disabled people should not have to wait for that provision another year. We should use the legislative opportunity of this Bill to remove the block in primary legislation and the details can be established in secondary legislation or by whatever other means is appropriate.

I shall not support the reasoned amendment and I shall vote for the Bill on Second Reading. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is the model of legislation that I wanted the Government to adopt. It provides the clear-cut affirmation of values and the comprehensive principle that we should assert. However, I accept absolutely the good faith and good will of my hon. Friend the Minister. The Bill contains much that is good and important. We should use it, in a spirit of cross-party co-operation, as a platform on which to build. I will certainly seek to have it amended to improve its definitions and its scope and to incorporate the necessary powers of enforcement.

If the Bill were defeated tonight by Conservative Members supporting the reasoned amendment declining to give the Bill a Second Reading, and if the Government were then, regrettably, not to support the private Member's Bill, there would be no legislative advance for disabled people. Without in any way abandoning our ideals, let us be practical and constructive.

8.5 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate and to follow the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth). In a previous incarnation as a Government Whip he helped me when I piloted my Bill, now known as the Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1989, through the House. I welcome the balanced approach that he demonstrated tonight.

I welcome the Disability Discrimination Bill. It is gratifying to see that the Government have attained a degree of enlightenment over the plight of the disabled, albeit as a direct result of democratic pressure within the Chamber and from outside. I hasten also to say that despite the fevered imagination of some that a deal has been done with the Ulster Unionists to extend the scope of the Bill to Northern Ireland, that has not happened. I welcome, however, the Minister's announcement to do just that.

The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) rebuked hon. Members for their adversarial approach to the Bill. The reality is that it is the job of the Opposition parties to test Government proposals and to push them. Because of the legislative method that has been adopted for Northern Ireland over the years—we have had no opportunity to explore, test or amend Bills—some bad legislation has, unfortunately, been introduced. If such an adversarial approach was not taken to the Disability Discrimination Bill, it, too, would run the risk of being bad legislation.

Mr. Barnes: The Government's last-minute concession to extend the scope of the Bill, once it is in Committee, to Northern Ireland may have something to do with the pressure openly exerted by hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland, because four of those hon. Members, who represent different political parties and between whom there are often considerable disagreements, have sponsored my Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. It commands the support of three other political parties of Northern Ireland.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I accept that. If hon. Members remember my intervention during business questions and on other occasions, they will recall that that pressure was exerted openly. Perhaps I am in a unique position tonight because I represent the commonality of political interests in Northern Ireland.

The House will be aware that, for many years, I have been at the forefront of the campaign for disability rights. As the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) has said, I am a co-sponsor of his Bill, which will be discussed by the House soon. That Bill would solve most of the discriminatory problems faced by the disabled, but the Disability Discrimination Bill will not do that. Given my professional background, I might ask,"Who doth hinder the union of the two?", because we might do better to unite those Bills if we are truly concerned about the interests of those with disabilities.

The call for comprehensive legislation on the issue is clear. I am not usually known as a supporter of quangos, but I call in support of my position the Government's own human rights watchdog in Northern Ireland—the Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights. Among the recommendations in its recent comprehensive report on disability, the committee comments on the preparation for the Bill. It has done much research in it, some of which is unique. The committee says:

"the Commission has become convinced that the proposals in the government consultation paper do not represent an adequate response to the issues revealed by the research. In effect they do not meet the concerns identified by the research team in respect of, for example, education, employment and mobility. The rights predicated in the paper seem unenforceable in practice—since legal aid would not be available and there is no provision for an effective enforcement agency."

There we have it—an honest opinion by, I believe, an independent Government body.

The report commends the former Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill introduced in the previous Session by the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), which is being

introduced again by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East. I have received a similar message from people involved in disability action in Northern Ireland.

As I understand it, the Bill fails in several aspects. I acknowledge that it is complex in many ways. I was amused when the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) commented that there were more advisers in the Box than there were hon. Members on the Back Benches. He would have been more accurate if he had looked at those on the Conservative Back Benches at the time, because throughout the debate the Opposition have normally been running ahead of them and we are now just about equal.

Clause 7 states that the Bill will not apply to small businesses with fewer than 20 employees. That has been mentioned before, but it is doubly unfortunate in the Northern Ireland context, for I understand that about 90 per cent. of companies in Northern Ireland have fewer than 10 employees. That fact makes nonsense of the provisions in the Bill. It is not the size of a firm or, for that matter, the turnover of the firm, that matters, but the fact that someone who is able to work in a specific post is disqualified from doing so—and sometimes not even interviewed for a post because he or she may have some disability.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) referred to the second issue to which I shall draw the House's attention—genetic testing. I am worried about genetic screening and access to that information. The narrow definition of disability will discriminate against those people who can be identified by predictive genetic testing as being at risk of becoming disabled as a result of genetic causes.

I understand that the Minister of State, Department of Employment, who will reply to the debate, may have some anxieties, as I have, at another level about genetic testing, but it appears to me that the information from such tests, were it to be made available, might also be used to discriminate against a person applying for insurance cover, for example. Legislation that takes into account the rapid developments in genetic engineering must be included in the Bill.

One of the objections to the earlier Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill was its cost, the estimates of which escalated beyond human comprehension. Many of the objections revolved around transport costs—the costs of new coaches, buses and so on. I understand that one of the figures quoted was that an increase of about 25 per cent. on the usual cost of a bus would be required if we were to provide an integrated transport system by road for people with disability—and age can also be a disability if one wishes to hop on a bus.

The issue is interesting. I spoke today to a Northern Ireland coach company, Robert Wright and Son of Ballymena, and I can give the House at least some good news. That company is in the process of finalising its plans and announcing that it will manufacture other low access coaches, which can carry as many as 70 people at a cost of only about 5 per cent. in excess of current bus prices. I believe that there is a message there for the Department and others: that we should make urgent progress down the road in renewing our coaches at a level that is economically viable, and which will facilitate people with disabilities.

Other anxieties have been mentioned today. In the Bill and the accompanying paper, "Disability—on the Agenda", the Government have relied on good will and on what is "reasonable" to make the legislation work. Will the Minister accept that legislation ring-fenced with exceptions is no solution? That applies to the problems with education.

I understand, for example, that in the North Antrim area where, a few years ago, there had been an increase in the number of young people being integrated into normal education, they are now being siphoned off into special care schools because the problem of access has not been properly tackled. I believe that that is contrary to the education provision. It is certainly contrary to the intentions of those of us who have campaigned for the right of people with disabilities to be integrated into mainstream education.

Among Government Departments, the Department of Health has not been a star performer in employing people with disability under the quota system. It has been recognised that the quota system failed to have an effect on discrimination against disabled people. Surely that points to the need for a foolproof system of policing the proposals.

Although I welcome the step that has been taken along the road, there remains a long way to go. If anyone says, "We have been doing the best we can," I am always mindful of the colleague with whom I was an assistant minister as a young man. On one occasion, in the General Assembly, a convenor pleaded, "We have been doing the best we can," and Dr. Martin went to the rostrum and said, "Moderator, their best is not good enough." If this is the best that the Government can do, I hope that they will hasten to marry the two Bills together, even in Committee.

8.17 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People on introducing the Bill. It builds on substantial work that the Government have done for disabled people for a very long time, starting long before the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill was even invented.

It is worth noting that spending on benefits for long-term sick and disabled people and their carers has increased to £17 billion in the past year; that is almost as much as we spend on national defence. Therefore, no one could say that there is not a whole-hearted and deep commitment by the Government to support the wishes of the disabled.

Although the Opposition, by and large, have been very grudging about the Bill, I welcome the remarks of the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), who described the Bill as

"a welcome step in the right direction".

Coming from the hon. Lady, that is significant, because she and I have not always agreed, and we shall probably disagree about many issues for some time.

None the less, I welcome a lower tone, greater calm and, on the whole, a desire by many people to ensure that the Bill can be workable. I have spoken to many disabled people who freely tell me that the Government's Bill is a good Bill and an excellent start in the process to right

[Lady Olga Maitland]

many wrongs which have not been dealt with so far. As one disabled person said to me only yesterday, "It has great merits—there is no question of that."

The Bill strikes a balance between justifiable aims and what is possible in terms of provision. It is a courageous effort when we bear in mind the fact that the interests of disabled people have, in the past year, been clouded by highly charged emotion, aspirations and political activism that has tended to cause disarray and concern among disabled people. In Sutton, disabled people have been alarmed and unnecessarily frightened at the idea that we are not trying to help them.

It is significant that the Bill has been put together on the basis of extensive consultation. All told, more than 1,000 people or organisations have responded in writing. My hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People has received scores of interest groups and has travelled across the country to meet others. Above all, he has listened and taken careful note of the views of enablers—businesses, Government agencies and local government—in his efforts to improve provision for the disabled. He is, rightly, deeply conscious of the financial burden that such groups will bear. It was never realistic to expect them to finance to the tune of £17 billion the changes proposed in the private Member's Bill.

I voted for and supported the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill on Second Reading. But I did so because I supported the spirit of it. What had not been made clear at that time and only became clear afterwards was the burden of costing that outweighed the Bill's possible advantages. The Government's Bill is expected to limit the costs to about £1.5 billion, which will be phased in over 15 years. The cost to an average business could range from £500 to £1,500 over that period.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My hon. Friend has argued in favour of a lower tone and against political activism. Does she also agree that fair-minded analysis is important and that, as well as the cost that a measure may carry, we should also look carefully at its economic benefits?

Lady Olga Maitland: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. It is always important to look at both sides of the equation. I hope that, as the Bill progresses to its Committee stage, that will happen.

The greatest chance of success is to develop policies that encourage individual effort—going with the grain of the market rather than imposing untenable requirements. In my constituency, the Sutton alliance of disabled people—an energetic and articulate group—appreciates the consultations that have been held so far. I have worked closely with that group, which has given the Bill careful thought and come up with some useful ideas.

One proposal that the group could have made could be integrated at a later stage: easier access to information on where disabled people can go for support and advice. Only this evening a disabled Sutton constituent came to visit the Houses of Parliament. She had no idea whether she could park her car outside Members' Entrance. Only after extensive phone calls did she tumble to the idea of calling her Member of Parliament. We should work far harder to ensure that the disabled community understand where help can be obtained.

The Bill cannot hope to satisfy everyone—no Bill can ever do that. I am sorry that the Opposition were so grudging that they could not give the Government any credit. Why? I think that it was because the Bill does address the deep concerns of disabled people. The Bill recognises the distress, frustration and humiliation experienced by them. They should not have to tolerate being treated as third-rate citizens—as, at best, an inconvenience, or, at worst, imbeciles.

When it is clear that reliance on common decency fails, a statutory framework can undoubtedly help to remedy the wrongdoing. The Bill breaks new ground over and above the consultation document, and I shall mention three ways in which it does so.

First, our society is the poorer if able-minded but physically disabled people are unable to work because we are unimaginative about how to assimilate them into the working environment. By making it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against a disabled person, we will make the employer think all the more carefully about the talents of that disabled applicant. Although the provision applies only to companies employing 20 or more people, we must remember that it will account for 82 per cent. of the businesses in this country, leaving just small and potentially vulnerable companies out of the equation.

I support the remarks made by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber that we should keep an open mind as to whether the 20-employee limit is appropriate. If it is not suitable, we should reduce it to a lower level and learn from the experiences of companies in Australia and New Zealand.

It is not unreasonable to expect companies to make reasonable adjustments to working conditions to facilitate disabled people. Such measures need not be draconian, and could incorporate flexible hours or merely moving a desk. As my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) explained so powerfully, we need more will—and where there is a will, there is always a way.

The second way in which the Bill breaks new ground involves the conciliation services. The crucial element in solving any dispute is to make full use of the locally based conciliation service—the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service—with the co-operation and support of the local citizens advice bureau. No one wants bureaucratic delays when confronted by a problem. People seek fast remedies and easily accessible advice and support—that aim is most effectively achieved through ACAS, whose personnel, as they are locally based, can see the employers or the providers of services immediately.

The experience of the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality shows that 90 per cent. of all disagreements are settled in that way. That is not to say that someone who is dissatisfied cannot go to an industrial tribunal—that has always been an employee's right. I support the comments made by hon. Members on both sides of the House that we should reflect on whether, when a disabled person is seeking redress in that way, he should be entitled to legal aid.

The third innovative measure in the Bill is its introduction of the national disability council—an important step. As it is, no other concerned group—ethnic minorities or those seeking redress for lack of equal opportunities—has a Minister directly answerable to it. It

is significant that there is a Minister with responsibility for the disabled who provides ready access to all who need it.

Mr. Berry: I was not aware that the Bill proposed that the Minister should be answerable to disabled people. One might think that, if the Minister were answerable to them, he would introduce the Bill that disabled people want.

Lady Olga Maitland: I think that the hon. Gentleman is splitting hairs.

The Government are going one stage further by establishing the national disability council—which will act as the Minister's eyes and ears. The council will closely monitor progress on the Bill—spotting where measures need tightening up and making recommendations to the Minister. Nobody should fall between two stools, without a substantial and authoritative organisation to which he can refer.

Quite rightly, at least half the council's members will be people with disabilities, or the parents or guardians of people with disabilities. With an input from a group of people who, to date, have demonstrated their ability to articulate their concerns, I have no doubt that the council will be effective, but it might be helpful were the council also to include representatives from recognised organisations for the disabled such as the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation and the Spinal Injuries Association.

Finally, I turn to the question of disabled access. Common sense must prevail; we must be reasonable about access demands on public buildings and places of employment. I welcome the focus on improved access for disabled people at railway stations. It is certainly good news for commuters in my constituency who have a choice of nine railway stations, all of which have access problems. By seeking reasonable changes there is more chance of immediate redress. For example, a restaurant could be required to designate a table with sufficient space for disabled people. A tiny corner shop would be within the law if it installed a bell outside which disabled people could ring in order to be served.

The Bill will make it illegal to refuse to serve disabled customers. Making it easier for disabled people to shop can only be good for retailers who will benefit from the increased custom. That has been the experience in Sutton, where there are extensive high street facilities for the disabled, including wheelchair access.

I commend the determination of the Government in promoting the Bill and I particularly congratulate the Prime Minister on taking such a personal interest in it. We must ensure that the Bill promotes action which is practical, workable, enforceable and fair for all. I reject the Opposition amendment and I will have great pleasure in supporting the Government in the Division Lobby.

8.30 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): When I reintroduce the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill on 10 February, I shall have the chance to make a substantial speech on this subject. On that occasion I hope to gain support for the Bill in order to secure its Second Reading. I wish to direct my remarks tonight to the current legislation and I shall advocate my own measure on 10 February.

Of Conservative Members who have spoken, I compliment the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) on his speech. Although there are serious tactical differences between us about how to vote tonight, his arguments are based solidly upon experience, upon a clear analysis of the situation and, above all, upon the correct principles. I could argue that he is rather naive in supporting the Government's position rather than the reasoned amendment, but I respect that judgment because I respect the person who made it.

I trust that the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon will explain to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), who has just spoken, why the Government's legislation is inadequate. Society does not want to see provision for bells outside shops, which will reinforce the idea that disabled people have special problems and should be treated differently. Disabled people should have easy access to all public buildings, as well as benefiting from the measures that are in the Bill that the hon. Lady supports.

I feel entirely justified in my decision to select the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill as a private Member's Bill. I could have had egg on my face, as the Queen's Speech foreshadowed that the Government intended to introduce their own Bill in this area. However, I based my judgment upon the fact that the Government were not likely to introduce adequate legislation. Although it is an advance for the Government to introduce any legislation at all in this area, I believed that the Government's measure would block off further advancement by disabled people rather than extend the opportunities that are demanded.

That is what has occurred. This Bill is entirely inadequate. The long titles of the two Bills describe the scope of each piece of legislation. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill will allow amendments to be made that will extend the boundaries of that legislation. That scope is not contained in the Government's Bill. In fact, such measures are specifically limited and blocked. In order to carry amendments to the Government Bill in Committee, hon. Members will have to make amendments to the long title of the Bill and change the nature of the legislation. In effect, we shall have to change chalk into cheese. We shall have to make fantastic alterations to the legislation. The council will have to be changed to a commission and the definition in the Bill will have to be based on entirely different principles.

The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is not my Bill; it is not a Bill to which any one person can lay claim. It has evolved from a movement in society. I am merely taking up the baton that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) carried last year. I have picked it up because I believe that the measure is right for this time.

I introduced a different measure two years ago dealing with electoral registration. That subject is very dear to my heart and it would have been easy to reintroduce it and carry on the campaign with which I have been involved. However, that argument is still developing; it needs to be extended and it needs to receive more publicity—its time will come. The time has come for extensive and comprehensive civil rights for disabled people. Such rights should not be constrained by the very limited and often contradictory measures in the Government's legislation.

When the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People introduced the Bill on behalf of the Government, I said that I would introduce the Civil Rights (Disabled

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

Persons) Bill unless someone else picked it up before me. I was disappointed that the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) did not pick it up, given his experience in the area of disability. He has now said that the Government measure can be altered and advanced and that the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is in some way counter-productive.

If the Opposition's reasoned amendment is not carried tonight and if progress is made with the Government Bill, the private Member's Bill that I propose to introduce on 10 February will put continuous pressure on the Government. It is the marker against which the Government Bill will be judged.

I recognise that this legislation represents a big step by the Government; they have crossed the Rubicon by contemplating and producing legislation about disablement. The problem is that it is a very small step for disabled people. It will not get them anywhere; it will barely take them past the Rubicon—in fact, the Bill's provisions may push them backwards.

Conservative Members are faced with a dilemma. Can the Government Bill be amended to operate in some meaningful way, or should the all-embracing measure of civil rights for disabled people be placed on the political agenda? They could then seek to offer amendments within the spirit of the legislation that is put forward.

The problems with the Government Bill have been described in considerable detail by Opposition Members. The most highly restrictive definition of disablement is set out in part I and schedule 1 of the Bill. The figures in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill relating to the numbers of people involved have never been disputed and were used in connection with cost assessment. It was a false assessment, but it was based on the same numbers of people.

It has always been estimated that 6.5 million people would be covered by the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. Can the Minister tell us how many people will be covered by the Disability Discrimination Bill as it stands?

We have heard about all the interest groups that are worried about being excluded. They have been quoted by hon. Members representing four political parties who have raised important issues. The Bill refers to those with substantial disabilities and those with long-term disabilities and states that the categories involved will be decided and explained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State. Do we trust the Secretary of State to provide the broadest possible definitions? We may finish up with an extremely limited measure.

I hope that, before we vote on the Bill, we shall be told what number the Government believe it will cover, compared with the 6.5 million covered by the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

Mr. Alfred Morris: It is possible that the Minister could help us now by giving that figure, which it seems to me is a crucial figure, not just for the purposes of my hon. Friend's argument, but in terms of the whole debate about the Bill.

Mr. Barnes: The Minister certainly has plenty of assistance and it must be possible that the figures have been calculated somewhere within the civil service and that there could be at least a rough and ready addition to enlighten the House.

It is possible to argue that the definition in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill is very wide and is in danger of becoming almost too wide. On the other hand, it has been argued that the definitions and provisions in the current Bill could lead to problems concerning litigation.

The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill needs almost no definition apart from the word "disabled". It provides that the argument that someone is disabled cannot be used by an employer, a provider of services or someone providing access to a building and that no one should be able to say, "No, you cannot come here or do this because you are disabled." Therefore, the word needs to be interpreted very broadly indeed.

People can be disabled in many ways and the eye of the beholder who is doing the discrimination needs to be taken into account. Some people are clearly disabled, such as those suffering from various chronic illnesses and those with mental impairments, and they are mentioned in one of the schedules to the Bill. The definition is so restricted, however, that what occurs is something of an obscenity—exceptions are included to further limit the definition.

Having defined certain people who are to be considered disabled, the Bill exempts certain circumstances. Restrictions on the scope of the Bill are then built into existing restrictions, reducing still further what it covers. The figures, therefore, do not need simply to say how many people would qualify under the definition; one has then to subtract the number exempted under clause 5, which lists the circumstances in which less favoured treatment is permitted.

Some of the language in the Bill is most unfortunate. It states that

"less favoured treatment is justified"

and details circumstances in which people can get away with unacceptable behaviour.

It has already been mentioned that, on the role of employers, the opinion of the employer appears to matter most. When a case goes to court or to an industrial tribunal, what is being judged is the opinion of the employer. If the opinion of the employer is genuinely that the case did not involve a category covered by the measure, the measure will not be able to be produced in law, even if services are available to help people who go to industrial tribunals, thereby facing the considerable financial difficulties that were discussed earlier.

A whole range of issues has been raised by hon. Members, including the Bill not applying to workplaces with fewer than 20 workers. Those companies are not necessarily financially strapped and unable to make provision for disabled people. In the new computer age, a small employer can often make considerable profits, but profitability is not a consideration. As has already been pointed out, the Minister can not only reduce the figure, but can increase the figure when pressures are applied by industry, and the legislation is no longer being discussed in the House and the subject is no longer of prime consideration.

We have had considerable discussion of the problems in transport and education. Subsections (5) and (6) of clause 12 explain all the sectors of education, under different funding regimes, to which the legislation will not apply. It is part of the list of exemptions. Surely we should know what in education is not covered by the exemptions.

Are there forms of education—private or state—where the law will have to apply? Is there any reason why we are given a list of exemptions?

Clause 12 (3)(f) says:

"the services of any profession or trade, or local or other public authority"

are covered by the Bill. Why does it not say "except education", thus ruling out the need for another half page? There must be something in education to which the measure applies, so may we have the details before we consider the Bill on Report as to what that something is? Otherwise, we shall be legislating blindly.

The Bill as it stands does not apply to Northern Ireland although we have been told that an adjustment will be made, and of course we believe that that will take place. In a meaningful contribution, the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) pointed out that the number of small firms operating in Northern Ireland is greater than anywhere else within the United Kingdom, so more people are being excluded in Northern Ireland. At least hon. Members representing Northern Ireland will now have the opportunity to table amendments and argue their case in Committee—if they are on that Committee—and on Report, to defend their interests and to join the rest of us in improving the Bill.

When I submitted the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, I took the precaution of seeking support from all parts of the House. In the rush, I did not manage to persuade a Conservative Member who took the Whip, but I do have the support of one who does not have the Whip. I have the support also of hon. Members from eight other political parties, including all four Northern Ireland parties. They are often at loggerheads in the House in respect of Northern Ireland issues, but are united on civil rights for disabled people.

I subsequently secured the approval of three other Northern Ireland political parties outside the House. I await responses from Sinn Fein and two Protestant parties more closely associated with paramilitary groups. There might be some embarrassment about them saying that they support civil rights for disabled people, because in the past, such groups have been associated with forms of militarism that created much disablement.

However, if one gets away from constitutional and border issues in Northern Ireland, it is amazing how much across-the-board support there is for worthwhile issues—and nothing could be more basic than my Bill. For example, there was unanimity—other than the small Conservative party that exists in Northern Ireland—in opposing the student loans system, from Democratic Unionists to Sinn Fein.

Last year, the Government talked out the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. This year, their tactic is that such a Bill would not work, or would cause considerable political damage. They have jumped ahead of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill and are seeking to persuade the public, by capturing some of its language, that they are following its principles.

The Government produced a White Paper that was available in the Vote Office at 12 o'clock a week last Thursday, and the Government Bill was given its First Reading at 4.15 pm the same day. How much consultation could be undertaken in four and a quarter hours on a Bill already in the Vote Office and waiting to be distributed? The White Paper was about news management. It was produced in the hope that the media would concentrate on its content rather than examine the Bill—and it needs examining.

One must question also the Government Bill's implementation. The beauty of a disability rights commission is that it would provide a mechanism to advance the rights conferred by the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. There will be various defences of reasonableness in different firms, so initial protection might not be as great as it could be. However, the commission would act in a dynamic fashion, so that the boundaries of discrimination would be pushed back further and further.

The council established by the Government Bill to advise the Secretary of State would in no way be equivalent to the commission, 75 per cent. of whose members would be disabled or associated with disabled organisations. The commission would submit codes of practice for the House to consider and to be transferred to the Secretary of State, but under the Government Bill, the House would have to consider codes of practice presented by the Secretary of State. The commission would be served by persons independent of the Department, who would present their considered opinions, on which the House could then decide. The House might even refer matters back to the commission if it did not seem to be moving in the right direction. That arrangement would help alert the House to what should be happening.

The commission would be the conciliating and service body for disabled people taking on the law. I do not trust a Secretary of State in a Conservative Government to do anything to advance the interests of disabled people. Despite the kind words said about the current Minister, who is quite a pleasant fellow, and about his predecessor, the Minister is controlled by the Secretary of State. The record of the current Secretary of State for Social Security does nothing for Opposition Members, and must strike the fear of God into some Conservative Members.

Instead of plodding ahead with the limiting and restrictive Government Bill, I hope that the House will support the reasoned amendment, which would replace it with the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), who has just returned to her place, recently tabled two written questions. She asked whether the Secretary of State will

"produce a copy of the Disability Discrimination Bill using pictures and simple text to make it available to people with learning difficulties."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. *754*.]

The Minister answered that the Department would put some stuff on audio cassette and that a simplified written version was available. That version is not for people with learning difficulties, and work must be done on that.

If the Bill is meant to apply, albeit inadequately, to people with learning difficulties, they should have some access to its content and the ability to make judgments, so that they may put pressure on their elected representatives to defend their interests.

Mr. Corbett: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Government acknowledge that, of the £1 million spent on advertising their efforts in this area, only £2,000 has been

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spent on producing material in Braille and on audio cassette? Does he agree that that speaks volumes about the nature of the Government's commitment?

Mr. Barnes: That just serves to illustrate my point.

The second question asked by the hon. Member for Rochdale concerned the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. She asked whether copies of the Bill using pictures and simple text would be provided for people with learning difficulties. The answer amounted to, "That's up to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East." The Government would offer no assistance.

Any hon. Member who is lucky in the ballot can draw £200 for legal advice when drafting his Bill. I ask the House to imagine how far £200 will go to procure legal advice. If the amount had been updated in line with inflation, it would now be worth more than £1,400. Meanwhile, hon. Members are given no real assistance to produce a text in the required form.

Luckily, however, there are people who are organised and who are doing the job. Simone Aspis, of the organisation People First, has produced a draft document on the Bill in just the form required. If People First, with its limited resources, can produce such a document, why cannot the Government? I am proud to see that ours is the first Bill that the organisation has ever produced in that way, although it has done other similar documents. The Government should think again about the assistance that should be given to hon. Members to introduce Bills connected with disability. People First could do with some more resources from public funds to carry out more work of that nature.

It is vital that we get the principles right, and that hon. Members on both sides of the House understand them. A Conservative Member said earlier that he was on the same wavelength as us even though he might vote differently—

Mr. Alfred Morris: My hon. Friend is on to a very important point about some severely disabled people. The early-day motion on this subject is widely supported; its message is that, unless we improve communication with severely disabled people, they are not just second-class citizens—they are non-people. As my hon. Friend will know, Simone Aspis has been instrumental in bringing this issue to the attention of Members on both sides of the House. Will my hon. Friend accept that there are people in all parts of the House who strongly endorse what he is saying now?

Mr. Barnes: It is indeed an important early-day motion, and Simone Aspis's organisation is important, too. Although I am not supposed to mention this, I might add that she has been the only person to stay in the Gallery throughout the debate today.

We shall return to the debate on 10 February. I hope that all Members present for this debate and voting tonight will be here again then. I hope that people outside will continue to apply pressure to their Members of Parliament, asking them to come along and support our Bill. It is not my Bill, but I have picked it up and I am running with it. This is my chance to get it passed; we must get it through on this occasion.

9.2 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I am pleased to speak in this debate after my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes). I face the disadvantage, speaking so late, that it will be difficult for me not to repeat much of what has been said—but I shall try to avoid doing so.

I want to concentrate on the definition of rights, the costs of the Bill and its enforcement. Like a number of other Conservative Members, the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) suggested that Opposition Members are being churlish, in that we should recognise that the Bill is a step in the right direction. We might have acknowledged that had we not known for a long time that something much better was on offer. There is already a much better Bill that could take the place of this one.

I deal first with definition and who is covered. It has been said that the definition is inadequate, that it is narrower than it should be, and that it is a negative definition that leaves out people with a "history or reputation" of disability—the terms that are used in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. As an example, I refer to people with HIV and AIDS. Clearly, there will be people, particularly some employers, who will treat people who are HIV positive or who have AIDS as disabled. They will discriminate against them. The definition in the Bill may well cover some people—most probably people in the advanced stages of AIDS who may be suffering physical impairment. The irony is that such people are least likely to seek employment and benefit from the Bill's provisions.

It is much more likely that people with HIV will be discriminated against, because an employer will perceive it as a disability. The issue of perception is important. The way in which people are perceived impacts on the way in which they are treated. If an employer perceives a disability that he or she believes will increase costs or reduce efficiency, they are likely to act on that perception. The person who is discriminated against will have no remedy through the provisions of the Bill as it stands.

Reputation is important. The sort of provision that was covered in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, and which is covered in other countries, for example, the United States and Australia, protects the individual. The issue becomes not, for example, whether a person has HIV, but rather whether they are being discriminated against because an employer believes that that person has HIV. That is what happens. That person's HIV status does not even have to be proved or disclosed. It is the fact that they have been discriminated against that matters.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Why does my hon. Friend think that the Government have specifically excluded the people, the victims of discrimination, to whom he has referred?

Mr. Gerrard: What we are up against are the costs of a full definition and full civil rights—to which I was going to refer later—and what the Government believe, falsely, those costs would be. I will return to that point later.

In opening the debate, the Minister referred to discussions that the Government will have with the insurance industry. I very much hope that HIV will be raised, because clearly it is an area in which the insurance industry discriminates at present.

I have used HIV as an example, but I am sure that many other people will recognise that similar problems apply to many other conditions. Obvious examples are people with epilepsy, which may in some cases have a serious effect on their physical abilities, but which in other cases is quite trivial and has no relationship to that person's ability to do a particular job.

The matter of rights that are established has been frequently referred to and I do not want to repeat what has been said, with the exception of one point on employment—that the majority of employers will not be covered because of the limitation on the number of employees to 20.

In the US, the limit is 15, but the interesting point about its approach is that, under US legislation, the number starts at 25, with an automatic reduction to 15 after two years. In the US, the approach was quite clear from the beginning. The intention was to bring the number down. As a number of hon. Members said earlier this evening, many of us would prefer an approach that did not depend on a number. Many hon. Members have said that we should not exempt anybody. It would be useful if the Minister explained just how the Government intend to use the provision in the Bill that allows the number to be changed, because as it stands, it can be used to go either way—up or down. That is a significant difference from the approach that was taken in the US.

As has been said, we will have two classes of disabled employee; some who are protected and some who are not. The gaps in the definition and the failure to go for a full civil rights approach are due to costs. The Government talk about the cost of implementing the legislation from the point of view of compliance. That is one side of the equation. But nothing is said about the cost of not implementing sufficiently tough legislation.

The position on costs is summed up in the preamble to the American legislation, which says:

"The continuing existence of unfair and unnecessary discrimination and prejudice denies people with disabilities the opportunity to compete on an equal basis, and to pursue those opportunities for which our free society is justifiably famous, and costs the United States billions of dollars in unnecessary expenses resulting from dependency and nonproductivity."

In other words, there should be a rounded look at the whole economic picture.

Compare that with the British Government's attitude, looking at one side of the equation, setting a limit of 20 or more employees, and their failure to accept a full definition and full civil rights. They look at only one side of the cost equation.

I come now to enforcement which, in some ways, is the most disappointing part of the Bill. It is not as if we have not had experience in Britain and elsewhere of constructing legislation to deal with discrimination in order to ensure that people have rights that can be enforced. But the Bill provides a dreadfully weak enforcement mechanism. Individuals will be left to try to fight their way through the legal system alone without legal aid and with no real help.

Compare this Bill with other attempts to prevent discrimination. I am most familiar with race discrimination and the work of the Commission on Racial Equality. The CRE can help individuals to deal with their own cases, but it has other powers as well, such as the power to take investigative action independent of an individual's complaint, to establish good practice, to make findings against organisations, public and private, and to take class actions.

I do not pretend that there are not still problems with the way in which that system operates. The CRE does not fight enough industrial tribunal cases, and it can deal with only a few high-profile cases. But that approach and its successes are lessons from which we should learn. The lesson is clear: we need a disability rights commission which can help individuals to initiate cases and obtain legal aid where necessary.

We are told that an individual will be able to go to an industrial tribunal, but that is not easy. Industrial tribunals—perhaps we should consider this in a wider sense—have become the province of lawyers in a way that was never envisaged when they were first established. Now, large organisations brief QCs to defend them at an industrial tribunal. That is not the way that industrial tribunals were originally expected to work. There is no question but that it puts individuals, particularly individuals without an organisation behind them, at a significant disadvantage. Moreoever, the system is already overloaded, with long waits for hearings.

It is also particularly difficult now for individuals who feel that they have been discriminated against when applying for employment to work through the industrial tribunal system. They are least likely to have the support of an organisation such as a trade union. The key point is that help should be available. There is no point in providing a remedy and then ensuring that some people will not be able to use that remedy because no mechanism exists to help them to do so.

We need a commission with investigative powers to take general cases. It should not only monitor discrimination, but uncover it. None of us should be under any illusions that it will be easy to remove discrimination, both direct and indirect, against people with disabilities. The Bill and the Government's approach fail to recognise the full effects of indirect discrimination. From experience of racial discrimination, we know that institutionalised discrimination is the most difficult to tackle, especially on the basis of individual cases or claims. That is why one needs a commission that can investigate, and people who can take class actions. We should not rely all the time on one individual trying to fight his way through the system on his own.

It is far too easy for us to assume that, because of the number of people who are prepared perhaps to stand up publicly and to make aggressive, abusive or hostile remarks about disabled people, such deep-seated prejudice does not exist. It is clear that prejudice exists against people with HIV, and that is not the only example that one could quote. The evidence still exists that there is systematic prejudice and discrimination.

There have been improvements in the past 15 years, but the majority of those improvements have occurred simply through disabled people and organisations for the disabled fighting for their rights. Discrimination will not disappear. Things will not improve just through persuasion. Certainly, we need education, but that on its own will not be enough; nor will legislation that is not enforced. That is the message that we receive from tackling other areas of discrimination and from other countries.

In the autumn, I was in Washington and I took the opportunity to visit the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. I specifically asked about its experiences in

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the past two years of implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act. Its view was that there had been some problems in getting started and that it was early days. Essentially, however, it had a very positive view of the Act's effect.

That Act is not enforced through vague rights that individuals are left to enforce on their own. It is enforced through duties on the commission, on the Attorney General, and on the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs. That is a recognition of the power that Governments can have in using their economic spending to influence the private sector. I know that contract compliance is the last thing that would be popular with the Government, but that sort of approach has been recognised by Governments in other countries as being valuable and as making a difference.

If we are serious about anti-discrimination legislation, we are required to be serious about its enforcement. Yes, we have to change attitudes and challenge prejudices. One does not do everything through legislation; an educative process is needed. It is certain, however, that without adequate enforcement, the provisions will fail.

9.18 pm

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), who has consistently supported and worked strongly on behalf of people with disabilities. He was the 17th Back Bencher to make a speech in the debate today. I am glad that the Leader of the House is here, although I am not supposed to see that. It is a great shame that people with disabilities who need to use wheelchairs have no access to the Galleries of the House, and that they must sit on the outside of those Galleries. I hope that that matter can be quickly put right.

In a curious way, there has been consensus in the debate: even those who spoke in favour of the Bill went on to criticise some or all of the inadequacies highlighted by our reasoned amendment. I suppose that that was to be expected, but I hope that it will be taken on board by, in particular, the Minister—whose responsibilities are new to him—because there has not been unqualified support for what he and the Government propose.

I especially commend the speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry)—who fought such a valiant and skilful battle in the last Session, in the face of Government skulduggery, to put his Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill on the statute book—and my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), who has now taken up the torch and will exhibit equal determination and tenacity in his efforts to do more to meet the demands of people with disabilities.

In the run-up to the Bill, the Minister and his officials told organisations of and for disabled people and their carers and families that, following the Government's consultation paper, all the issues were up for discussion. Some felt that, on that basis, there was no need for the Bill proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood: if need be, parts of his Bill could be transferred to the Government measure in the form of amendments. They now know better.

The Government's words were an attempt to throw dust in the people's eyes after their shameful behaviour over the Bill presented in the last Session. The issues are not, and never were, "all up for discussion"; the best that was up for discussion was contained in the long title of the Government's Bill, which—as several speakers have pointed out today—was restrictively drawn.

The Bill is nowhere near comprehensive enough, and its limited scope rules out areas in which organisations of and for disabled people and their carers demand and deserve action. I may say to the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson)—and to others who, with less charm, chided us for tabling our reasoned amendment—that it is not our fault that there was no co-operation over the Government measure; the Opposition have co-operated for 13 years, and we still have no legislation guaranteeing civil rights for disabled people.

Had the Government wished to proceed on the basis of consultation, they could have consulted us—and every other party represented on either side of the House—to try to achieve the consensus of which the hon. Lady spoke. I acknowledge immediately that the 6.5 million people with disabilities outside the House, their families and their carers would have preferred us to proceed on that basis, but it was not the Opposition but the Government who chose not to make that possible.

The Bill is, of course, a timorous step forward, but we invite the House to deny it a Second Reading so that the Government can do better, perhaps by taking over the Bill proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East. As has been said—none of this is new—the Bill is inadequate: its definition of disability is restrictive and exclusive, and it fails to tackle the vital question of access to education for people with learning difficulties.

It excludes firms with fewer than 20 employees from anti-discrimination protection, and provides no timetables for the removal of that phoney threshold. The Bill also does nothing to help people on to buses and trains, although the places from which they leave are covered. It is silent on any financial help to employers to take on people with disabilities, or to help speed access to buildings offering services. It lacks any real attempt to co-ordinate enforcement and to help spread good practice.

I wish to mention six good reasons why the House should not accept the Bill, but there are others which other hon. Members have mentioned.

Mr. Thurnham: Shame.

Mr. Corbett: If the hon. Gentleman listens, he will understand the sense of what has been said from all around the Chamber today about the illogical and silly way in which the Government have tried to help people with disabilities.

I want to go through the six reasons quickly. The British Council of Organisations of Disabled People—Jane Campbell of the council has been watching our proceedings all day—complained that the definition of disability is based on the medical model. That would exclude elderly disabled people who do not suffer from what the Bill labels "a disease", people with a disease such as multiple sclerosis who are not prevented from carrying on most tasks but who might—in employment—be considered unfit for work, and people with HIV who experience some of the most severe forms of discrimination.

I will give the House an example of the narrow and flawed thinking of the Government. Clause 14, about which Mencap is concerned, deals with the circumstances

in which the Government say that it is all right to discriminate—for instance, under subsection (3), because a disabled person

"is incapable of entering into an enforceable agreement or of giving an informed consent".

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Corbett: The Minister agrees. If she will wait, she can comment when she winds up.

Mencap believes that that measure alone could deny about 250,000 people their right to equal access. Mencap cites the examples of people wanting to open a bank account, needing medical or dental treatment, wanting to make rental agreements or even wanting to take out council house tenancies. What is the intention there? Whom is the measure supposed to cover? Surely the people who meet the definition in the Bill are likely to be looked after already by the court of protection.

Miss Widdecombe: Exactly.

Mr. Corbett: I am glad to hear that. If they are protected, does not the measure simply widen the grounds on which it remains lawful to discriminate?

I remind Ministers that in any event the Law Commission is due to report in March on the whole issue of capacity and decision making. I would like the Minister today at least to undertake that she will consider the recommendations of the Law Commission as the Bill proceeds, and that she will consider tabling amendments here or in another place to implement those which impact on the Bill.

Perhaps the greatest hole in the Bill—I believe that it is of great significance, and many of my hon. Friends have also spoken about it—is its failure properly to tackle discrimination in education. Barnardo's says:

"The quality of education provision disabled children receive, will play a major part in their subsequent integration into adult life".

The Bill simply ignores that. Important as trying to meet the needs of people with disabilities or special learning needs in the short term is, we must also try to help to prepare people with a range of disabilities for integration into adult life. Barnardo's adds something which we all know from constituency cases:

"The present system still discriminates against disabled people and young children because parents cannot choose a mainstream school on the same basis as other parents."

In the city of Birmingham, only two secondary schools—one to the north and one to the south of the city—have the necessary facilities for young people with disabilities. I have a young constituent who has been well served by Great Barr primary school, which is situated just outside my constituency. The school was recently praised by the schools inspectorate for the quality of education it provides. They engaged in correspondence—I almost said a battle—lasting several months with Birmingham education department because they rightly insisted on a choice of secondary education for their daughter. Like all other parents, they were invited to state their preference, but the school they chose did not have the facilities to take the child. The upshot is that, to find a school that best suits and meets her needs, she has to be transported to the other side of the city.

Miss Emma Nicholson: The Opposition spokesman should not place 100 per cent. reliance on mainstream schooling for people with difficulties. I am a governor of the Mary Hare grammar school for the deaf—the only grammar school for the deaf in the United Kingdom—and what it offers is unbeatable anywhere.

Mr. Corbett: I take the hon. Lady's point and I did not mean to be dogmatic, but if parents want to choose mainstream education for children, they should have that right; they should not be turned down because the facilities do not exist. Many special schools do a magnificent job—some of those in the city of Birmingham are known to me and I try to be supportive of them.

One primary school in my constituency which copes with children with disabilities decided to pal up with a school a few miles up the road whose pupils are not disabled. For the past two years, pupils from the two schools have gone away together for a week to a camp in the countryside on the edge of Birmingham. The resulting learning and understanding, among both groups of children and the very committed and devoted teachers, is magnificent. That is exactly the sort of work that the Minister and his right hon. Friends at the Department of Education and Science should encourage.

Mr. O'Hara: Does my hon. Friend agree that children with disabilities should have the opportunity to profit from an education with mainstream pupils and to share their experiences if that is good for them? As the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) said, however, in many cases segregated provision is best, and both options should be available.

Mr. Corbett: Exactly, and the present Government of all Governments should not need any lectures from the Opposition about parental choice, because they said that they were introducing it. The Bill does nothing to improve parental choice for parents whose children have disabilities. Some promises were made—restated wishes from the Education Act 1993—but that is beside the point. Two out of every three primary schools and more than half the secondary schools in England and Wales have no suitably adapted lavatories. Moreover, I cannot be the only hon. Member with primary schools that still have outside toilets—or can I? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Clearly, I am not.

The denial of mainstream education further isolates young people with disabilities because it shields those without them from the experience of being alongside children with different abilities. What is more, as Scope says, the White Paper simply restates the provisions of the 1993 Act for an accessibility audit; there is nothing new in that.

On work, the exclusion of firms with fewer than 20 employees and the absence of a phased removal of that threshold are unacceptable. The Government know that 96 out of every 100 firms employ fewer than 20 people. As the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) said, in rural areas small businesses are the main providers of job opportunities for everyone, including people with disabilities. The Government know that that sector offers the best growth in jobs and that six out of 10 companies with up to 10 staff already have one disabled person working for them. So what is the problem?

The Government also know that the Confederation of British Industry and the Employers Forum on Disability do not want a cut-off. Under the present Prime Minister—and, indeed, the previous one—have run around telling us

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that it is not their job to run business, so why in heaven's name do not they let business get on with the job that it says it wants to do? They are stopping business doing the job that it wants to do.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood said, 91 per cent. of the employers who responded to the Government's consultation paper rejected the idea of a cut-off point for firms with 20 or fewer employees.

Miss Widdecombe: The figure of 91 per cent. is accurate. Will the hon. Gentleman now confirm that the number of employers responding was 11?

Mr. Corbett: No.

I will now show what can happen at work and describe the experience of a former press operator at the Leyland DAF plant at Washwood Heath in Birmingham. That man lost three fingers at work but was still regarded as a valued and productive employee. Then he was made redundant. He applied for a similar job with a small car component firm and was invited for interview. All went well until he mentioned that he had lost three fingers. From then on, the prospective employer did not want to know. That man could not be refused a job on grounds of his race or gender because that would be against the law, but the Bill would not stop him being refused a job on the ground of his disability. He said:

"I didn't think of myself as being disabled until I was discriminated against."

How can the Government say—quite rightly—that they will not tolerate discrimination on grounds of race and gender but then tell 96 out of every 100 firms that it is all right to discriminate on grounds of disability?Lawyers will have a field day if the Bill reaches the statute book. If a disabled job applicant happens also to be gay or lesbian and from an ethnic community, the lawyers could keep the case running into thousands of pounds.

Mr. Alfred Morris: My hon. Friend referred earlier to Jane Campbell of the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People, who is highly regarded in this House. How can the Government pretend to correct Jane on this issue? She is a severely disabled person and she knows the realities of disabled living. She knows what she is talking about in defining disability. How can they say that they know more than Jane?

Mr. Corbett: My right hon. Friend makes an exceptionally good point. I applaud the fact that the Government decided to carry out a consultation. The only trouble with consultation is that it implies that one will listen and, where one feels it right to do so, respond to what is said. All the evidence, even in the document that the Minister has now published, is that the Government have taken little notice of what people said because they do not like it.

My right hon. Friend is absolutely right: the House should show some humility. The best people to tell us about discrimination against disabled people are those who suffer from that discrimination, who face it every day of the week and who come to anticipate it because of what happens in our society.

As other hon. Members have mentioned transport, I will omit that issue in view of the lack of time available. The Bill is silent on financial encouragement for employers or owners of shops or other commercial properties to improve access. For example, the Royal National Institute for the Blind wants the national insurance contributions holiday for employers who take on the long-term jobless extended to employers who take on disabled people. Why not? What about tax relief on spending to assist the employment of disabled people? If people can apply for grants of up to £20,000 to improve their homes, why cannot some modest help be offered, perhaps on a pound-for-pound basis, to small retailers and others who need to make their premises accessible to disabled people?

Perhaps the biggest weakness of the Bill is the total absence of a proposal to set up an organisation with responsibility for enforcement, to develop case studies and practice, as well as to encourage and spread good practice. Virtually every organisation of the disabled and for the disabled that has commented on the Bill has made that point, but again, the Government have ignored it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East said, it is pretty rich for the Government to indulge in a consultation exercise, spend a million quid boasting about it and then spend just £2,000 on putting out versions on audio and in Braille. The very people from whom we desperately need to hear, so that we have a better chance of getting the legislation right, are effectively locked out of the debate.

I commend especially to the Minister for the Disabled the excellent booklet published by People First, which states:

"People with learning difficulties had found it impossible to understand and comment on the Government Disability Discrimination Bill because the summary . . . was not written using pictures and simple text."

I wish we could use video screens in the Chamber, but we have not come to that yet. I commend that booklet to the Minister. There would be no need to employ civil servants to produce the Government's own version, as I am sure that People First would make it available to the Minister, his Department and others at a reasonable cost.

We should have the humility to accept that the best people to talk about discrimination are those who know about it, meet it and are offended by it because they are denied the same rights as other citizens. The Government must understand that calls to end discrimination against people with disabilities are not about services and benefits, important as they are, but about civil rights—rights equal to those that the rest of us are able to claim and exercise.

To deny the Bill a Second Reading today will not rob disabled people of their rights because the Government can take over the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill after they help it to secure its Second Reading on 10 February.

9.41 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): This has been a constructive and sensible debate, with many useful contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I echo the tributes that have been paid to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) for the huge amount of work that he did to support the work to eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities. I congratulate my hon. Friend the current Minister for

Social Security and Disabled People on producing an excellent Bill and on the huge amount of work and consultation which went into it.

With one or two exceptions, the tone of the debate has been entirely reasoned. Many points were raised and, for that reason, I may not be able to respond to all of them tonight. I should like, first, to address the reasoned amendment.

To echo the wise words of my hon. Friends the Members for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) and for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), we have a choice: either we can accept a Bill which has been introduced by the Government and which, amended or otherwise, will reach the statute book, or we can reject it. If we do that, we will for ever after have to explain why, when we had the chance to get an anti-discrimination measure on the statute book—we will not be able to accept the Bill sponsored by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes)—we turned it down. That is the question that faces hon. Members tonight.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) said that she would vote for the reasoned amendment because there was nothing in it with which she could disagree, but she must remind herself that if she does that, the Disability Discrimination Bill will be rejected. That could easily result in no anti-discrimination measure being on the statute book. I am talking straightforward fact. If hon. Members who have been in the House for a long time, and who know the workings of the system, do not understand the logic of that, I am unable to assist hon. Members further.

Secondly, I believe that much of what is in the reasoned amendment either is inaccurate or refers to matters that are being addressed. For example, my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People said clearly that we shall now consider the possibility—and, if possible, enact legislation to that effect—of making it unlawful to discriminate in the sale and letting of premises.

It is also said in the reasoned amendment that the Bill is unacceptable because its employment provisions would extend to less than—

Mr. Tom Clarke: The hon. Lady has said that the reasoned amendment is inaccurate. She then referred to the Bill, but there is no reference in it whatever to premises in the way in which the Minister discussed them in his speech. Will she therefore withdraw what she said, because it is she who is being wholly inaccurate?

Miss Widdecombe: With respect, the hon. Gentleman did not listen to what I said. I said that there is much in the reasoned amendment that either is inaccurate or refers to measures that have been addressed. When I spoke about measures that have been addressed, I meant the unlawful discrimination in the sale and letting of premises, which was discussed by my hon. Friend in his opening speech. *[Interruption.]* I shall proceed, because I assume that the reason that hon. Members have made so many arguments tonight is that they wish to hear answers. I suggest that we make some progress on that.

The reasoned amendment claims that our Bill is unacceptable because the employment provisions extend only to less than 5 per cent. of firms. Although, strictly, technically, statistically, that may be true, the reasoned amendment conjures up a wildly inaccurate picture of the vast majority of the work force not being covered, whereas the exact opposite is true; 83 per cent. of employees will be covered.

It does not follow that, just because a small firm is exempt, it will make a practice of discrimination. It simply means that we have recognised that there are burdens on businesses that it is not sensible to inflict on very small businesses. However, we have also said more than once tonight that, although we have written into the Bill the dividing line of 20 employees, we are taking a power to amend that in the light of experience

We were asked from the Opposition Benches whether we could amend that to a larger number as well as a smaller number, but that is certainly not the intention of that power. There would have to be some mighty compelling evidence and some consultation as well. The idea is to find out, in time to come, whether experience shows that we could decrease that number, but we are starting with what we consider to be a reasonable number.

I am sorry to take issue again with the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), because he has quite a reputation on that issue and I honestly thought that he would have read the consultation document extremely thoroughly. I must take issue with him when he says that 91 per cent. of employers oppose an exemption. When it comes down to 11 employers, 10 of whom oppose an exemption, that does not describe the opinions of employers. He omitted to add that, of the employer associations that were actually consulted, six out of nine supported an exemption.

Mr. Berry: I was absolutely correct when I said that, of the employers who responded, 91 per cent. opposed an exemption. That was 10 out of 11 who offered an opinion. Will the hon. Lady admit that, of all the employers who were consulted and who responded, only one—the one that she has mentioned—actually wanted an exemption for small firms? I am grateful that she has strengthened the argument that I was trying to make.

Miss Widdecombe: Now will the hon. Gentleman please tell me how many of the remaining 10 employers were small ones? I think that he will probably be unable to do so.

I shall now proceed to make progress.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Will the Minister give way?

Miss Widdecombe: I shall not give way now. I intend to make progress. I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once and I have given way to the hon. Member for Kingswood; I shall give way on sensible points, but I want to make progress.

Much has been made of our decision to set up a national disability council rather than a commission. There appears to be some received wisdom that, just because 20 years ago a Labour Government decided that the best way of monitoring and policing equal rights was to set up commissions, that was the only way it could be done. I invite hon. Members to compare the two very different tasks faced by commissions and the council.

The Equal Opportunities Commission represents 50 per cent. of the population and is largely engaged in class actions. The number of individual cases that it supports before tribunals amounts to a minority. The work entailed by the disability laws will largely involve individuals—no two of whom will be the same—coming before tribunals.

[Miss Widdecombe]

I noted the call from the Labour Front-Bench team earlier to introduce legal aid in tribunals. In his response to an intervention, the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) seemed to commit a future Labour Government—hypothetical, of course—to introducing legal aid. I hope that he has consulted the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer on the likely cost of that policy.

Mr. Clarke: I thank the Minister for giving way. I do not want there to be any misunderstanding about the next Government, but I want to be particularly clear about the present Government's view. In my speech, I mentioned a boy who suffers from cerebral palsy and who has taken a case of unfair dismissal to a tribunal. That tribunal has been suspended today because his family does not have the money for further representation. What advice would the Minister give that family tonight?

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): A good question—answer it.

Miss Widdecombe: I shall. I would say to that family—I am surprised that the hon. Member for Monklands, West has not already done so—that tribunals are specifically designed to be user-friendly, cheap and informal. The majority of successful cases before tribunals are those where there is no representation.

The Education Act 1993 and the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 set out extremely clear provisions for disabled pupils and students. We have already said many times during the debate that the Department for Education is carrying out an audit of accessibility to establish the current position on access within schools, but the majority of schoolchildren with special educational needs are already in mainstream schools and there has been a vast increase in the percentage of children with statements, right across the age range, who are now taught in mainstream schools. With due respect to the hon. Members who were concerned about the issue, the Government are ahead in their thinking and are already beginning to take action of the sort that we have been asked to follow.

Of course, education will be caught by the conditions imposed on employers in the Bill. Schools will have to observe non-discriminatory practices in employment, and vocational training—which is provided under the Employment and Training Act 1973—will be covered by the Bill. We are left with schools which are already subject to an audit and which have made remarkable progress in a fairly short time.

A further question which was raised about education referred to the fact that only new schools will be accessible under the legislation. However, it is worth pointing out that, each year, half the capital budget goes on new build, and schools will have to observe the rules. It is not reasonable to suggest that there is only a limited amount of new build and that nothing else will be covered.

I am grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) intends to vote against the reasoned amendment, and his speech about his reasons for coming to that decision should stand as an example to those who may be thinking of taking a different course.

My hon. Friend asked about the importance of addressing the question of lack of disabled access to our courts. The Government place a high priority on ensuring that disabled people are able to access our courts. Much work has already been done in that area. For example, at least one court room in every new Crown and county court is equipped with an infra-red hearing system for people who have poor hearing. Courts will be subject to the new right of access and we will bring forward proposals for consultation on how that right will apply in this area.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon that we make provision in our tribunals for hearing and sight-impaired individuals and for those with communication difficulties. Special arrangements are made to ensure that they are helped in that context.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will my hon. Friend consider extending that support, for example, to assisting disabled people in preparing their cases before they come to the tribunals? Could that be associated with green form support?

Miss Widdecombe: Some legal aid is available to disabled people in preparing for tribunals, but I shall undertake to look further at what my hon. Friend has said.

The winding-up speech of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) departed in tone from much of the debate. He asked how the Government could be trusted with looking after the rights of people with disabilities. All he has to do is look at our record of caring for people with disabilities. I suggest that he look at the dozens of measures that we have implemented since 1979. I shall list some, in case Labour Members have forgotten them.

Do Labour Members recall how we look after not only the disabled but their carers? We extended the invalid care allowance to non-relatives in 1984. The Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations 1983 placed further requirements on local authorities concerning assessment and statements for school children with special educational needs.

What about the introduction of the disablement advisory service in 1983-84? What about the introduction of the severe disablement allowance, the disability living allowance, the disability working allowance and the sheltered placement scheme? What about the provisions that we put in place for building regulations? What about the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 and the provisions in the Education Reform Act 1988? We have introduced all those measures, but the Opposition do not think that we can be trusted.

Do Labour Members have a record which compares to that? Of course they do not. Tonight, we have a choice: we can accept the Bill and move towards the most comprehensive proposal for safeguarding the rights of disabled people that has come forward in decades, or we can reject the Bill and return to the situation of last year, with a thoroughly unsatisfactory, very ambitious but very impractical substitute measure.

Mr. Berry: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: No, I am afraid that I will not give way at this point. The last time I gave way to the hon. Gentleman, he quoted 91 per cent. of 11 as a definitive

explanation of the views of employers. I shall not give way to Opposition Members, and I hope that no one in the House will give way to the reasoned amendment. I hope that we shall now put on its journey towards the statute book a major measure which everybody out there who is disabled or who is caring for the disabled wants and hopes to see.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 280, Noes 307.

Division No. 47] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Duinnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffd, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian

Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Stephen Byers and
Mr. Peter Mandelson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Saltby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Boneor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cthorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'byire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Horden, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Ritkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'th'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Waller, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*

Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and Mr. Simon Burns.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 December],

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Disability Discrimination Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(1) any sums required by the Secretary of State—

(a) for making payments to persons appointed under, or in accordance with arrangements made under, the Act;

(b) for paying expenses incurred by the National Disability Council; and

(c) in respect of any other expenditure incurred by him under or by virtue of the Act;

(2) any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown in complying with any provision of the Act; and

(3) any increase attributable to the Act in sums payable out of money so provided under or by virtue of any other enactment—

[Mr. Lightbown.]

Question agreed to.

Local Government

10.16 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Local Government (Compensation for Redundancy) Regulations 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 3025), dated 28th November 1994, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th December, be annulled.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to move the motion on the Order Paper standing in the name of myself and my hon. Friends. It is not often that the Liberal Democrats have an opportunity to initiate a debate in the House. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Liberal Democrats will not only initiate a debate; they will be heard in the House. Will Members who are leaving do so quickly? Close the doors so that we can hear what the hon. Member for Newbury has to say.

Mr. Rendel: I am especially pleased that we have today an opportunity to bring before the House a matter of such crucial importance. It is crucial not just to the individuals in local government who may be unfortunate enough to lose their jobs through redundancy but to the whole process of local government reform itself.

The regulations that the motion seeks to annul are unfair, inadequate and unlikely to attract sufficient numbers of voluntary redundancies. It is, therefore, important that the House should have a chance to debate them. I hope that as a result of the debate the Government will accept the annulment and return with an improved set of regulations as soon as possible. As the regulations cover England and Wales, but not Scotland, I hope that the annulment, which will result if the motion is passed later tonight, will persuade the Government to withdraw the equivalent set of regulations in Scotland.

The regulations have three main purposes: part II puts in place a scheme for redundancy payments above the statutory minimum for cases of redundancy that are separate from those caused by the reorganisation of local government. Part III deals with redundancy payments and early retirement for employees who lose their jobs as a result of local government reorganisation; and part IV seeks to overcome some of the difficulties caused when the notorious north Tyneside judgment led to an unforeseen reduction in the level of pension for some ex-local government employees, who had previously been made redundant or who left in the interests of the efficiency of the service.

Most of my remarks this evening will be directed towards part III, but it may be appropriate at this point to begin with a few remarks about the inaccuracies of parts II and IV.

First, I pay tribute to the various bodies which have done their best to provide the Government with what would have been an acceptable set of regulations for local government redundancies. The local government associations, the Staff Commission and Unison in particular have all done valuable work in making sensible proposals and, in doing so, have given me invaluable support in considering how to react to the Government's response.

Those bodies consider part II to be the least unacceptable part of the proposals. Unison is unhappy that some degree of discretion is allowed to local councils by

[Mr. Rendel]

part II, but it is largely welcomed by the local authority associations. There is good reason to support some discretion in cases where we are not dealing with a large scale redundancy programme, as we may well be during the period of local government reorganisation.

However, it is greatly to be regretted that that discretion is fettered to the extent that the maximum payments allowed under that part are still well below payments which are being offered to civil servants in many cases.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing such an urgent matter to the attention of the House. Is it not extraordinary that in Wales the level of payments given to redundant local government officers will be even lower than in England to start with and, even more extraordinary, to emphasise the point that has just been made, civil servants in the Welsh Office, perhaps with a similar experience and background to those in local government, will receive about £72,000 in redundancy pay, whereas the equivalent in local government will receive as little as £29,000? It is extraordinary that the Secretary of State cannot control his own Department while doing this to people in local government.

Mr. Rendel: I feel at least as sorry for the Welsh as I feel for the English in this case. Surely, in considering the different merits of civil servants and local government officers, the Government should recognise that what is sauce for the goose should also be sauce for the gander.

The attempt in part IV to overcome the problems produced by the north Tyneside judgment is also welcome in so far as it goes, but it is no better than a half-hearted and partial solution to the problems. Not all those affected will be covered by the new measures and those who are affected will, for the most part, not be fully compensated.

The fact that the compensation is discretionary is, in this case, simply a temptation to those local authorities which tend not to act in a responsible way in relation to their staff. After all, these are staff who, by definition, finished their service with the local authority some time ago. Clearly, the pressure on the local authority to treat them properly is so much reduced that we would be foolish to allow an unnecessary level of discretion in this case.

The Government should have put the pensioners affected back in the position that they were in before the north Tyneside judgment was made. That would have been the fair way to deal with the situation. After all, it is not the pensioners' fault that the law was misunderstood by those who should have known better. The pensioners should not now have to pay any of the costs of that misunderstanding.

I come now to what most of us consider to be the heart of the regulations, or at least the section which has the greatest importance for the immediate future—the section which deals with local government reorganisation. Sadly, not only is part III the heart of the regulations, but it is the part in the greatest need of significant amendment.

The first and most telling criticism of all is that the maximum level of payments to be made under the regulations is, quite simply, far too low, especially in relation to precedents set in previous episodes of local government reorganisation and by the modern day civil service.

For example, the maximum level set in the 1986 reorganisation for a 49-year-old with service throughout his or her career was 82 weeks' pay compared with a maximum of 66 weeks' pay under these regulations. It might be said that those were different, easier times, when the country could afford more; times when it was not so necessary to watch every penny. Is that the Government's argument? Are they really arguing that the economy has got steadily worse in the past 10 years of Conservative rule, so we can now afford to pay people only 80 per cent. of what we could afford to pay them 10 years ago? Surely not.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): A few moments ago, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) made a valid point about the redundancy pay level available to local government employees in Wales. Does my hon. Friend accept that a further problem is overlaid on the quantum and it especially affects local government officers who face redundancy in rural Wales? They face the grave problem of finding new jobs, if they have lived in a rural area for the past 15 or 20 years, and if their families have settled in those rural areas. Does my hon. Friend think that a strong case exists for protecting in particular those many local government employees in rural mid-Wales, who face terrible uncertainty and financial loss?

Mr. Rendel: Indeed. I accept the point made by my hon. and learned Friend. His case is all the stronger in that Wales has not been treated in the same way as England. Wales went through its organisation process by diktat of the Minister, rather than by a process of agreement by the people of the country.

The argument that the Government might think that we are now poorer is, in some ways, refuted by what is happening in the civil service. The very same Treasury mandarins who insist that 66 weeks pay must be the maximum for local government officials, have managed to negotiate a package for redundancies from their own Ministry which, I understand, amounts to a maximum payment of no less than 156 weeks pay. That, however, is not the only fault in part III of the regulations, even if it is the most obviously hypocritical.

I welcome the fact that the Government have decided that the scheme to be introduced for people under 50 is to be mandatory. In a major reorganisation of this sort, it is right that all employees who stand to be made redundant across the whole country should know what to expect by way of compensation. Nothing is guaranteed further to inflame an already emotive situation than for different councils to offer different redundancy terms as they go through the same trauma of reorganisation.

The fact that the Government have been forced to recognise the strength of that argument for people who are under 50 makes it all the more strange that they have failed to recognise that the argument is just as strong for people who are over 50. That is another serious fault in the regulations and another reason why the annulment should be agreed tonight, so that the Government can introduce a new set of regulations to ensure that all local government employees are fairly treated and have a clear picture of what their rights are.

A third problem lies in the failure of the Government to introduce any special provisions for people in the age bracket of 40 to 49. Unfortunately, I have been in the position of trying to find work when aged over 40. Who knows, had it not been for the people of the Newbury

constituency asking me to carry out my present responsibilities, I might still be looking for work. Besides, I am sure that all hon. Members have come across several constituents who have complained to them bitterly about the ageism of employers, about the way in which, in some careers, it is now almost impossible to get even an interview, let alone to get a job, once one has passed the magic figure of 40.

There is a pressing need, therefore, to make special provision for people who are in that especially difficult part of their careers. They are far too young to retire—what a waste it would be if retirement were their only option—and yet they are old enough to find it desperately difficult to find another job.

Finally on part III, there is the inadequacy of the provisions for people whose work for local government has, so far, been limited either because they are part-timers, or because they have only recently taken up their local government employment. Those people, more often women than men, do not deserve to be neglected just because they have not yet had the chance to put in a long period of service. Their needs should be provided for in the regulations.

Why is this all so important? Whenever we think of the local government reorganisation shambles, as it has turned out to be, we must all hope that the process, whenever it does go ahead, proceeds as smoothly as possible. We must hope that, not just for the sake of the employees concerned as they go through what will no doubt turn out to be a very traumatic period for some of them, but, perhaps even more important, for the sake of all the recipients of local authority services—residents of local authority areas, many of whom are the very people who elected us to speak for them here. Many of those people fear that local authority services will be disrupted by the reorganisation.

One way in which we can allay some of those fears is to ensure that, where redundancies and early retirements are necessary, they take place smoothly and with the maximum acceptance by the employees involved. Surely experience has taught us that to offer redundancy terms less good that those that have been offered in similar circumstances in the past is a sure way to create discontent and low morale. That is true not only of those who are eventually forced to accept the terms but—this is important—of those who are left behind.

If the Government sincerely want local government reorganisation to be a success, one of their first tasks should be to improve the regulations to ensure that all the redundancies that it is expected to cause can be voluntary rather than compulsory.

Although this is not at the heart of the debate, let me say in passing that the Government's failure to provide adequate funds for the costs of local government reorganistion in areas such as Berskshire where, on top of the transitional costs, there are expected to be on-going costs rather than on-going savings—can serve only to exacerbate the problem of redundancy costs. Indeed, it may even force some councils to use the discretion that the Government are giving them to minimise redundancy payments, which can only make the problem of inadequate payments even worse.

We see, then, just how fundamentally the regulations demand to be improved: indeed, I believe that the very success of local government reorganisation hangs on their being improved. This is another example of how the Government have got it in for local government, and local government officers, in a big way. What is it about local government that makes this Conservative Administration hate it so much? Could it be that the Government know that the number of Conservative councillors is falling year by year, and that most of the seats are being taken over by Liberal Democrats?

Whatever it is, the Government would be well advised to admit tonight that the regulations are nowhere near adequate. If they refuse to vote to annul the regulations—as my hon. Friends and I will—they will find that their decision traps them yet deeper in the mire into which they have fallen over the whole question of local government reform. Tonight, the Liberal Democrats have provided the Government with an opportunity to overcome the difficulties in which the regulations will land them otherwise; they should seize that opportunity with both hands.

10.23 pm

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): I am surprised by the prayer, and by the comments of the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel)—although I congratulate him on moving the motion and giving us an opportunity to debate it.

I am surprised first by the hon. Gentleman's claim that the local authority associations do not support the proposals, because I have a piece of paper from the Association of District Councils that suggests that they do support them. Secondly, I am surprised that the Liberal party—which began the week with a demand for the Labour party to come clean over its spending plans, and sought to cost the expenditure of that same party only a few days later—should seek to increase public expenditure as it is tonight. Is there much difference between the two Opposition parties?

Thirdly, I am surprised because it appears that Unison has yet another spokesperson on the Opposition Benches. Fourthly, I am surprised that the hon. Member for Newbury seems to think that one can make an argument in favour of increasing expenditure and improving conditions of employment by mounting one settlement upon another. We know that is the very reason why inflation has gone out of control in the past.

One cannot take the civil service settlement and seek to improve on it, because in turn somebody will come along with an attempt to improve it further, which leads inevitably to escalation. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] I hear the cries of the Opposition. That way leads to ruin, because each settlement is taking more public expenditure than the previous one, and adds more to inflation, step by gruesome step.

Mr. Rogers: Why does not the hon. Gentleman follow the logic of his own argument and attack the Ministers who agreed to the civil service settlement, rather than trying to exploit people in local government who have no real voice? If there is a bad settlement—the hon. Gentleman seems to think that the civil service settlement was bad—why does he not criticise Ministers?

Mr. Thomason: I did not say that the civil service settlement was a bad one. My argument is that the Labour party—and apparently now the Liberal Democrat party—

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is seeking to use one settlement to step above another to increase public expenditure. That is the old story which we have heard so often.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that the McKinstry memorandum in *The Spectator*, in which Leo McKinstry described the way in which the Labour party has operated in local government and said what a great indication that was of what it would be like in government, goes very much to the heart of the issue and explains the parrot cries from Opposition Members?

Mr. Thomason: My hon. Friend is right.

I do not wish to detain the House, so I shall briefly ask my hon. Friend the Minister whether he can define "material date" for the purposes of the regulations, and whether he can confirm that the regulations are improving local discretion by giving power to local government to make decisions. Can he also confirm that the national joint negotiating bodies are likely to meet later this week to agree tariffs for the over-50s that are generous, and to agree to settle terms that some of us consider to be more than fair? Can he further confirm that meetings are taking place on 26 January between the local authorities and the unions, which could give a guaranteed offer of new jobs after reorganisation to those who want them? Will not that answer the criticisms raised by the hon. Member for Newbury?

Does my hon. Friend agree that the present proposed costs—not any enhanced costs—of this provision could be met by savings that will be generated from the local government review? Does he further agree that this measure should be welcomed on both sides of the Chamber as being in the interests of local government employees?

10.36 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Tonight the House has a very clear choice. We are dealing with the future of people who will lose their jobs in local councils through no fault of their own, either through general redundancy or through the local government reorganisation that the Government are pushing through. The question is whether such people should get a fair deal, and the choice before the House tonight is whether people are treated fairly or meanly.

The choice is not between a generous settlement and a mean settlement—it is a much narrower choice between a fair settlement and a mean settlement. Needless to say, the alternative that the Government are proposing tonight is a mean alternative. We all know that the Government are extremely generous to rich people, and that they are happy to pour money into the pockets and handbags of the bosses of privatised industries. They look after themselves rather nicely, and they are very mean to people who cannot fight back.

The regulations cover three categories of staff—staff who are likely to be made redundant by the local government review, staff who may be made redundant generally and pensioners whose pensions were cut as a result of the court decisions on North Tyneside.

First, on the local government review, contrary to what the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) said, the staff are not seeking any leapfrogging improvement on what has gone before. They are simply asking for a settlement along the lines that the Government conceded in 1986, when the metropolitan counties were abolished—the terms agreed by Margaret Thatcher. One might summarise it by saying that the deal that she put together, John Major has decided to put asunder. The settlement can thus be simply categorised as meaner than Thatcher, and it is difficult to think of anything meaner than that.

The settlement is not merely meaner than Thatcher, but worse than what the Staff Commission recommended to the Government, worse than the terms offered to the civil service, and worse than severance payments paid to other categories of people for whom the Government are responsible. The boss of Severn Trent Water, for example, got £512,000 as part of his severance agreement, which was entirely the Government's responsibility as they passed the legislation that enabled him to pay himself that enormous amount.

If someone is made redundant as part of the local government review, the regulations allow maximum compensation of 66 weeks, which compares with the 82 weeks to which Mrs. Thatcher agreed in 1986 and which the Staff Commission recommended, and the 156 weeks that this Government and these Ministers have agreed will be available in the civil service.

Let us consider an example of what will happen in Wales as a result of the regulations. Under the civil service severance agreement, a 45-year-old civil servant in the Welsh Office with 26 years' service, earning £23,000, will get £71,000, but a local government officer in Wales, aged 45—perhaps the civil servant's twin brother or sister—and earning £23,000 after 26 years' service, would get £29,570 at the most, which cannot be fair or reasonable.

The scheme is mandatory only up to the age of 50, or for people over that age who are not entitled to a pension when they give up work. It also provides some special arrangements for people who are entitled to a pension. Once again, the Government have chosen the mean-minded alternative. Generally, those over 50 who are entitled to a pension will receive only statutory redundancy pay because the Government have apparently decided that the pension, which people have worked and paid for, should be taken into account when they allow a special severance payment as a result of a local government review that they introduced. People who are paid a salary will have to live on a pension and statutory redundancy, without the Government making up any of the difference.

The Government and the hon. Member for Bromsgrove, who is supporting them, claim that they cannot afford better terms. Presumably they think that, from a Government point of view, times are harder than they were in 1986.

There are two choices. No one knows how many people may be made redundant as a result of the local government review. If it is to be a large number, massive savings in expenditure will result in the years to come and it would surely be easy to find the money to pay a decent severance payment out of those savings. If few people are to be affected by redundancy, the sums will be so trivial that it will be equally easy for the Government or local government to find them.

The second aspect of the regulations is the enhanced payment for people made redundant because of changes in the internal organisation of their council. I admit that

the regulations improve the maximum under such arrangements, from 24.5 to 66 weeks, but that is not the 82 weeks for which the staff have been asking, and it is not mandatory. The payments are entirely discretionary and, given the choice between a fair and a mean arrangement, yet again the Government have chosen a mean one.

The third aspect is the North Tyneside judgment. When the district auditor went through North Tyneside council's books, he said that enhanced severance payments and top-up retirement bonuses given to staff were unlawful. That has left existing pensioners, not just in north Tyneside but in other parts of the country, who retired in good faith with a higher pension as part of those agreements, with lower pensions. Indeed, some of them have been asked to pay back the lump sums that they received. All those involved in those agreements—employers and employees—were acting in good faith and believed that they were acting lawfully at all times. Councils of all parties believe that to be the case.

One of the areas most affected, which is dear to the hearts of Tory Members, is Tory Westminster council. It agreed to some of the biggest enhanced pension arrangements and pay-offs when people left local government service of any council in Britain. Some 600 of its former staff—now its pensioners—are now faced with substantial reductions in their living standards. The same applies to agreements with the then Tory Hillingdon council.

Everyone agrees that the matter should be put right. What everybody thought was lawful and reasonable should be made lawful and reasonable. But it is not being made so by the regulations, which fail to put pensioners in the position that they thought they were in before that unexpected judgment.

In passing, I comment on the strange inconsistencies of the district audit service, which for years said nothing about those enhanced payments. In the year when district auditors in North Tyneside identified the payments as unlawful, the district auditors in Hillingdon and Westminster apparently still saw them as lawful. We need more consistency in the system.

Furthermore, the arrangements are not mandatory. Whether Westminster pensioners get back even what is permitted under the regulations is entirely in the hands of Westminster city council, from which we can expect no sensible decision. In other councils, all the money that pensioners have lost will not be made up. Indeed, the judgment may affect other pensioners who were paid off before the period covered by the regulations, and they may still lose. Once again, these are sloppily drafted and mean-minded regulations. What the Government are doing might be described as "a Maxwell" on the pensioners, but in this case it is by statutory instrument.

Various people advise me that aspects of the regulations are technically unsound and may lead to the Minister having to come back within a very short period to put them right. My Welsh colleagues want to know why the period covered by the regulations is 18 months in England but only 15 months in Wales.

The regulations are mean to council staff who lose their jobs through no fault of their own. They are in marked contrast to the generous attitude that the Government have towards themselves and their colleagues. Since the settlement in 1986, the Conservatives have introduced and benefited from ministerial severance payments. Those are made to people who lose their jobs not through no fault of their own but either because even the Prime Minister finally recognises that they are totally incompetent or because they are up to something, financially or with somebody who is not their spouse. Those seem to be the reasons why Ministers lose their jobs, yet they get severance payments in those circumstances.

The other part of the ministerial severance package is that Ministers then go on to jobs in the City with Barclays bank, in industries that they have privatised, or in merchant banks that have taken part in the privatisation process. The Government are very generous to themselves but mean to everybody else. The regulations are typical of what they are up to, and people are sick of it.

10.49 pm

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry) *rose—*

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As a defender of Back Benchers, do you believe that in a debate of one and quarter hours it is appropriate that there should be three opening speeches and three closing speeches from Front-Bench spokesmen? Do you think it appropriate that we should have had just one speech from a Conservative Back Bencher and not even one from an Opposition Back Bencher? That is an abuse of parliamentary procedure and I ask you to protect Back Benchers on both sides of the House from such abuse.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): That point of order has been noted.

Mr. Curry: This is a serious matter because people's livelihoods are affected and they are naturally anxious. It merits a serious debate.

Although I do not agree with the conclusions of the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), he treated the subject seriously. The hon. Member for Holborn and St.Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has a particular talent for disfiguring any subject with which he comes into contact—mainly, it must be said, as a pretext for his failure to understand the substance of it.

Local government reorganisation is at an advanced stage. The commission has submitted final reports for all 39 shire counties and the Cleveland order has been approved by both Houses. I know that the hon. Members for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) and for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) are looking forward to joining their colleagues in the Lobby tonight.

We are consulting on draft orders to implement changes in Avon, Humberside and York and we are aiming to seek parliamentary approval soon, in time for elections to be held in May. Further orders will be laid as decisions are taken.

Change is a normal part of local government. The search for efficiency, the changes in function and the growing success of the role of local government as an enabler has inevitably meant that there will be different staffing requirements. No organisation can petrify its structure if it is to respond to public needs and its own search for greater efficiency.

That is the context in which the new local government compensation regulations have been introduced. Those regulations are not confined just to local government

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reorganisation, but, as hon. Members have already noted, they achieve three things. First, they provide a better and more flexible general compensation scheme, for which local authority employers have long asked, for use in all cases—not just reorganisation. Secondly, we have made special extra provisions to suit the particular circumstances of local government reorganisation, reflecting the key role to be played by local government staff in the transition to restructured authorities.

Thirdly, we have provided the means for compensation to be paid to those pensioners who are adversely affected by the North Tyneside Court of Appeal judgment. Only one of the three elements covered in the regulations therefore refers to local government reorganisation.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) *rose—*

Mr. Curry: I will give way, but you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, no doubt want me to press ahead in the interests of Back Benchers.

Mr. O'Brien: If the Minister will not accept the annulment of the regulations, will he support those local authorities that are involved in the reorganisation of local government which do not wish to make people compulsorily redundant? Would he agree to negotiate a national agreement on severance and conditions for those who agree to leave their employment voluntarily?

Mr. Curry: It is entirely up to a new council to make staffing dispositions; the Government do not intend to lay down whether redundancies should be compulsory or voluntary. It is up to councils to seek the changes by the methods which they arrive at. That is what the principle of allowing local authority discretion means. I understand that the negotiating body is likely to agree soon that the discretionary awards in the regulations will be paid at the maximum. That could obviously benefit the over-50s and the other groups covered by the regulations.

Mr. Llwyd: Can the Minister explain why Wales is being treated differently? Is he aware that, during the passage of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994, the implications of reorganisation were raised time and time with Welsh Office Ministers? Assurances were given about improving conditions and so on, but to date nothing has been done. We have been badly treated by the Government.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman knows that there are some differences between England and Wales.

Mr. Rogers: Why?

Mr. Curry: If the hon. Gentleman will wait, I will tell him.

The first difference is that the prescribed period to which part III applies in England is 18 months after the vesting day; in Wales, it runs from three months before to a year after. That is the result of a consultation that was undertaken. In Wales, the consultation resulted in the choice of that formula; in England, people preferred a different period. The United Kingdom has constituent parts which have their own characteristics, so I see no problem in that.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke) *rose—*

Mr. Curry: I have not finished the answer to the first intervention yet.

As far as the other condition is concerned, loss of employment in Wales must be attributable to provisions made under the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994, because it is intended to target part III to staff losing their jobs because of reorganisation, and not for other reasons.

I think that you would want me to make progress, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in view of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen).

As I said, we have made additional provision because of the specific circumstances of reorganisation. I have also mentioned the North Tyneside position.

The regulations provide new and significantly improved compensation terms for local government staff in England and Wales in cases of redundancy, which may occur as part of the normal operations of local government. Before the regulations came into force, local government employees aged below 50 could receive only the minimum statutory payments on redundancy. The most that could be given to an employee under the age of 50 was 24 weeks' pay. Under the new regulations, for all future general cases of redundancy, local authorities have the discretion to make payments of up to 66 weeks' pay for employees, based on a tariff according to age and service.

Employees aged over 50 have, for many years, had a better deal than those aged below 50. If they have two years' service, they are entitled to immediate payment of their pension and pension lump sum. In addition, if they have at least five years' service, they may receive a discretionary top-up to their pension benefits. That provision has not changed. Local government employees aged over 50 facing redundancy as a result of normal change in local government can still receive those benefits.

As well as introducing significantly better severance terms for general cases of redundancy, the regulations provide extra benefits for employees made redundant from local government service specifically as a result of local government reorganisation. Those benefits are, first, that the maximum amounts permitted under the 66-week tariff are mandatory for staff aged under 50 affected by reorganisation. [HON. MEMBERS: "How much?"] They are maximum and mandatory. Secondly, for the over-50s made redundant in reorganisation cases, there are options for further compensation payments at the employer's discretion. I shall say more about that later.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Curry: If I can make progress, I will return to that later.

We have also taken the opportunity provided by the regulations to provide local authorities with new powers to enable them to compensate those of their pensioners who suffered reductions in their pension payments as a result of the 1992 Court of Appeal decision in Allsop *v.* North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council. As hon. Members will recall, that judgment declared unlawful the

local severance scheme operated by North Tyneside council and, as a consequence, several councils had to terminate pension claims made under their local schemes—although I have not heard of cases of pensioners being required to pay back lump sums. If my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) has specific references to that, I will be pleased to receive them.

Many of those pensions, which authorities had agreed, had been in payment for some years before being reduced. Some of those pensioners have had to wait more than two years for compensation, and the new powers that we are giving to local authorities will be widely welcomed.

All those new provisions, which flow directly from discussions that we have had with the Staff Commissions, the local authority associations and the Local Government Management Board, incorporate the results of two extensive consultation exercises among all interested parties, and provide the framework that local government has sought.

We have modified our proposals substantially in the light of the consultation exercises. Specifically, we have amended our proposals to make a mandatory arrangement for reorganisation cases.

Mr. Steen: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, because the matter that I wish to mention will not come out in any other way. The Prime Minister said last year that there would be fewer rules and regulations in the House. There were going to be fewer rules and regulations on the Floor of the House, fewer rules and regulations upstairs and fewer downstairs. Yet every time that I enter the Chamber, there is another rule or regulation. Why do we have to take this course tonight? Only the other day I was dealing with the town and country planning regulations; now we are discussing another regulation. Is the deregulation arrangement working in the Minister's Department?

Mr. Curry: The answer to the second question is yes. The answer to the first question is that, if there is reorganisation, one has to make provision—as has been made in the past—for those people affected by it. We have taken advantage of that fact to enhance the conditions for all local authority members. My hon. Friend will appreciate that it is relatively unusual now to be here at nearly 11 pm, and perhaps we have become accustomed to slightly soft ways in the House.

Mr. Steen: Wednesday mornings and Friday mornings?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is a slave to duty.

Mr. Tipping: Although the Minister has amended the regulations to take account of criticisms, will he explain why the figure given now is 66 weeks when, back in 1986 when the metropolitan counties were abolished, 82 weeks redundancy payment was offered?

Mr. Curry *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the Minister replies I must inform the House that all the interventions—it is not a matter for the Chair to criticise them as they are in order—are ruling out hon. Members who wish to speak and who have taken the trouble to write to the Speaker to ask to speak.

Mr. Curry: I like to give way as I think that that helps the debate, but in view of your stricture, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall now try to move to the conclusion of my speech. I shall answer the question of the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) because I had anticipated it. If he has patience, we shall get there—with the tolerance of his colleagues.

The compensation package that we have adopted, as contained in the regulations, means that local government employees under the age of 50 on being made redundant as part of normal staffing changes, can now receive compensation equal to the maximum of two weeks pay for each year of local government service over the age of 23. In addition, each year of service over the age of 42 counts for five weeks pay, leading to a total equivalent to 66 weeks pay. Those improvements also apply to redundancies due to reorganisation, with the important proviso that in this circumstance it is mandatory for local authorities to pay the maximum amounts available.

Secondly, we have also provided that extra powers are available to provide benefits to those aged 50 and over made redundant as a result of reorganisation. At the employers' discretion, such employees' pensions can be increased if they have five or more years service, or they can receive the lump sum compensation payment—up to 66 weeks pay in some cases. For those with between two and five years service, we are making available the option of additional compensation in lieu of immediate payment of pension.

In formulating the regulations, we had helpful and detailed assistance from the Local Government Staff Commission in England and the Staff Commission for Wales. The Staff Commission was expressly asked to consider whether there should be a special scheme for staff made redundant as a result of reorganisation and, if so, whether the arrangements should be discretionary or mandatory. After consideration, it advised that there should be a special scheme, and that is now provided. It also recommended that the scheme should be mandatory—a proposal that has been implemented in respect of staff under 50. A special mandatory level payment has been included as one of the options for the over-50s.

Other recommendations by the Staff Commission—for example that the age group of 45 to 49-year-olds should be targeted for the highest payments and that the age service banding should closely follow that used in previous reorganisations—have also been followed. In some respects, such as the 18-month period for the reorganisation terms in England, we have bettered what the Staff Commission recommended.

Two recommendations of the Staff Commission were not followed in full. Those were that the maximum limit for payments should be set at 82 weeks and that it should be mandatory for over-50s to receive maximum added years enhancement to their pension and pension lump sum.

The precedent of the GLC and the metropolitan counties abolition is prayed in aid. However, the 82 weeks maximum was available in 1986 only to a very limited group of employees. In fact, employees had to be aged exactly 49 and to have over 25 years service to qualify

[Mr. Curry]

for that amount. Anybody aged less than 49 could not receive 82 weeks and received similar amounts in 1986 to those available under the regulations. A 45-year-old with 27 or more years service would receive 66 weeks pay under both the 1986 regulations and under our new regulations.

We have targeted the maximum 66 weeks to employees aged between 45 and 49—the very group that the Staff Commission and other consultees asked us specifically to earmark for higher compensation payments. The 66 weeks maximum was settled upon only after full account was taken of all the relevant factors. I am sure that it is the right level—it is more than two and a half times better than the compensation previously available to local government employees. Taken together with the other measures that we have introduced or are proposing—including our proposed compensation for detriment, the consultation period for which closed yesterday—those regulations provide a very much improved and flexible statutory-based compensation package.

The other recommendation of the Staff Commission which we have not fully followed is that staff over 50 years of age should receive mandatory payment of added years, which results in higher pension payments. I believe that this would be an expensive imposition on local authorities' discretion. Under our proposals, employing authorities may choose to pay maximum added years if they believe that the case for doing so is justified. We have also provided the alternative of a lump sum payment according to personal circumstances. Such a single sum may be more welcome to individuals than relatively small increases in continuing pension payments.

Local government employers and their employees now know where they stand on redundancy payments and they can plan for the future. The decisions themselves are for the councils to make. We have provided a proper statutory protection for staff affected by reorganisation and for all local authority staff affected by change. If the motion to reject the package is successful, not only will the package for staff affected by local government reorganisation fall, but so will the great improvement in the security of all local government staff. It will also mean that pensioners who stand to receive compensation for cuts in their pensions will be immediate losers. I trust that the House will firmly reject such an outcome.

Mr. Dobson: Before the hon. Gentleman sits down—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Has the hon. Gentleman given way?

Mr. Curry: Congeniality is second nature to me, as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Dobson: As I understand it, the hon. Gentleman accepts that the pensioners who retired in good faith feel that, one way or another, they have been swindled out of the pensions to which they and their employers thought that they were entitled. Can he tell us why he is not proposing a scheme which will restore to each and every one of them by right the money that they have lost as a result of the judgement? Why does he accept that some of them will not get full restoration, and why is he leaving the decision to the discretion of the councils?

Mr. Curry: First, the hon. Gentleman talks about pensioners being swindled. I think that one has to be cautious in using that sort of terminology when speaking about something that has happened as a result of a court ruling. The pensioners may feel that they were dealt with unjustly, but one must be careful how one reflects that feeling.

Secondly, we have provided for 66 weeks in the regulations which cover those people affected by both reorganisation and the normal run of changes in local authorities' competences and employment. It seems reasonable that, if 66 weeks is applied to those cases, it should apply also to the generality of cases, so that everyone is on the same footing. I think that it is a perfectly reasonable position, and the overwhelming number of pensioners will receive full compensation under that methodology.

11.7 pm

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I wish to comment on the North Tyneside follow-up and the regulations. The Minister must be much clearer about the position of pensioners who were affected by the genuine and proper decisions taken by local authorities, generally on the basis of legal advice.

Will the Minister assure the House that people who entered into agreements with local authorities that they would retire under a certain compensation package will not have that package reduced as a result of the regulations? It is most improper for the House to pass regulations that will have the effect of reducing the pensions of people who entered into an agreement with their local authorities in good faith.

While I am on that subject, I take strong exception to the comments of the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). He spoke of people who "should have known better"—presumably referring to the local authorities which made the decisions at the time. My local authority received advice from our legal officers and from counsel on the subject before we reached a decision. Certainly members of both the leading political parties took that decision seriously. The fact that the hon. Gentleman's colleague on the committee at the time walked out halfway through the meeting and refused to pass a vote on the subject is probably not untypical of the way in which the Liberal party behaves in such circumstances.

Let me also comment briefly on the issues that affect the current reorganisation of local government and the compensatory arrangements for redundancy. First, it is disappointing that the Government did not concede the general issue that was put to them by the local authority associations and the unions—that staff transfer orders should have applied to all staff. It would have been much easier to have sorted out all the arrangements for redundancy, retirement and compensation had that approach been taken.

The problem now is that staff are in totally different positions. Some are subject to staff transfer orders, some have chief officer open interviews and others have priority interviews. They do not know whether redundancy rules will apply to them. In direct service organisations, for example, staff still do not know whether their jobs will

exist after the reorganisation, although private contractors that employ people have contracts with the authorities, and the new authorities will have to honour those contracts. That is wrong, and something should be done to sort it out.

Equally, the Government have not issued any proper advice on the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 and that certainly will affect people who are made redundant. It is time the Government sorted it out. Clearly, it is a substantial mess. A general staff transfer order would have resolved that problem and allowed the redundancy issues to be sorted out in a more ordered and proper way.

I am one of the few people in the House who can think back to 1986 and say that I was party to the issues which applied to the metropolitan county reorganisation from both sides. I was both a councillor and an employee, one of Sheffield city council and the other of the South Yorkshire local authority, so I saw the regulations from both sides and generally they worked pretty well.

The question that the Minister has not answered tonight—he tried to answer it by explaining that only a small group of staff would benefit if the maximum number of weeks was 82 and not 66—is why a system which worked in 1986 has now been changed. He did not say why the Staff Commission, which recommended that exactly the same rules that applied in 1986 should apply now, was ignored. His argument that 82 weeks applied only to a certain number of staff was surely taken on board by the Staff Commission when it recommended that 82 weeks should be the maximum period. Why did he demur from the Staff Commission's decision?

Mr. Rendel: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Betts: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman as he has had his say and I am aware that others want to speak.

The Minister also did not answer why the Staff Commission recommended that the scheme for the over-50s should be mandatory. Why did the Minister not accept that recommendation? It was good enough in 1986; why is it not good enough for staff in 1995?

Those questions certainly need answering because they affect people who are not responsible for the changes. They are not staff who have been inefficient or unproductive, but staff who are affected by a political change beyond their control. They want some degree of certainty and a feeling that their interests are being recognised and looked after.

Finally, the Minister said nothing about the funding of the scheme. I agree that the scheme should be mandatory because—rightly or wrongly—the House is compelling reorganisation on local authorities. I support some of the changes, but the House is making the decisions, so the scheme should be mandatory.

The House should also make provision for the proper funding of the arrangements. All that we know for the next financial year is that the Government will top-slice £50 million of capital to allow local authorities to borrow to try to fund the schemes. We also know that money is topsliced, so every other authority in the country will suffer.

My authority represents about one hundredth of the population of the country, so if one subtracts one hundredth of the cost of £50 million from its own borrowing, it will lose £500,000 of borrowing to help fund the reorganisation schemes. My local authority, therefore, loses more than its total allocation of borrowing for social services in the city of Sheffield.

Is it not time that the Government accepted their own responsibilities and decided to fund the schemes? Will they guarantee that the sum of £50 million for 1995-96 will be substantially increased for 1996-97, when the majority of those costs will fall? Will they guarantee to provide borrowing facilities for those authorities and not do it at the expense of the other authorities in the country?

11.14 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Although there is not much point in speaking for a minute or two, I thought that the House might like to hear me.

First, I do not understand why, having just adopted the Jopling recommendations, we sat until late last night. We are sitting till midnight tonight, all Wednesday morning, afternoon and evening, on Thursday and on Friday morning. The more the House sits, the more rules and regulations it passes. These regulations are a good example of filling the time available—it is Parkinson's law. My hon. Friend the Minister beautifully and convincingly explained the reason for them, but we should not be passing more and more regulations and sitting later into the night than we did last year. We are passing more regulations in Committee upstairs, in the Chamber and in the basement, despite the Government's commitment to reducing regulations. I would like my hon. Friend the Minister to assure me that these are the last regulations that he will introduce this Session.

11.15 pm

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Part III of the regulations concerns local government reorganisation and compensation for resulting redundancies. I was involved in local government for 12 years before entering the House and I have grave reservations about the redundancy implications of reorganisation in my county of Avon.

If there are to be redundancies, it is essential to provide a fair system of compensation and ensure that the package is realistically funded. Neither is the case. It is accepted that the maximum compensation payable to staff aged 45 to 49 will be 66 weeks' pay, assuming full service from the age of 18. Few staff will be eligible for that maximum. Even then, those terms are significantly worse than those offered when metropolitan authorities were abolished in 1986. If 82 weeks' pay was thought acceptable compensation then, why should a significantly lower amount be acceptable today? The proposed compensation is worth less than the civil service scheme and is vastly poorer than that offered under the last reorganisation in 1974.

Mr. Rendel: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Berry: I would love to give way, but I am told that there is no time.

The proposed redundancy package is a poor deal for local government staff who have given good service to their communities. The scheme will not attract many voluntary redundancies, but it will lead to more compulsory redundancies from reorganisation. Even though the terms are an insult, local councils will have

[Mr. Berry]

difficulty finding the money to fund them. There will be no new money to cover the costs of reorganisation, but only limited powers to borrow.

Most redundancies will occur in 1996-97 and 1997-98. No guarantee has been given that councils will be allowed to borrow in those years as they will need to do. Any redundancy costs that cannot be funded from additional borrowing will have to be met from more cuts in services or higher council tax, if that is allowed.

The regulations provide worse compensation than for any other previous local government reorganisation. They are not fair and will not encourage voluntary redundancies. They will result in further cuts in services and jobs, and they should be opposed.

11.17 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Labour Members have explained compellingly why we oppose the regulations and want them annulled. The Minister did not touch on the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981, which are vital to Wales because only one of its counties is unaffected by the possibility that workers on the transfer will not be covered by them. As this Government-inspired scheme of local government reorganisation will affect the whole of Wales, there should be no nit-picking over the interpretation and application of TUPE.

The Government's record of interpreting TUPE shows them to have been wrong on virtually every occasion. Rather than engage in a prolonged dogfight, at the end of which the Government will be proved wrong, they should, for the sake of fairness and completeness, accept that TUPE applies to all workers in reorganised local government in Wales.

I come next to arrangements for the proper funding of the local government reorganisation. There seems to be a major debate about the exact number of people likely to be made redundant as a result of the reorganisation. Touche Ross, employed to carry out a survey of the possible consequences for jobs, suggested that about 900 people employed in central services and administrative tasks—out of a total of about 6,000—would probably lose their jobs in Wales. The Secretary of State for Wales, however, is on record as saying in the House that he expects very few people to become redundant, because of the scope for retraining and finding new jobs for people in the new unitary authorities. If this is true, it would appear that few savings will be made from these local government changes, yet savings were ostensibly the Government's reason for effecting the reorganisation.

There will be a mandatory scheme for some staff, and the Welsh Office will be prepared to provide supplementary credit approvals to cover those schemes. The Welsh Office will take account of the consequences in future years when the capping criteria are determined. For the discretionary schemes, however, no supplementary credit approvals will be provided. When local authorities apply discretionary schemes, they will not be counted for capping criteria purposes, so authorities will be in danger of being capped for trying to give their employees a fair deal. Given that the Staff Commission has recommended mandatory schemes to cover all workers who are made redundant, or who choose redundancy, the Government should be prepared to withdraw the scheme tonight and to make further changes.

The shadow Environment Secretary has already cited the huge differences between the Welsh Office redundancy scheme and the one for local government workers. The Minister of State made no attempt to justify the fact that workers in the Welsh Office will receive double what their counterparts in local government will get.

I hope that, even at this late stage, the Government will be prepared to withdraw the regulations and to introduce others based on the 1986 scheme. It has been claimed that the lower limit of 15 months for the scheme to work in Wales—as opposed to 18 months in England—resulted from consultations with local authorities; but local authorities in Wales at the time were under the impression that the period of 82 weeks would also apply to the new scheme. The Welsh Office has therefore reneged on that part of the agreement, while retaining the 15-month period. That is yet another reason why the regulations should be withdrawn and a new scheme introduced in their place.

11.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): I shall try to answer all the points raised in this short debate. The House will understand that I feel the greatest sympathy for my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), who expressed reservations about what we do here, and when we do it. I think, though, that we are making good progress with the timing.

The Government do not agree that it would be right to annul the Local Government (Compensation for Redundancy) Regulations 1994. The package that they contain is a fair and good one. Local authorities have a certain legal framework to provide equitable and affordable compensation to their employees in a variety of circumstances.

Part II of the regulations—I think that the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) called it the least unacceptable part—gives councils an opportunity to structure flexible severance packages to suit local needs, at levels that are significantly above those that applied before 28 December. These improved arrangements stem directly from discussions with the local authority associations. A higher overall limit may be preferred by some, but councils, just like anybody else, must live within their means, precisely as my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) was seeking to emphasise. The Government took the view that the tariff in part II was at the right level.

Opposition Members tended to concentrate on part III of the regulations. They say that the terms on offer for the staff who lose their jobs because of local government reorganisation are worse than those that would have been available in previous reorganisations, and are worse than those available in the civil service. Civil service pay has traditionally been set to take account of the greater job security that civil servants have, and compensation payments were set at a correspondingly higher level.

What the Opposition do not say is that the compensation for local government employees is now higher than it is for certain other groups of public sector

employees; nor have they recognised that compensation is just one aspect of terms and conditions: it is the whole package that should be compared, not just elements of it. The Government take that wider view, and terms and conditions in local government, taken as a whole, are no worse or better than in other parts of the public sector.

I accept that the compensation terms that applied when the Greater London council and metropolitan councils were abolished involved higher payments only for particular long-serving staff aged 49. That does not mean that the precedent must always be followed slavishly. The detriment consultation scheme, on which we have been consulting, would provide for potentially higher detriment payments than were available in 1986. The key feature of part III of the regulations is a mandatory scheme for staff aged under 50. That was the principal recommendation of the staff commissions for Wales and for England, and our decision to follow it has been widely welcomed.

I acknowledge that the commissions went further and recommended that there should be mandatory "added years" for staff aged over 50 who can receive an immediate pension. The Government did not feel able to accept that recommendation. We have instead provided councils, in these regulations, with a range of options for dealing with staff over 50. It would not make sense to provide a range of options but then decree that one of them—the most expensive, naturally—should be mandatory.

The hon. Members for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) all sought to allege that Wales has been treated worse in these arrangements than in previous reorganisations. I must remind them that the consultation paper issued last June said that the scheme should apply in Wales only for the calendar year 1996. We received 13 comments on that proposal.

Of those proposals, eight of the responses argued that the period should be extended beyond the calendar year 1996 to 31 March 1997. That is precisely what we have done. We responded to those consultations. Normally, it is claimed that we do not listen to consultations, but on this occasion, we did precisely that.

I want to put it into perspective because, to stress the importance of the point, we also had responses from 15 district councils and four county councils in Wales. Not one of them mentioned the point about the term, nor did a joint response by the Local Government Management Board, the Council of Welsh Districts, the Assembly of Welsh Counties and the Wales Trades Union Congress.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) was concerned that part IV of the regulations provide a legal basis for councils to make compensatory lump sum payments to pensioners who have suffered reductions in the North Tyneside case. They have waited some time for these provisions. The regulations do not attempt to restore the illegal payments that were made previously, but I hope that authorities will exercise their discretion fairly and sympathetically within the terms of the regulations. As my hon. Friend has already made clear to the House, we have brought forward the right package, and I commend it to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 265, Noes 296.

Division No. 48] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S

Killoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(G. Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Archy Kirkwood and Mr Don Foster.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Simon
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas

MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Mitchell and Mr. Derek Conway.

Question accordingly negatived.

TRANSPORT

Ordered,

That Mr. James Hill be discharged from the Transport Committee and Sir David Madel be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

11.42 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I welcome the opportunity to debate—not before time—what has happened, is happening and will happen to the South Thames training and enterprise council. I also welcome my colleagues from south London who are present; I have received apologies from others who cannot be here, but are no less concerned about the matter than I am.

It is a paradox that yesterday London Pride launched its prospectus, containing a section called "Raising Skills". That section in turn contained a subsection entitled "Training", and read as follows:

"London's most pressing challenge is more fundamental. The capital has a very high requirement for basic skills and literacy training which is not being sufficiently met. Current programmes need to be extended to allow more Londoners to progress to medium and higher skill levels.

The Partnership believes: Government must rectify the under-funding of the London TECs. Historically they have been substantially underfunded on key programmes relative to TECs elsewhere. If London is to achieve the targets set, it is essential that this differentiation is addressed."

The partnership prospectus addressed the need for effective mechanisms for providing training in the capital city.

By way of background, training and enterprise councils have been in existence for four years, and there are 82 in this country. Scotland has a parallel system. They were a Government idea, and it was intended that they would pull together the various training agencies to provide training for school leavers and for the short and long-term unemployed. They would also help businesses to develop the skills necessary either to expand or to make themselves more efficient in the future.

TECs have been given certain jobs in relation to which they are effectively a Government agency. They are responsible for administering youth training, employment training, training for work for the long-term unemployed and for training credits. From the beginning, the Government made a commitment and statements were made of various objectives. All of us who were Members at that time were sent promotional material on the subject.

It was clear that the Government were encouraging participation from the private sector, and encouraging people to join in with help to target training on areas where long-term growth was expected. The private sector was encouraged to develop higher skills, and particularly to offer support in areas where there had been a decline in industry. South Thames is unique because it is definitely the most needy area for such an agency.

The first chairman of the South Thames TEC, when talking to a European training conference in 1992, said:

"South Thames exhibits all the characteristics of a deprived inner city area. The community we serve is made up of a million residents of whom one third come from the ethic minorities. In one school in Lambeth 115 languages are spoken."

He added that the TEC covers some of the poorest and most deprived districts in London as he talked about the needs with which the South Thames TEC must deal.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

Its budget of £46 million has successfully grown during the past four years from £25 million at the beginning. It was the pilot TEC for adult training credit, and it covers 13 per cent. of London's population and 11 per cent. of the work force. All four of the boroughs affected have urban priority areas, poor housing, high levels of crime, high unemployment and special training needs. We have been particular victims of a declining manufacturing industry, and the recession has hit us very hard.

It is not surprising then that, of the top 10 constituencies in Britain in terms of unemployment, four are within the area of the South Thames TEC. Those four include my constituency, which is now in the invidious position of being the fourth worst in the country.

Everything initially appeared to be going well with the South Thames TEC; so well that the Government regularly sang its praises. The current Chancellor of the Duchy even had a go at the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) for not paying tribute to

"the tremendous amount of work being done by the South Thames training and enterprise council in providing opportunities to the long-term unemployed."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 907.]

It continued to be successful and respected until about a year ago, when there first appeared to be some financial difficulties.

During 1994, those difficulties became more and more obvious. In August, the chief executive resigned. In passing, I would like to pay tribute to Mike Hanson who—I think my colleagues would agree—did an excellent job in presenting and promoting south London locally and further afield. We were very sad that he went. When the history of this episode is written, I hope that no one will say that the fault lay at his door. He tried extremely hard to ensure that the TEC delivered, even though it did not always give the Government the messages that they wanted to hear, and continued to act independently, which is important.

The TEC continued to serve the local community, as the deprivation figures became worse in south Thames. Last year, we ended up as the TEC area in Britain with the highest levels of unemployment and the lowest levels of job availability. Let there be no mistake, therefore, about the importance of the TEC to south London.

In the autumn, a breach notice was issued because of various financial irregularities. Apparently, the TEC did not have the proper financial management structures in place to ensure that invoices that were presented were genuine. Further management changes took place and many assurances were given, on the record, that matters were being sorted out.

On 21 December, after the House had risen for the recess, the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) wound up South Thames TEC. On that day it went into receivership. The Government had two options: to come to the rescue and support the TEC; or, to pull the plug. All the information in the possession of those who were directly informed suggests that the Government specifically decided to withdraw their support and to pull the plug.

There are two possible explanations. The first is that the Government were initially complacent and unprepared and then had not taken seriously the concerns expressed locally, or given local management the chance to respond to the breach notice. If it was due to a lack of preparedness, the manifestations are as serious for jobs and training in south London as the lack of preparedness of the Japanese Government to deal with recent emergencies in Japan—and I am not being flippant. The Government were not ready to pick up the pieces and to deal with the problem.

The second explanation is that the Government intended to pull the plug because they were not happy with a high-spending TEC that was trying to ensure that the Government kept on putting the money in and, not least, because the Secretary of State does not like TECs very much, to set an example to the other TECs. I do not take a view one way or the other. I know, however, that the right solution was not to allow the TEC suddenly to disappear.

An extraordinary situation has resulted from that December disappearance. I understand that it has also happened once in Scotland, but I do not remember an occasion in England when a body which everyone who had contracted with it thought was a Government agency suddenly went bust. Yes, it was, formally, a private sector company, but everyone dealing with it assumed that it had Government backing.

Suddenly, a bit like a south Thames bubble—it burst. The Minister may nod his head, but people were subsequently told that they must wait in line, as one does when a company goes bust, and hope that there would be enough to pay them out. That is true, and all of my south Thames colleagues will testify to the fact that we have been contacted by people who are waiting for the money that the Government said that they would receive—I have a file full of contacts here.

First, assurances were given. In the week before Christmas, the Department of Employment said that training obligations would be maintained, but might be transferred, and a letter of comfort was issued. The Under-Secretary said later in a written answer:

"As foreshadowed in the minute laid before the House on 21 December 1994 . . . letters of comfort have been issued to certain providers of training and business support programmes within the area covered by South Thames training and enterprise council. That process is continuing. The minute said, that some of the indemnities were likely to be called in and that has now occurred."—[*Official Report*, 16 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. *331*.]

I think that £9 million was made available, as a Government grant, so that honouring the obligations could commence. That was welcome.

One sometimes wonders whether debating an issue in this House serves any use. The Minister and I have had a word and he says that the following facts are unrelated. But the fact that we were due to debate the matter today has produced a flurry of activity in the past day or two, including the tabling of a revised minute yesterday and ministerial letters arriving at near to the speed of light. I have received two letters from the Minister today, both of which are welcome.

My colleagues and I have also received an invitation to meet the Minister before Thursday to discuss the matter. I understand that the revised minute includes individuals who were not included in the original minute. Obviously, that is welcome, but it does not provide all the answers and has certainly not produced money for everyone waiting in the queue.

I shall list some examples of organisations that are in the queue and then ask some questions. Although the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) will say a few words if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in reality all that we can do tonight is express our huge concerns on the Floor of the House while accepting that we do not expect the Minister to answer tonight the huge number of questions that need to be answered.

Some of the people in the queue are owed a very large sum of money. Southwark college, the major further education college in my borough, is owed £1.4 million for training credits, work-related further education, capital works schemes, student hardship funds and the like. I have a list of some 20 organisations in Southwark that have various contracts. Many of them have contacted me in some way. They range from large public agencies like colleges to individual who were employees or for whom a contract worth £50 makes a huge difference.

For example, a firm called Martyn Dawes Associates is waiting for £17,000. Its suppliers are chasing it, and unless it can pay off the people to whom it owes money it must either lay people off or get into financial difficulty. It has had verbal commitments but nothing in writing and no letters answered by the receiver, Grant Thornton. The firm also tells me that it received the letter saying that Grant Thornton was the receiver only after the statutory 28-day period in which the letter should be sent. That is at best a technical—if not more serious—breach of the law.

An organisation called Springboard Southwark is also owed money. Like many other bodies, it is effectively now a Government paying agency. As a charity, it is being asked to fund the obligation of a Government agency and is using its funding to provide training allowances for other people. If that is not an example of bad practice by an agency that is meant to be about good business practice, I do not know what is. The real concern is that the death of the TEC will give rise to a considerable loss of credibility.

Training for Change has also contacted me. It is owed £22,000 in outstanding invoices. It has had many conversations with the Government office for London, and some matters have been secured while others have not.

The big sector that has not yet been secured is all the money due for the investors in people programme, none of which looks like being secured. That is bad news because many investors have responded to the call to be partners and are now left effectively unprotected and unsecured. If that does not put people off becoming partners in training and enterprise, I do not know what will.

The list includes little local organisations like Southwark Heritage, which develops tourism. The consequence of the Government's action is also shown by the words of the head teacher of a secondary school in my constituency, St. Saviour's and St. Olave's school, who wrote to me saying:

"We are sure you share our dismay at the unreliability of a government funded agency".

The school was expecting to be supported by the schools' effectiveness project.

One person wrote to me that she had submitted a business plan and had expected 40 quid a week for six months. Last week, someone who lives in Rotherhithe came to my surgery and explained that he was in exactly the same position as that woman, only worse. He had been told that there would no problem and that he could expect 40 quid a week. He entered into various commitments on the basis of that assurance, including loans from the bank, which he now has no capacity to pay off.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice), who cannot be present tonight, asked me to mention someone at the bottom end of the financial scale. Someone was due 50 quid and was sent a cheque that bounced. Many other people I have seen were also sent cheques that bounced.

I have given the range of the practical, real, suddenly-left-singing-for-our-money implications. We must have a mechanism to guarantee all outstanding invoices. Nothing less than a decision by the Government to honour all the obligations will satisfy those hon. Members who are present and all the other interested people who will read the debate. We must do something to restore the good faith of the TEC system with all the people who are needed to be partners in it. We must ensure that no one is left out of pocket for the period for which people are now subsidising the current shortfall in funding. We must ensure that such financial difficulties, with their consequences, are not repeated.

What are we to do now to ensure that those in training programmes can continue in them when the current contract comes to an end? I know that the Minister will offer a partial response to that question. What are we to do now to honour those who have delivered the work? What will happen to payments for work from now until the end of the financial year and to outstanding payments to people for last October and November, before the receivers were sent in? What role does the Government office for London play, as opposed to the Department or the TEC successor?

I and my colleagues are extremely concerned to know about the new arrangements. Any arrangement that merely carves up the South Thames TEC and makes, for example, my borough an appendage to central London and the boroughs of Lewisham and Greenwich appendages to the borough of Bromley and those further out of London would be unsatisfactory. There was a logic in the South Thames TEC being constituted of boroughs with a common tradition—that logic is no less valid today.

We want the present TEC area to remain. We want the public to be told what is going on. We want anyone who has a concern to be given a direct answer. We want contracts to be honoured and debts paid. We want an assurance that what has happened to our TEC will never be repeated.

If one goes to watch Millwall, one of the chants is, "No one likes us, we don't care." It feels now as though the Government are saying that to south London. My colleagues and I do care and the Government should care. I hope that tonight they will pledge to put right quickly an avoidable fiasco that should never have happened.

12.2 am

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich) *rose—*

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): In the time available, does the Minister agree that the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) should speak?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. James Paice): Briefly.

Mr. Raynsford: I am grateful to the Minister and the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) for allowing me to intervene briefly in the debate.

I should like to reinforce the case made by the hon. Gentleman. Important training operations are threatened with closure at any moment as a result of the situation that has arisen. I have written to the Minister about the Greenwich Training Company, which has established an excellent reputation and currently has about 450 trainees and employs 42 staff.

Last Friday it was uncertain about whether it would be able to pay its 150 youth trainees their weekly allowance. It is now seeking legal advice as to whether it is able to continue to trade because it might be insolvent. It is unsatisfactory that such worthwhile training operations should be threatened with insolvency because of a situation created by the Minister's decision and the Government's failure to put suitable mechanisms in place to ensure the survival of training.

I hope that the Minister will give us an assurance that that type of venture will be enabled to survive, at least in the short term, until a more appropriate long-term framework is in place to guarantee the survival of training. Otherwise, large numbers of people whose future livelihoods depend on that type of venture will be left in the lurch; that would be unacceptable.

12.4 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. James Paice): The debate that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has initiated gives us a chance, as he rightly said, to examine some of the issues surrounding South Thames training and enterprise council. I am afraid that, in the time that remains, I shall not be able to discuss all the issues that he mentioned, and I hope that he will understand that perhaps I can pursue them in correspondence or, if he wishes, at a meeting with him, and with his colleagues if he so desires.

The decision that I took on 21 December 1994, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, was not easy, but I am convinced that it was the right and necessary decision. It took place against a background, which we should not forget, of there being 82 TECs in England and Wales—the hon. Gentleman said "this country". It is a good job that hon. Members who usually sit on the Bench behind him were not present. They might not have liked that, because it includes Wales in the total. As the hon. Gentleman said, those TECs are about three to four years old.

In the time that they have existed, TECs have demonstrated that they are able to provide significant improvements in the delivery of a range of Government programmes. They are local organisations; they are in the private sector; they are run by local business people. Two or three times, the hon. Gentleman used the words, "the Government agency". TECs are not Government agencies and never have been. They were set up as private companies limited by guarantee. They have a contract with the Government to deliver Government programmes but, beyond that contract, they have considerable flexibility to generate margins and to use those margins for any other purpose in their overall strategy agreement.

I shall say a word about audit and control arrangements, which the hon. Gentleman rightly mentioned. All TECs are required, by annual contract with our Department, to operate sound financial management control systems. Teams of departmental staff carry out regular risk assessments of all TECs. They examine their financial controls and systems, and their means of demonstrating by documentary evidence that they have delivered the training for which they have claimed funding.

Each TEC is allocated to a risk band. All the other TECs in the country bar one are in the low-risk category; one is in the medium-risk category. Only South Thames TEC has been in the high-risk category, and the rest is history, to which I shall return later.

I emphasise that it was a licensing requirement—and we are embarked on the licensing of all TECs—that TECs should be in the low-risk category. Therefore, no TEC will be able to be licensed without being in that category, and all TECs will be required to be licensed in the next two years.

I should also make it clear that the Comptroller and Auditor General's report from the National Audit Office on our own departmental accounts for 1993-94 specifically highlighted South Thames TEC; the report also referred to significant improvements in the technical audit and financial control systems.

I shall discuss South Thames TEC specifically. The history of the case is that weaknesses were found as long ago as July 1993, and the TEC was told about those weaknesses in its financial accounting systems. Our London Government regional office worked with the TEC to try to obtain improvements to its systems.

In very early 1994, the TEC was told that it would have to be placed in the high-risk category, and it was asked in fairly strong terms to implement an action plan to return it to a low-risk category. When it became demonstrably clear that it was failing to do so, the breach of contract notice to which the hon. Gentleman referred was issued, on 3 October 1994.

Following that, in spite of the changes in management to which the hon. Gentleman also referred, we began to have serious doubts that even that breach would be remedied, and we sent in a team of accountants from our Department and from Messrs Grant Thornton. They submitted a report to the Department on 16 December 1994, a copy of which is in the Library and therefore available for all hon. Members to read.

In summary, the main points are as follows. The report demonstrated a very serious loss of about £2 million in the previous accounting period. It demonstrated an incorrect balance sheet, which itself was bad. It demonstrated—perhaps more seriously—that the forecast for 1995-96 was for continuing very serious losses. Perhaps most significantly, the management accounts could not be substantiated by the information available.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that I could, at that stage, have decided to bail out the TEC, and he is right—of course that was an option. But given all the information

that I received from the accountants and the glaring weaknesses in the financial control systems that had not been remedied despite all the many months of pressure from my Department, I do not believe that I would have been fulfilling my duty to the taxpayer if I had put more public money into an organisation that had shown itself to be completely incapable of managing that public money.

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Paice: I am sorry, but I have not got time to give way. I have many questions to answer.

On 21 December—just five days after we had the report—I appointed the receiver. On the same day, I issued letters of comfort to the providers.

Ms Ruddock: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Paice: No, I am sorry. I will not give way as I have very little time to respond to many points.

I laid a minute before the House. As required, I also informed the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee of the events as they transpired. Letters of comfort were initially provided to the providers of youth training and training for work. The letters demonstrated that we would provide funds for the receiver for the three months following– up to the end of the present contracting year, the end of March.

In addition, we would also make payments for accounting period nine, from 7 November—six weeks earlier than when the receiver went in. The reason for the choice of 7 November—which I have seen questioned—was clearly because at that stage we had not paid any money to the TEC for that period, so there was no question of double funding, which is important.

Since then, we have extended the letter of comfort to child care, work-related further education and various aspects of the career service. The Department of the Environment has extended it to business start-up schemes, education and business partnerships, compacts and teacher placements—it is important to stress that point as the hon. Gentleman raised a particular case.

We are still looking at all aspects of how we can provide comfort for the providers and we propose to lay a further minute before the House in line with the procedures and to issue a further letter of comfort to providers, guaranteeing that if their existing contracts with the TEC are not renewed, they will nevertheless be paid for outputs achieved in relation to training completed prior to 26 March under the existing contracts. We will pay for output-related funding even though it may not occur to be paid until after the period for which we have already issued comfort.

Of course I am aware that many providers are owed money by the TEC for the period before then. I could give a more detailed explanation, but in my final minute I shall just say that the payment of those debts is a matter for the receiver. It would not be appropriate for the Government to make payments to providers for money owed to them prior to period nine. We have already made that money available—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Wednesday 25 January 1995

The House met at Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: As this is the first morning sitting under the new arrangements, it may be a help to Members if I make one or two points clear and for the record.

First, the House will have noted that times for each debate have been printed on the Order Paper. That means that the practice on the former last day Adjournments will be followed—that, if the House gets ahead of the timetable and the Member opening the next debate is not present, the occupant of the Chair will be able to suspend the sitting until, but not beyond, the stated time.

Secondly, I propose for the three half-hour debates to follow the practice to which the House is accustomed with the half-hour Adjournment at the end of each day's sitting—that no additional Member may take part except with the permission of the Member introducing the debate, and the Minister, and of course the Chair, should be informed.

Pergau Dam

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

10.5 am

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South) *rose—*

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Marshall: The House is far more crowded than one would usually expect during an Adjournment debate, and it is most unusual for my standing up to arouse a cheer as well, but perhaps we are making history in more than one sense today.

There is a certain irony in my luck in coming top of the draw, as I was one of those hon. Members and right hon. Members who voted against the change. Perhaps, Madam Speaker, either you or the gods are getting their own back by ensuring that I have to be here at 10 o'clock on the first Wednesday.

The second comment that I wish to make before I reach the substance of the debate is that, as you know better than I, Madam Speaker, and I am sure that the Leader of the House also knows, the House has sat on Wednesdays in recent times, although not regularly since 1967. The last time that the House sat on a Wednesday morning was on an overspill on the Consolidated Fund Bill debate—something that can no longer happen—on 28 March 1990.

The House decided to meet on Wednesday morning of 1 August 1984 because the House was going into recess. That is an interesting date also because now we do not reach August before we go into the summer recess. It is a sign that the times have changed with the Government. They want us out of the way now, rather than keeping us here in the House.

The House also met on Wednesday 7 November 1990, for the Queen's Speech. However, the last time that the House met regularly on Wednesday was on 25 October 1967, well before my time in the House, and I am sure a few years before your entrance, Madam Speaker.

I asked the Journal Office to obtain for me the front page of that day's *Hansard*, and it is obvious that some things never change, even though we may change our proceedings from time to time. After Prayers, the House started with a ten-minute Bill, the Travel Concessions for Seamen Bill, moved by Mr. Hector Hughes, who was then the Member of Parliament for Aberdeen North. It will not surprise the House to know that it was critical of British Rail. Hon. Members criticised British Rail for removing the travel concession for seamen going home after arriving in port; so that, as is habitual, British Rail was being criticised 27 years ago, as it is today.

The main item of business under the Orders of the Day—is shows how important those issues were then—was the Sea Fisheries (Shellfish) Bill. Some names to conjure with: Mr. Graham Page sought to move amendments, as did the then Mr. Ronald Bell; so there are some links between now and that time, 27 years ago.

I am delighted to be able to open the first Adjournment debate. I think that it does credit to you, Madam Speaker, or to the ballot, that we should be able to have a debate that is of real significance to this country's national interest and to the position of the poorest countries throughout the world.

[Mr. Marshall]

The Pergau dam affair shows all that is wrong with the way that Britain gives its aid to some of the less poor countries of the world. To me, and I am sure to many other hon. Members, the affair still leaves a nasty taste in the mouth. Despite protestations to the contrary, it will always, to me and to others, be associated with aid for arms.

The Foreign Secretary has admitted, in his own singular phrase, to a "brief entanglement" between arms and aid in 1988. I have taken an interest in the issues of Bosnia and Europe generally over the past few years. One of the things about the Foreign Secretary is that he can always come up with a neat phrase. The tighter the corner he is in, the smarter and neater the phrase he comes out with.

To me, the phrase "brief entanglement" implies something a bit more than just a short time span. The then Secretary of State for Defence—the scion of the Scottish industiral family—made an error when he went to Kuala Lumpur in 1988 to negotiate arms and offered aid on the side. But in the Foreign Secretary's phrase, the affair was a "brief entanglement". There are those—mainly Opposition Members—who believe that the project would not have been proceeded with without the arms connection. To me it is a long affair, not a brief entanglement.

The case is also a bad deal for the United Kingdom taxpayer, and arguably a bad deal for the Malaysian electricity consumer. Funding the project by soft loans has increased the charge on the United Kingdom public purse by approximately £56 million more than if the project had been funded by a method of mixed credits. It has been estimated—I presume that the estimate is correct as I am not aware that its validity has been questioned—that Malaysian electricity consumers will pay £100 million more than if the electricity was generated by gas turbines. In economic terms alone, the project should not have been proceeded with.

Great credit is due to the World Development Movement for its courage in taking the Foreign Secretary to the High Court to seek a judicial review on his 1991 decision. We all know the outcome—the High Court agreed that the Foreign Secretary had acted unlawfully. We now know—because of the Foreign Secretary's statement and his response to questions on 13 December 1994—that the Government had no intention of appealing against that decision.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Marshall: I shall give way when I have finished making my point, but other hon. Members want to speak, and we have only one and a half hours for debate.

The Foreign Secretary must go further than his statement to Parliament on 13 December, and make two matters absolutely clear. First, he must state clearly that the Treasury will not be allowed to cut future spending allocations to the budget of the Overseas Development Administration in order to claw back future payments for the Pergau dam. The Foreign Secretary has already given that commitment for this year and for 1995-96, but his commitment must go further still to cover the lifetime of the project—for the next 10 to 11 years.

Secondly, the Foreign Secretary must give a commitment to repay fully the aid budget for all past spending, both on the Pergau dam and on the other three projects that might be deemed to be unlawful, and thus reverse the decision that he gave in the House of Commons on 13 December.

Mr. Canavan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. On the illegality of the Secretary of State's action, does my hon. Friend agree that, if a local councillor had been found guilty in a court of law of misappropriating more than £20 million of public money for an unviable project against the advice of a senior official, that local councillor would almost certainly be surcharged, probably be banned from office for many years, if not for life, and almost certainly be bankrupt? Yet the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs carries on almost regardless. Should he not, in all honesty, resign?

Mr. Marshall: I agree with my hon. Friend's conclusion. Clearly, the Foreign Secretary should resign, together with all his Cabinet colleagues. To be fair to the Foreign Secretary—I am not usually fair to him—the High Court ruled that he acted unlawfully in using that piece of legislation. It did not rule that he was unable to provide funds to allow the project to go ahead. We are discussing the legality of the action under the 1980 legislation, not whether the Government had the right to provide money, which they clearly did. They simply chose the wrong vehicle to do so.

I was in the Chamber when my hon. Friend put the same question to the Foreign Secretary in person, and the response that I have just given was far more convincing than the one that the Foreign Secretary gave to my hon. Friend.

The Government's justification for the non-reimbursement of funding for previous years is that the aid and trade provision of the aid programme for previous and future years was set on the assumption that the cost of the Pergau dam and the three other projects would be met from it. In the Foreign Secretary's words,

"the books for those years are effectively closed".—[*Official Report*, 13 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 774.]

That is another neat phrase.

Books are either closed or not. What does he mean by "effectively"? Does he mean that, if pressure is exerted, the books could be reopened? Is he already anticipating his response when my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) says to him, "You have been under pressure from the High Court or other quarters and have had to reopen the books; how does that tie in with your commitment of 13 December 1994?"?

I can already see the Foreign Secretary, in his usual languid manner, rising at the Dispatch Box and saying to my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles, "I said that the books were effectively closed." Perhaps that phrase means one of two things—the books are closed and cannot be reopened, or the Foreign Secretary is making an escape route for himself for the time when sufficient pressure is placed on him that the books have to be reopened and the payment repaid.

I think that we all accept that the reason that the Foreign Secretary has given and the arguments advanced by the Government amount to pathetic excuses. The Government's unlawful decision prevented lawful aid and trade provisions from going ahead—only one third of the

ATPs put forward for 1990-91 were proceeded with. If the Pergau dam project had not been approved, the way would have been left open for lawful ATPs. If the House did not wish to do that, the resources could have been put into the mainstream aid budget.

As a basic principle, the money which was spent illegally must be returned to the aid budget. If that is not done, the Government will have spent resources set aside for aid on non-aid purposes, in blatant disregard of the wishes and the authority of Parliament. The £24 million that was spent on Pergau could make a significant difference to the quality of life in a poor country.

The Pergau dam affair has cast a shadow over the credibility of our aid programme which must be removed. I believe that we should take this opportunity to review overseas development administration policy as it has not been reviewed comprehensively since the 1975 White Paper. My view—I believe that it is also increasingly the view of my party—is that our aid, both bilateral and multilateral, should be targeted at the poorest people in the poorest countries.

We should never forget that 1.2 billion people continue to live in poverty throughout the world. If we are to help to eliminate that poverty, we must give increased priority to the provision of basic education, primary health and safe drinking water—just three objectives among many. I contend that £234 million would provide a great boost to that policy development.

10.21 am

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I rise on this important and historic occasion with a great deal of pleasure. Madam Speaker, you will recall that this Wednesday morning sitting—which I hope will be the first of a permanent series of such sittings—results from the unanimous recommendation of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House, which I had the honour to chair.

The four different types of private Members' business—the Consolidated Fund Bill debate, with its absurd all-night sittings which are hopefully now behind us; private Member's motions; Adjournment motions; and the last day Adjournment debates—can now be dealt with in the four-and-a-half hour sitting of the House every Wednesday morning. That is a very neat way of putting private Members' business on a regular footing, instead of dealing with it hurriedly just before a recess. It is a far more satisfactory forum for hearing hon. Members' concerns, and it is much more sensible for us to debate an important issue like Pergau at this time of the morning rather than at 4 am, as we probably would have done previously.

The hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) referred to the parliamentary sittings in 1967. I may have been in the Chamber during the debate to which he referred—I recall taking part in the morning debates during the Crossman experiment. That experiment failed because the House was not prepared to accept those arrangements, and because the business which Mr. Crossman put on the Order Paper was much too controversial.

There is always a temptation for people to monkey about with controversial business, which is what happened in the 1960s. We are now accepting relatively non-controversial business on motions for the Adjournment, and I believe that that will prove very satisfactory for the House.

I am a member of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, which held a number of hearings and produced a report about the Pergau dam affair late last year. I want to refer to the events leading up to the court's decision about the legality of the payments for the construction of the Pergau dam under the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980.

The whole sorry saga of the Pergau dam began when my noble Friend Lord Younger, as he is now, signed the protocol in March 1988 in Kuala Lumpur. He maintains to this day that he did not do anything wrong, and he gave advice to that effect to the Select Committee. He said that he thought that the wording of the protocol was appropriate, and did not link aid with arms expenditure. However, the Foreign Office and the Government disagreed with that view, as did the Select Committee in its report. We felt that it was wrong for Mr. Younger to sign the protocol at that time.

The signing of the protocol has had a domino effect. I reflect the criticism in the Select Committee report when I say that I cannot understand why the Foreign Office or the Ministry of Defence allowed the protocol to be signed. The Foreign Office was totally ignorant of what was going on. The actions of the British high commission in Kuala Lumpur were totally disgraceful. It appeared to know very little about the reason for George Younger's visit to Kuala Lumpur, and it then failed to inform the Foreign Office what he had signed until some weeks after his return to this country. That is a lamentable state of affairs.

The whole project was appraised in a bizarre mission between 12 and 14 March 1989. Sir Tim Lankester, the permanent secretary, said—it appears in the Select Committee report—that the mission was "wholly unsatisfactory", and described it as a "lamentable slip-up." I agree with him. It is all very well for Sir Tim Lankester to complain about the viability of the scheme after the event; I think it is a pity that people within the Department did not pay more attention to the conduct of the scheme's appraisal and to the legal basis of the expenditure, which has since been overturned by the court as contrary to the provisions of the 1980 Act.

The events surrounding the Pergau dam affair have not been helped by the machinations of the consortium of contractors. The Select Committee was critical of those contractors, and I think that their behaviour does them little credit. Having said that, I entirely understand why it was impossible to stop the Pergau dam project dead in its tracks once the first mistake of signing the protocol had been made. That could have had massive ramifications for our relations with Malaysia—which are delicate at the best of times—and badly affected our important trade with that country. Undertakings had been given by the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, and I believe that the Government were right to uphold the undertakings which were given at that time.

I now turn to the issue at the core of what the hon. Gentleman is raising in his one-and-a-half hour Adjournment debate—the judgment of the courts, which nobody really anticipated. The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), who interrupted the hon. Member for Leicester, South, is also a member of the Select Committee for Foreign Affairs.

If he were still in his place, I am sure that he would agree with me, as would my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), who is also a member of the

[Mr. Michael Jopling]

Select Committee, that, although the World Development Movement told us that it considered the payment to be illegal, nobody else, on or off the Committee, also reached that conclusion. Although we heard what the World Development Movement had to say, none of us set very much store by it. The World Development Movement was right, however, and the rest of us were wrong.

Returning to the intervention by the hon. Member for Falkirk, West, he sought to link the court case, which was about the legality of the payment under the 1980 Act, with the advice and the objection by Sir Tim Lankester, which was based purely on the viability of the scheme and had nothing to do with the legality of the payment. Those two issues are quite separate, and I wish that the hon. Gentleman were still in his place so that he could hear me say that.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): If the right hon. Gentleman checks back on parliamentary questions that have been tabled over a number of years, he will find that a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends questioned the legality of the project.

Mr. Jopling: I accept that there have been questions which suggested that. I would guess that those questions might have been inspired by conversations with the World Development Movement. I do not think that there was any advice in or out of the Select Committee to the effect that the payments were illegal, except from the World Development Movement. Therefore, the judgment was a surprise.

I applaud the statement of the Government, complying with the judgment of the court, that money will be found from the reserves—£34.5 million this year and £31 million next year—to put right what the court has said was wrong, and that seems adequate.

Referring to previous years, I am not clear how and whether it would be appropriate or sensible to reopen previous years concerning the £24 million. It seems to me that that is water over the dam, and I could not support pressure to make the Government find that £24 million as well. Of course, the World Development Movement is doing everything it can—it may go back to court, for all I know—to insist that that £24 million is found, but those books are closed. They refer to years gone by and I should be very surprised if it were possible to find that money.

The third part of the money is in future years, and that has also been referred to in the debate. There is no way in which the Government can commit themselves—before we have entered into the specific public expenditure survey rounds—to be absolutely clear about what will happen in 1996-97, but when the Foreign Secretary made his statement on 13 December, he pointed out that the overseas aid budget is to increase by £56 million in 1996-97 and by £115 million in the following year. That will be the baseline for discussions at that time.

Finally, I want to say a word about the aid and trade provision. We should remember that it was introduced by the Labour Government in 1977. We ought also to recall that only 6 per cent. of our aid budget—rather less, I think—goes on ATP and, what is most important, since the Pergau affair the rules have been changed and it would be impossible for Pergau to be financed now to ATP, as it was then.

I am glad that the Select Committee report endorsed the use of ATP, and was not in favour of its abolition. ATP is a very good scheme. I welcome the use of the aid budget to encourage British trade and the preservation of British jobs.

Although the Select Committee was not in favour of an extension of it above 6 per cent., I would not object at all if the ATP budget were increased. It would be to the advantage of British industry, as ATP has had very good effects and repercussions on jobs and industry in this country. It is a pity that the statistics are not sufficiently clear for us to be precise about just what advantages have been gained over the years from the ATP provision.

With those remarks, I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say. In particular, I think it would be interesting if he could give us some an idea of how the extra £34.5 million this year is likely to be spent. The Foreign Secretary referred to Bosnia, but there may be other provisions, and I am sure that the House would like to know where the money is going.

10.37 am

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I first congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) on obtaining his debate on this historic first Wednesday morning sitting, at least for a number of years. I am pleased to follow the right hon. Member for Westmoreland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), who is responsible for us sitting on Wednesday morning. I am glad to see him here today, and look forward to seeing him regularly on Wednesday mornings.

I also emphasise that my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South, who so ably put his case today, has the total support of those on the Opposition Front Bench in the arguments he put forward.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): In the Labour party, support from the Front Bench counts as a novelty.

Mr. Foulkes: The Minister will have the opportunity to speak later. He is noted for his sarcasm rather than his humour. My hon. Friend has the total support of the Opposition in seeking the debate, and in everything he said.

Today's much-needed debate on repayment of the money that was so scandalously wasted on the Pergau dam is an issue that, contrary to what Ministers and Conservative Members say, is in no way resolved. It may seem to the Foreign Secretary, a small discrepancy in his bookkeeping, but, to millions of people throughout the developing world who are dependant on British humanitarian aid, it can mean the difference between life and death.

The Pergau dam affair, from the original infamous entanglement of arms sales and aid, arising from the improper deal signed by Lord Younger on 23 March 1988, all the way through to the High Court ruling and the Foreign Secretary's stubborn refusal to accept it, has been one of the sorriest sagas of this discredited Government.

On 9 and 10 November last year—nearly three months ago—the High Court heard the World Development Movement case for a judicial review of the Foreign Secretary's decision. The WDM deserves the thanks and

congratulations of the whole House for that action. The challenge to the Foreign Secretary's decision was based on the Overseas and Development Co-operation Act 1980.

The judgment held that the Foreign Secretary's decision was unlawful, and that future payments from the aid budget were to be halted. We do not congratulate the Foreign Secretary on doing that, because he was so instructed by the High Court. Equally important, the High Court instructed the Government to reveal to the World Development Movement how they intended to put right the aid payments made so far.

By comparison, the Government quickly stated their intention to meet their contractual obligations to Malaysia, no doubt under legal threat from its Prime Minister, Mohatmir Mohammed. However, the High Court ruling explicitly stated that the WDM must be informed how the Foreign Secretary planned to make good the overseas aid budget. When will it receive a similarly quick response? It still awaits one. Once again, the interests of British companies and of trade relations with Malaysia have taken precedence over the needs of the developing world.

In the House, the Foreign Secretary first ignored many legitimate requests for his resignation, and even mild requests for an apology for the unlawful action that had been taken. Now, the right hon. Gentleman is blatantly attempting to avoid the implications of the judgment. The High Court specifically instructed the Foreign Secretary

"to take appropriate steps to make good the deficiency in the overseas aid budget."

It could not have been clearer.

The Foreign Secretary had the gall to tell the House that he believed that not paying back the £24 million that unlawfully went to Malaysia in that "brief entanglement" as he described it, was "an equitable way" of dealing with the difficult situation that had been created. That is unbelievable. The right hon. Gentleman's view of what is equitable is of no great relevance to the House, and his view of the matter has been shown by the High Court to be fundamentally flawed, and an insult to right hon. and hon. Members and to the British judiciary. Above all, his view is an insult to the people who desperately need the £24 million that the Foreign Secretary is so anxious to keep.

The Labour party is not opposed to the aid and trade provision. We were reminded today as on previous occasions by the Under-Secretary of State, with his usual sarcasm—

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman mistakes humour for sarcasm.

Mr. Foulkes: It may seem like a sense of humour to some people, but it seems like sarcasm to this side of the House. We do not need to be reminded that a Labour Government introduced the aid scheme. We are proud that Judith Hart introduced it in 1978, but that is not the scheme currently pursued by the Government. The original scheme was intended to allow a small proportion of bilateral aid of about 5 per cent. to be available, to give higher priority to the commercial importance of a limited number—these are the key words—of "developmentally sound projects."

We find objectionable the systematic abuse and corruption of the scheme under a Conservative Government to satisfy Tory central office, the awarding of tenders to companies donating large sums of money to Tory party funds—no doubt to pay some of the heavy legal fees that it must reimburse *The Guardian* and other newspapers, manipulation of the aid budget to further the sale of British arms and the financial interests of the Government's family and friends, and the Government's refusal to admit dishonesty and at least attempt to make amends.

The legal basis for aid payments was agreed by the House in 1966 and 1980. It gives the Foreign Secretary to authorise aid payments, but only

"for the purpose of promoting the development or maintaining the economy of a country or territories outside the UK, or the welfare of its people".

That was not the purpose of the Pergau dam. As the Foreign Secretary told the Foreign Affairs Committee, there were "wider considerations", such as

"a clear understanding at the highest level"

and

"the interests of British industry."

Ironically, the Committee and the Overseas Development Administration's own study of the programme showed that it will not create jobs or orders for British industry, so it cannot be argued that Pergau would help in that way. It boils down to

"a clear understanding at the highest level"

I cannot believe that George Younger, who was Mrs. Thatcher's leadership campaign manager, did not have his leader's words ringing in his ears when he signed that fateful arms-for-aid deal in 1988. It was not for nothing that Mrs. Thatcher was nicknamed by a former Leader of the House

"she who must be obeyed."

The following year, on 15 March 1988, Mrs. Thatcher met the Malaysian Prime Minister and sealed the deal on the basis of incomplete information about the cost to the British taxpayer. Over the next two years, it became clear that the Pergau project was not developmentally sound but uneconomic and, in the words of the ODA's own appraisal, "a very bad buy" for Britain and

"a burden on Malaysian electricity consumers."

In 1991, the ODA's Permanent Secretary, Tim Lankester, and the Minister for Overseas Development, Lady Chalker, reached the conclusion that the project was not sound, yet on 26 February 1991, after consulting the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary gave his final approval.

Why did the Foreign Secretary do that, against all professional and, I believe, legal advice? Why did he approve a project that would help neither British jobs nor Malaysian consumers? We should not be surprised that he did, when we realise that nearly all the companies that benefit from ATP donate to Tory party funds. We should not be surprised, because of the particular interest taken in Pergau and in the Ankara metro project by the then Prime Minister. Despite all her other tasks, she took a particular interest in those two projects.

When I asked the Minister what other projects the Prime Minister had asked to be put on her desk, he said that it would cost too much to tell the House. It is time the House knew of all the ATP and other projects that found their way on to Mrs. Thatcher's desk before they were approved.

Because of her special relationship with the Malaysian Prime Minister, she was also keen to see British arms sales to Malaysia proceed. One hon. Friend pointed out to

[Mr. Foulkes]

me that a report in *The Times* today says that our Export Credits Guarantee Department programme is distorted by high expenditure on the arms trade. Although the Prime Minister formally de-linked the "separate but parallel letters", there was still a strong relationship between them. The Prime Minister might also have had a close family interest in the project.

Downing street's involvement in reviewing ATP projects is particularly disturbing. The overruling of countless officials, discontent of Cabinet Ministers, protests of non-governmental organisations and press editorials were all ignored by the Government. It took action by the World Development Movement in the High Court to force the Foreign Secretary to admit that he had acted illegally in spending aid money on Pergau. A further refusal to abide by the judgment and to repay the money has caused unmitigated outrage, and rightly so.

The case for repayment is straightforward. The Foreign Secretary has used the lame excuse that the books for previous years are effectively closed. However, it was made clear in response to a question put to the Foreign Secretary's counsel in a preliminary hearing that provision existed for retrospective rearrangement of funds. In other words, the Foreign Secretary's representative said that the books could be reopened, and they should be. It seems that the interpretation of the laws of the United Kingdom depend on which side of the law the Government are operating on.

The Foreign Secretary also stands accused of contempt of the authority of Parliament. He seems to be of the opinion that the aid budget was set on the assumption that the Pergau project would be financed from within it, so provision would have been less if the project had not been included. However, the House did not vote on individual aid and trade projects when it voted for the aid budget in 1991. The ATP allocation appears as a total figure, not as a list of individual projects. Parliament voted the ATP money on the assumption that it would be used for genuine developmental projects. That has not been the case. The House has been ignored.

The money refused by the Foreign Secretary also provides a compelling argument for its return to the aid budget, which has fallen to 0.3 per cent. of gross national product. The bilateral aid budget has declined, and it desperately needs the money that could come, as it were, from the Pergau project. Africa and all poorer countries of the world desperately need the money.

In conclusion—that will please Noddy, the Government Whip. Even more important, Madam Speaker, it will please you.

Madam Speaker: I have an interest in Back-Bench Members.

Mr. Foulkes: So do I, Madam Speaker.

The Pergau dividend, which was successfully won by the World Development Movement, could be used to fund many grass-roots projects which have disappeared from the forefront of British aid.

The Government must be aware that any attempt to cut the aid budget in other areas will be vigorously opposed by the Opposition. Attempts at retribution by the Foreign Secretary will not be accepted. The Labour party wants—indeed, demands—that the money misappropriated from the aid budget be immediately restored. The restoration of credibility to the United Kingdom's aid programme is badly needed to remedy what has become one of the most sickening examples of the susceptibility of this discredited Government.

The only thing that will satisfy the House, non-governmental organisations and the law is that the future payments earmarked for the Pergau project be targeted on the poorest people in the poorest countries—in other words, not only the £24 million that has previously been wasted on the project.

The Minister must say how the Government intend fully to implement the decision of the High Court. If not, it will be open to the World Development Movement, as the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale rightly said, to return to the High Court to seek legal redress. The Opposition would encourage the WDM to take that action, to ensure that the Foreign Secretary is made to obey the law of the land.

10.54 am

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) spoke from the Opposition Front Bench in his usual colourful, florid and inaccurate way to try to build up a case that was out of all proportion. I have spent 20 years in the House using my energy to improve the transfer of resources from this country and other developed countries to developing countries, for the relief of poverty and for the integration of the world economy, and I speak from that background.

The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs took an enormous amount of evidence on this controversial issue, made recommendations and identified areas of concern. There is no point in a Select Committee taking that course if Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen repeat assertions that have been disproved, including links between arms and aid, and continually repeat charges that have been clearly demonstrated by others, including Opposition Members who sat on the Select Committee, to be untrue. The Select Committee examined the matter with considerable concern, including aid and trade provision.

It is interesting that Malaysia, which was a very poor country and qualified for ATP when the Pergau dam was authorised, no longer qualifies for such provision. That is a tribute to the success of aid programme development. Countries such as Malaysia have succeeded in getting themselves into the world economy, much to the benefit of the majority of their peoples.

We recognise that ATP has always been an extremely difficult horse to ride. It is difficult to qualify what is developmental aid and what is assistance to business men who make quotations for major projects. To my recollection, the Select Committee has considered the issue on at least three occasions and has made various recommendations. It must be recognised that, in an imperfect world, it is an extremely difficult issue.

The United Kingdom is one of the few countries that has a limit on ATP. We have limited it to a maximum of 9 per cent. of our aid budget of £2 billion. Other countries use most of their aid budget to assist their own commercial development. The United Kingdom is more restricted because we have much tighter rules than other countries.

It is a misconception that the money spent on the Pergau dam should be available for the bilateral aid programme. The hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) did not make that mistake. Instead, he said that the money should be used within ATP. The changed rules limit ATP to countries with low per capita incomes and countries with much smaller projects.

My principal concern is that the concept of the dam has been much undermined by what has happened in this country. I feel that strongly. The evidence shows that there is a narrow technical argument in the Overseas Development Administration not about whether the dam should be built but about when it should have been built in terms of the Malaysian electricity cycle. It was a question whether it should be built immediately or in 10 years' time. In the end, the argument turned on who had the most interest in and knowledge of what should happen in Malaysia—in other words, whether the Malaysians should go ahead or whether ODA officials, who took an interested but narrow view, should decide when or whether it should proceed.

The hon. Member for Leicester, South talked about targeting poverty. I have seen various projects throughout the world and it is my experience that the provision of electricity in areas where hitherto there was none, such as the townships of South Africa, can do far more to target poverty—in the sense that it brings an area to life, enables factories to be built and provides a basis for jobs to be created—than projects which bring clean water, education and social services, although I do not seek to undermine those.

It is a great mistake to imagine that the provision of essential infrastructure does not relieve poverty in a positive way. It is understandable that the Malaysians wanted to develop an area of their country that had no electricity. It is understandable also that they wanted to develop a regional project. It has been a successful project. Nobody has ever suggested that the price that was eventually arrived at when the design work was done was unfair. Nobody has suggested that the dam is a white elephant. It has not been suggested that the dam will be anything but a successful project within the Malaysian electricity cycle.

Mr. Foulkes: That is not true.

Mr. Lester: It is true. The project is nearly finished, and it will be successful.

Harping on, moralising and repeating assertions undermine precisely what I, my hon. Friends and Opposition Members who form the all-party group seek to do. Disinformation about sleaze, linkage with arms and corruption, which is not borne out by the facts, only reinforces those who seek to oppose the transfer of resources from the United Kingdom to developing countries. and to close down the aid programme as an easy way to save public expenditure. It damages all that one seeks to do.

In the real world, one must negotiate resources with the Treasury. Our current Foreign Secretary—one of the most capable and committed Foreign Secretaries that we have had for a long time—succeeded, despite all the difficulties, in getting an increase in the aid budget. We all know about the 0.3 per cent. and the 0.7 per cent., but to get an increase in the aid budget out of a difficult public expenditure round is a matter for congratulation, not castigation. I understand that the £24 million already spent was a matter of considerable negotiation with the Treasury and the Foreign Office came out with a reasonable deal. We can all argue for perfection, but we should also argue from reality and from accurate information. I hope that I have at least tried to put the balance right in terms of the argument.

11 am

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): I welcome the opportunity to participate in this first ever Wednesday morning debate under the new arrangements, and I join my colleagues in congratulating the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) on the part that he played in getting us to where we are.

In a way, I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) is not with us, as I know that he was not an enthusiastic advocate of the new arrangements and is even less enthusiastic about my urging that we should go yet further. I would like the House to sit on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings and for Mondays and Fridays to be entirely constituency days. If anybody tried to suggest that I or any other hon. Member would be working only a three-day week as a result, I should have no problem in refuting that. None the less, we have taken the first steps towards more sensible hours and I am glad that we have the opportunity—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I allowed the hon. Gentleman a little latitude, but he must now return to the subject.

Mr. Watson: I am happy to do so, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The aid community and, for that matter, the developing world, owes a twofold debt of gratitude as a result of the recent developments in the Pergau dam affair: first, to the World Development Movement for having the foresight to challenge the Government on spending on the Pergau dam and on the wider question of the methods by which the Government operate their aid policy, and for having the determination to see the case through to its successful conclusion; secondly, to Lord Justice Rose for his judgment of 10 November last.

Historic though that judgment was in reining in the Government's increasing tendency to act with impunity, it confirmed the trend of the courts in being prepared to dive in and swim around in those murky waters which not much more than a decade ago were regarded as the exclusive domain of the Executive. The willingness of the judiciary to allow an organisation such as the World Development Movement to pursue a judicial review must be welcomed.

If the wider result of the judgment is that it succeeds in curbing Executive power, that will meet with widespread acclaim from every direction but Whitehall as it fits into the unpleasant pattern of Cabinet Ministers having to be told by the courts that they were acting illegally—a previous Home Secretary on a deportation case and the current Home Secretary in relation to compensation for victims of crime.

My pleasure at Lord Justice Rose's judgment was tempered by the Foreign Secretary's grudging acceptance on 13 December 1994 when he addressed the House on the Government's response to the judgment. There was no contrition whatever. There was no admission of guilt and no apology. No regret was shown, except at the fact

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that they had been found out, which these days seems to be the only crime to which they are ever prepared to admit.

Despite failing to hold his hands up and say, as it were, "It's a fair cop, guv," in true Dixon of Dock Green style, the Foreign Secretary asked for three other offences to be taken into account, which was interesting to say the least. They were the Ankara metro project in Turkey, a television studio project in Indonesia—we could ask all sorts of questions about whether we should have relationships with countries with such human rights records—and the flight information project in Botswana. The latter two have been completed and the first will be completed in 1997.

In total, they amount to some £35 million worth of aid—relatively small beer in terms of the £234 million earmarked for the Pergau dam project, but again they form a pattern: a culture of deception, of disguised intentions with regard to aid funding, of hidden agendas and the end being held to justify the means. That is not a philosophy to which I and my hon. Friends would subscribe, particularly in regard to such an important area as overseas development aid.

In his statement on 13 December, the Foreign Secretary refused to reinstate the £24 million already taken—illegally, it emerges—from the already depleted ODA funds. In effect, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) said, money was effectively stolen from the poor in the developing word. Attempting to justify that, the Foreign Secretary said:

> "But the aid and trade provision of the aid programme for previous and future years was set on the assumption that the cost of Pergau and the other three projects would be met from within it . . . It is not self-evident to me or to the Government that the Government should in consequence ask the taxpayer for additional money to allow the ODA to expand its aid activities."—[*Official Report*, 13 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 774.]

In other words, those who never had it will never miss it. Let the Government tell that to the starving millions of sub-Saharan Africa, where on the ODA's own calculations the percentage of total British aid will fall from 14.4 per cent. in 1994-95 to 12.1 per cent. in 1997. If there is not a need to make up that deficit now, I do not know when there ever will be. We shall not convince the Government of the need if they can claim that the books are closed while at the same time aid to that deserving part of the world is decreased in terms of our overall aid budget.

A modest increase in aid was announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to take place, I believe, in 1996-97 and 1997-98. Unlike most other European Union member states, however, the Government refused to promise extra funding for the overall aid budget to take account of the need to increase European aid by 60 per cent. by the end of the century. That decision was taken at the Edinburgh summit in December 1992 and it leaves us in a disadvantageous position compared with our fellow members of the European Union.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which sets aid guidelines for 25 of the richest nations, recently reported that Britain was the only member among the top 12 donors whose aid budget had declined over the past 10 years. It warned that bilateral aid to poor countries—the main purpose of the total aid programme—of some £2.3 billion will be severely cut if Britain is to meet the 60 per cent. increase in EU aid without coming up with any other funding.

That target would absorb up to one third of British aid, compared with the current figure of one fifth. It is in that context that Opposition Members demand that the funding earmarked for Pergau and the other projects to which I referred, which must be reinstated, should be set. Even if the full outstanding part of the £234 million over the next decade is not reinstated, at the very least the £24 million already illegally diverted must be restored.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) so eloquently put it in opening the debate, why should the books be closed for those years when it is admitted not just that a mistake was made but that the Government acted illegally? If I broke into the office of a colleague, stole something and was found guilty, I do not believe that it would be right for me to be told, "You don't have to give it back—all you have to do is to ensure that you don't do it again in the future." There is something bizarre in the Government's saying, "Well, yes, we were caught out, but we'll close the book on it," effectively pretending that it did not happen.

I was not convinced by the argument made by the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, who said that one cannot expect the Government to look into the future, and I agree—particularly for a Government who do not have a future. None the less, they have announced figures for increases in aid for 1996-97 and 1997-98, so they are at least willing to look that far ahead. I am not sure where they find the confidence, but they are prepared to do that although they have not been prepared to give a commitment in respect of the Pergau dam aid funding.

That has been only for this year and next year. If the Minister will not accept the Opposition's pleas, he should remember that the High Court judgment instructed the Foreign Secretary to replenish the ODA funds which had been diverted for that ill-starred project. I hope that the World Development Movement will consider returning to the courts if the Minister confirms, as I expect that he will, the Government's refusal to reopen the books and to make good the deficit that has been identified.

The retrospective rearrangement of funds, which was mentioned in court, is well merited in its own right. The arguments have been eloquently put. Under Lord Justice Rose's judgment it is obligatory, but most of all it is needed by the poor of the world, who have consistently been sold short by the Government in their aid programme despite the rises for the next two years to which I have referred.

Money was stolen from the poor of the world despite the Government's stated intention that their aid budget was to deal first and foremost with poverty. The Government must not be allowed to get away with their ill-gotten gains. Those funds should be reinstated and I urge the Minister to announce the intention to do so today.

11.10 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) on introducing the debate and providing the Government with a further opportunity to state their position on the aid and trade programme and on the particular event in question. We welcome that.

I also welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) was able to take part in the debate. It is due to the initiatives of the Committee that he chaired that we are able to have Wednesday morning sittings, which will be much welcomed by hon. Members. As a senior member of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, his contribution was valid and valuable. It should be noted that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), also a member of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, endorsed and supported the Government's approach to the matter.

I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on the Opposition Front Bench. I believe that this is the first time he has spoken at the Dispatch Box since taking on his new brief. I was not entirely sure who would be the Opposition's Foreign Affairs spokesman this morning as I noted that the shadow Foreign Secretary was making a speech today on clause IV. Everyone in the Labour party now has to make speeches on clause IV, even those who supposedly have responsibility for foreign affairs. The shadow Foreign Secretary may be able to explain to the Labour party that it is now the only democratic party left in Europe which—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister is trying my patience. He must return to his brief.

Mr. Baldry: I was simply welcoming the hon. Gentleman to the Dispatch Box and pointing out why it was that only he appeared to be free this morning to take part in the debate. However, I appreciate the sensitivities in the Labour party about the debate on clause IV.

The United Kingdom has a substantial aid programme of some £2.28 billion this year, praised for its quality and focused on helping the poorest in the world. Nine of the 10 biggest aid recipients last year were poor countries in Africa and Asia. Former Yugoslavia—Bosnia in particular—was the other main recipient.

Our purpose is to help people in countries poorer than our own to improve their lives. In doing this of course we are keen to link with British companies and British consultants wherever it makes sense to do so, as we do with British non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam and Save the Children.We link with them because they can provide the advice, know-how, products, experience and expertise which can be of benefit to the development of the countries that we help. We should be proud that British money, British talent and British expertise is being devoted to help many of the poorest in the world.

The aid and trade provision was established in 1977 by a Labour Government, as has already been commented on and acknowledged. It has enabled the UK to promote development in areas where British companies have much to offer.

ATP is a successful scheme. It is successful in helping poorer countries in that the approximately £1.4 billion which has been committed to support development projects overseas has led to nearly £4 billion of British exports. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale asked whether we had the figure and that is it. It has led to substantial exports for the UK. That is good news for Britain, good news for UK jobs and good news for exports. It is particularly good news for those countries which have benefited from these projects. Not surprisingly, the Foreign Affairs Select Committee concluded that ATP should continue.

As the House will know, my predecessor, the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd), announced in June 1993 new procedures for ATP projects. All ATP projects approved since the new procedures were introduced fully meet the criteria laid down in the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980, as now interpreted by the divisional court. Following the judgment of the divisional court in co-operation with the National Audit Office, there was a review of all projects receiving finance under the aid and trade provision to see whether any of the projects approved under our previous understanding of the Act might fall outside the interpretation of the legislation given by the divisional court.Three projects raised concerns, so following the judgment it was made clear to the House that arrangements would be made for the outstanding commitments to Pergau and the other three projects to be met from funds voted by Parliament outside the scope of the Act.

As to the past, the aid and trade provision of the aid programme was set on the assumption that the cost of Pergau and the other three projects would be met from within it. The books for those years are now closed. Therefore, as the House will know, we concluded that in respect of spending on those projects in previous years no adjustment would be made to ODA's future budget. The planned aid programme for the present and future years again contains provision for all four projects. Spending on the four projects is expected to be £32 million this financial year and £32.7 million next year.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York) *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: We have therefore decided that funding from the reserve will be provided to meet the costs of the four projects, thus making available an extra £32 million for the aid budget this year and £32.7 million next year for overseas development. I am sure that the vast majority of people will find that a fair, reasonable and equitable outcome. I am sure that the vast majority of right hon. and hon. Members consider that to be a fair, reasonable and equitable outcome.

Mr. Bayley *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: That is evidenced by the fact that today's debate has been attended by only a handful of Opposition Members. This does not seem to be a House in which there is considerable doubt about whether the outcome is fair, reasonable or equitable.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): One of the things that I note has not arisen in the debate, most of which I have heard, is that however much many of us might wish to see aid to the rest of the world which is in need increased, many of my constituents feel strongly that some charity belongs at home, and they see great difficulties with such increases when the Government are refusing to give money for the elderly and for many other projects. That must be taken into account. It is no good dismissing it. That is what is felt by many of my constituents.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend illustrates the fact, which was commented on by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe, that every year the Government have to

[Mr. Baldry]

make difficult decisions in the public expenditure survey. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is to be congratulated on the fact that this year, next year and the year after that, the overseas development budget will be increasing year on year so that we shall be able to devote more resources to helping the poorer nations.

Mr. Bayley *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, who has been something of a yo-yo in the debate. I think that he has only been present for a short part of it, but I gladly give way to him.

Mr. Bayley: I am grateful to the Minister. I am sure that he will agree that it is important to ensure that any future ATP projects are funded within the ODA's rules. Following the Pergau debacle, the ODA changed its rules: in future, ATP would be given only to countries with a per capita gross national product of less than $700. On 18 November, in answer to a parliamentary question, the Minister gave me a list of ATP projects that had been approved for funding since June 1993, when the policy changed; it included four projects worth a total of £16 million—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is now beginning to make a speech. Interventions, by their nature, must be brief.

Mr. Baldry: Perhaps I may anticipate the hon. Gentleman's point. Before Christmas he issued a press release asserting that Ministers had approved projects in defiance of the policy announced in June 1993 that new ATP projects would be approved only for countries with an income per head not exceeding $700 in 1989. That policy has not been breached: the four projects to which the hon. Gentleman's December press statement referred were approved well before June 1993, as my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development made clear to him subsequently in correspondence.

Mr. Bayley: That is not what the parliamentary answer said.

Mr. Baldry: Perhaps I could make some progress.

As far as I can see, the only organisation—apart from the official Opposition—that does not consider the Government's approach fair, reasonable and equitable is the World Development Movement. It does not consider the extra £65 million for the aid budget to be reasonable. So be it; the WDM may seek to return to court if it wishes, but I am confident that we shall be found to have acted properly and reasonably.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baldry: No. The hon. Gentleman made a long speech—so long that it tried your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker, and you told us as much.

We are putting the extra money to good use, as we put all the aid budget money to good use. In the current financial year it will enable us to provide, for example, additional emergency aid for Bosnia and Rwanda, and to deal with the crisis in Chechnya. We are financing general relief supplies through the International Committee of the Red Cross, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other non-governmental organisations that are working for the 400,000 people who have been displaced by the tragedy in Chechnya. Britain will give up to £1 million for international humanitarian efforts to help those injured or made homeless in the fighting; the money will be used to provide food as well as blankets, plastic sheeting and clothing to protect people from the extreme weather conditions in the region.

We shall also be able to respond to specific appeals from the UN and the Red Cross, and to work on joint projects with the World Health Organisation and other multilateral organisations which are intended to deal with primary health care needs in developing countries. Allocations for the next financial year are still to be decided, but aid for the poorest in Africa and Asia is our priority. I assure my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, and others who asked me about the money, that it is being put to very good use supporting our humanitarian work throughout the world.

Mr. Foulkes: I welcome what the Minister has said, but he has not yet told us—and he has only a few minutes left—how the Foreign Secretary will implement the court's third decision. When will he meet the World Development Movement to explain how he intends to put right the aid payments that have been made so far? That is what the court decided should be done; how will the Government fulfil its decision?

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman clearly did not listen to what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said before Christmas, or to what I have said this morning. Furthermore, he obviously was not particularly well briefed by the World Development Movement. The Treasury Solicitor wrote to the WDM on 23 January, setting out the Government's position.

Mr. Foulkes *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: Sadly, the need for emergency aid has never been greater than in recent times—

Mr. Foulkes: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am aware of the existence of the letter to which the Minister referred, but has it been placed in the Library of the House? It has not been circulated, but it ought to be the property of the House as well as the World Development Movement. Surely it is improper for the Minister to refer to a letter that has not previously been circulated to hon. Members, although they are aware of it and it is central and material to the important point with which we are dealing.

Mr. Baldry: I am more than happy to make the letter available, and to place it in the Library. It repeats very clearly what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said before Christmas, and what I have said today. The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening to my speech.

As I was saying, the need for emergency aid has never been greater than in recent times. In 1993-94, we spent about £180 million on providing speedy and effective help for the victims of natural and man-made disasters. We provided help for the victims of 135 emergencies. We work together with the UN, other relief organisations, our partners in Europe and non-governmental organisations such as the British Red Cross and Oxfam. Whether it be the horn of Africa, refugees in Afghanistan or displaced

people from Azerbaijan, the ODA is there providing a continuous flow of emergency aid to help the victims of many emergencies.

Nor does ODA help stop at emergency aid, vital though that is. It is, for example, running a programme to restore basic electricity supplies to central Bosnia; ODA engineers are repairing power stations and mending supply lines to provide local communities with electricity. Road engineers maintaining life-saving convoy routes, radio operators, fitters, telecommunications experts and logisticians, all paid for by British aid, are working with the UN throughout Bosnia and Croatia. That is work of which we can all be proud.

During the past four months, operations in Rwanda and Bosnia have been undertaken by the UN and a wide range of British NGOs using bilateral ODA funds now totalling respectively £33 million and £94 million. Last week we announced a further £2 million to promote the recovery of Rwanda. Including our share of EC aid, we have spent more than £62 million on the Rwandan crisis since last April. Long-term programmes also continue in northern Iraq, Angola, Mozambique and the horn of Africa.

Sadly, the Opposition have used today's debate to recycle the canard that our aid is in some way linked to arms sales. That is nonsense: there is no link between our aid programme and defence sales, and there never has been. It is absurd to suggest that our aid flows are in any way determined by prospects of such sales. All the 10 highest aid recipients are low-income countries, nine of them in Africa and Asia. A recent OECD report recognises that our aid focuses on poorer countries, and acknowledges its quality.

"The United Kingdom",

says the OECD,

"has a highly concessional business-like bilateral programme largely directed towards the poorest developing countries. Its role as a major donor has been particularly important in several geographical areas, notably Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, and in key sectors such as education, agricultural research, health and population and private enterprise. The United Kingdom has many prominent institutions in the development field and an enormous amount of expertise".

That is the reality of the UK aid programme—aid that works to reduce poverty world wide, promoting sustainable and lasting development. It has helped, and continues to help, to change the world for the better.

Fifteen years ago there was bitter war in Zimbabwe; equally unresolved was the struggle for Namibia's independence, while civil wars scarred Mozambique and Angola and, of course, South Africa lived under the shadow of apartheid. Now only Angola's future remains in doubt, and there too an end to the conflict seems in sight. In all those countries, and in some 150 developing countries around the world, UK aid has been and continues to be a catalyst for change for the better. There is nothing inevitable about countries' having to be poor, and every reason to believe that it is possible for us—and others—to make a positive contribution to change. *The Economist* recently forecast that by the year 2020 what are now called developing countries will account for two thirds of world output and that as many as nine of the 15 biggest economies at that time will be from today's third world.

Whether it is helping to improve the distribution of bread in Moscow, supporting sustainable agriculture in Bangladesh, helping to fight malaria in Africa or the countless other programmes and projects supported and funded by the ODA, we are determined to maintain a substantial and effective aid programme to help to reduce poverty worldwide. It is work of which we can all be proud.

Legal Aid

11.30 am

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I am pleased to share this moment of history with my hon. Friend the Minister. It is perhaps appropriate that you should be in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, because you are a former history teacher. It is also a pleasure to follow the debate initiated by the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall). When I was elected to this place I feared that I would get his mess bills and that he would get all my dinner invitations. The hon. Gentleman has obviously gone for his coffee break. I wonder what the odds are of two Members by the name of J. Marshall initiating these first two historic debates?

This is not the first time that I have shared a moment of history with the Minister because we were both elected to the European Parliament in 1979. However, the greatest moment of history that he and I shared was on 19 August 1953, when on our respective birthdays Mr. Dennis Compton swept England to victory in the fifth test match and we regained the Ashes. I have one advantage over the Minister because not only was I at the match to see Mr. Dennis Compton do that, but he was born in my constituency; and a week or two ago I took him back to see his old home and his old school.

I pay tribute to the noble Lord Mackay, the Lord Chancellor. The dream of every American is to move from the log cabin to the White House. Lord Mackay made just as distinguished a journey, from a railwayman's cottage in Sutherland to the job of a Law Officer and then Lord Chancellor. There are two kinds of Law Officers—distinguished politicians who happen to be lawyers and distinguished lawyers who happen to be supporters of a political party. Lord Mackay is very much a distinguished lawyer.

It was said in Scotland that, no matter which party had won the 1979 election, it would have asked him to be Lord Advocate. It is a tribute to him as an emigré Scot that when he was appointed Lord Chancellor of England in 1987 the appointment was greeted with a mere murmur of approval. One wonders how Scotland would have reacted if an Englishman had been appointed Lord Advocate in 1988. I suspect that there would not have been a murmur of approval: the Scottish advocates would have had something to say.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I join in the hon. Gentleman's fulsome tribute to Lord Mackay, who is one of my constituents. However, to put the matter in another contemporary context, although he may well have been appointed by a Labour or a Conservative Government in 1979, his subsequent conversion seems to have been complete, because at the last two general elections he spoke against me at Conservative campaign meetings in the constituency.

Mr. Marshall: My only regret is that the noble Lord cannot vote in the constituency, other than in European elections when I am sure that he carries out his duty and votes for the right party.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): To vote the right way is to vote Labour.

Mr. Marshall: The hon. Gentleman is misguided if he thinks that the Labour party has any chance in that Euro-constituency. We know that he is an opponent—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. What has this to do with legal aid?

Mr. Marshall: You might ask the hon. Gentleman who took me down that by road with his sedentary intervention, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It is appropriate that the task of reforming the legal aid system should fall to Lord Mackay who has a fine legal mind, the analytical mind of a mathematician, and who has the sense of compassion to be found in those with a deep religious background.

The legal aid system was designed on the simple premise that no one should be denied justice because he is poor. That is an excellent and noble sentiment but, unfortunately, the system no longer achieves its basic objective despite being the most generous system of legal aid in the western world. Its cost has risen dramatically. In 1979-80, the system cost £99 million. In 1984-85, the cost was £263.1 million and by 1993-94, it had risen to £1,210 million. In the current financial year, it is estimated that it will cost £1,333 million.

Since 1979-80, the cost of legal aid has more than quadrupled in real terms and has gone up by 1,248 per cent. in cash terms. No wonder the noble Lord Mackay said:

> "We must look to new solutions. I am open to new ideas on how we can meet our objectives more efficiently, more effectively and more cheaply."

Of course some people will cavil about the phrase "more cheaply" but I remind the House of two points. First, if we can produce a cheaper system it will be to the benefit of all litigants, not only to the benefit of the legal aid fund. Secondly, the resources devoted to legal aid could be better employed elsewhere. It is a chilling fact that the amount devoted to such aid would be sufficient to provide nursery school places for all three and four-year-olds.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most important reforms that the Lord Chancellor has said he will carry into effect is the withdrawal of legal aid which has scandalously been made available to extremely wealthy people? The only reason for those overseas nationals litigating in British courts is that our courts are convenient forums. Those people have vast assets and clearly should not qualify for British legal aid to the detriment of the British taxpayer. It is right that our noble Friend intends to correct that abuse.

Mr. Marshall: My hon. Friend anticipates my speech. Like him, I have read the consultation document "Legal Aid for the Apparently Wealthy". It is a valuable document, to which I shall turn later in the debate.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Does my hon. Friend agree that legal aid for the apparently wealthy is a mere pinprick compared with the amount of legal aid that has been granted? Was he present in the 1980s and 1990s when we enacted one piece of legislation after another, doubling the number of offences, the number of

courts and the amount of legal aid that has to be granted as a result? Does he agree that a large part of the legal aid budget is our fault? We are responsible for it.

Mr. Marshall: I am afraid that I must disagree with my hon. Friend. When one examines the growth of the fund—*[Interruption.]* I wonder how those who are following our proceedings at this historic moment regard the attitude of Opposition Front-Bench speakers who make sedentary and unintelligible interruptions.

The biggest item of growth in the legal aid fund is civil legal aid rather than criminal legal aid, so I must disagree with my hon. Friend. He may regard it as a mere pinprick that Mr. Ernest Saunders received £1.3 million in legal aid and that the Levitt case cost the taxpayer £2 million, but when people see Mr. Levitt quaffing champagne at Tottenham Hotspur and living in a home worth £750,000, they regard it not as a pinprick but as an obscenity. They believe that those sums are the resources of the taxpayer and that they could be used more efficiently and more sensibly elsewhere.

Mr. Ashby: I agree with my hon. Friend about that.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my hon. Friend for his agreement. I think that, for a Wednesday morning, the House is indulging in far too many sedentary interruptions and I shall now proceed with my speech.

The National Consumer Council has suggested various ways in which legal aid could be dealt with more cheaply. It suggests that greater use could be made of binding arbitration. That would be especially useful in matrimonial cases, which have been one of the causes of the great mushrooming in legal aid. The council also suggests the development of no win, no fee, legal services. Our noble Friend Lord Mackay suggested that idea during the recent reform of the legal profession.

The council suggests that no-fault compensation under the Road Traffic Acts would be a means of reducing the legal aid burden, and that we should promote low-cost legal services. As a consumer, one would like legal services to become less expensive not only for the legal aid fund but for the many other consumers of legal services.

Mr. Hawkins: My hon. Friend mentioned the explosion in matrimonial legal aid. I practised at the Bar for a number of years before I came to this place, and I did a lot of work as a family law barrister in particular. I noticed that there was large legal aid expenditure for people who would frequently come to court for domestic violence injunctions.

Although it is proper that legal aid should be available in such cases, the problem often was that the battered wife would obtain legal aid to bring a case, to obtain an injunction, perfectly properly, and to protect herself, but she would then allow the man responsible for the violence back into her house. The relationship would resume. There would then be another violent incident. I see that the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) nodding. He is familiar with the problem. The woman would return to court and there would be further legal aid expenditure.

Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important for legal aid to be limited to, at the most, no more than two applications to court, because so often, legal aid is wasted by repeated applications by the same parties in the same court?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) resumes his speech, may I point out, as I have already said once this morning, that interventions should be brief.

Mr. Marshall: There is obviously merit in what my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) says.

The National Consumer Council suggested that there might be a development of the salaried sector. It pointed out that in Holland, 15 per cent. of legal aid is through the salaried sector rather than through private practice solicitors.

In the legal aid system, we must consider the need to make greater checks on applications. In a written answer on 24 October 1994, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department told me that, in 1993-94, there were 413,728 claims for civil legal aid and 606,041 applications for criminal legal aid. In that financial year, the legal aid assessment office referred 15 cases for alleged fraudulent claims.

We are being asked to believe that, of the 606,041 rather benign individuals who made applications for criminal legal aid, only 15 would dare to give misleading, inaccurate information to the legal aid fund. I do not believe that, out of 1 million applicants, only 15 might have told the odd fib or two. It beggars belief.

A written answer given on 26 October 1994 by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary shows that there has been a growth in the number of high-cost trials. In 1990-91, there were only 94 legal aid cases costing the taxpayer more than £100,000. By 1993-94, there were 226 such cases. In the first half of the current financial year, there were 153 cases. Those include some of the cases that have caused the greatest concern to the taxpayer.

The fact that some cases can cost more than £100,000, and that some other cases may cost only £1,000 or £2,000, underlines the absurdity of a standard assessment of means under the legal aid system. Although one individual might be able to afford a case costing him £5,000, he might find it much more difficult to produce the readies for a case costing him £100,000.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the cost of the legal aid system, it is expensive, capricious and unfair to individuals. That is why the Lord Chancellor's attempts to reform the system have been widely welcomed. Nothing has received a greater welcome than the consultative document "Legal Aid for the Apparently Wealthy".

I referred earlier to the case of Mr. Roger Levitt, who enjoys a life style that was the envy of many people. He has a home in St. John's Wood. He quaffs champagne. *[Interruption.]* He is still very well represented in St John's Wood by my right hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. Marshall]

Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler). Mr. Levitt's life style is an insult to the investors who lost all their money in his organisation.

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman was only too anxious to share with us his judgment as to how the noble Lord Mackay voted at the previous election. Would he like to hazard a guess as to how Mr. Levitt voted?

Mr. Marshall: I made it clear that Lord Mackay did not vote at the previous election because, as a member of the House of Lords, he could not have done so.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I caution the hon. Gentleman about following the path set out by the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng).

Mr. Marshall: I was just going to say that I would not speculate as to how someone who did not live in my constituency voted, because I would not have any access to canvass returns that could give me any accurate information on the matter.

It is equally offensive to taxpayers and citizens when they see Mr. Ernest Saunders skiing with his wife in Switzerland and hopping across the Atlantic on Concorde, no doubt ready to patent the cause that managed to cure him of Alzheimer's disease. He enjoys a lifestyle that is far superior to that of the vast majority of taxpayers and hon. Members, yet he received £1.3 million in legal aid.

There is the case of Mr. Gordon Foxley, who is guilty of massive corruption at the Ministry of Defence. He netted a tidy sum, has a house worth £500,000 and a fleet of cars. He has managed to sting the taxpayer twice, first as a civil servant and then as a defendant in a case. We also have the case of Mr. Hashim, who received £4 million in legal aid, despite being a multi-millionaire.

Legal aid was designed to help the indigent defend themselves. Instead, it is being misused by a number of asset-rich individuals, who have been able to cover up the source of their luxurious life style and to sponge off the taxpayer. I am sure that all hon. Members would like to congratulate our noble Friend Lord Mackay on his determination to remove that scandal.

Lord Mackay's consultation paper contained five questions. First, should there be a limit to the amount of equity ignored for means-testing purposes and should that limit be set at £100,000 for private houses? Secondly, should there be a ceiling on the amount that can be ignored as the subject of dispute and, if so, would a figure of £100,000 be appropriate? Thirdly, should the legal aid rules be changed to allow the existence of a Mareva injunction to be ignored? Fourthly, should more be done to develop the concept of legal aid as a loan when the applicant is unsuccessful in his litigation? Finally, should there be an affluent life style provision in the civil legal aid scheme?

Most people believe that there should be a limit on the amount of equity to be ignored when it involves a private home. Most ordinary taxpayers do not enjoy an equity of £100,000 in their homes, so why should they pay taxes to finance the legal costs of those who live in very much better homes? I also believe that there should be a similar disregard in respect of the assets which are the subject of debate. I suppose that a Mareva injunction would be known as the Hashim clause. It is applied only when someone leads a wealthy life style and has substantial assets. It gives great offence to people that Mr. Jawad Hashim should have receive £4 million in legal aid when he was a multi-millionaire, had seven homes and expensive cars, and managed to employ servants.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not only the very rich who should be considered in the review but the poor? If the poor receive legal aid as a matter of right, it could distort the outcome of a case for the defendant.

Mr. Marshall: With that very short question, my hon. Friend has curtailed my speech by about four minutes, which will no doubt please the House.

I agree that, in civil legal aid, which is the most expensive aspect of legal aid at the moment, the existence of a legal aid certificate is the strongest weapon that a litigant can have because those against whom he is litigating know that, whether they win or lose the argument, they will pay the costs.

The principle whereby, when a case is lost, the legal fund pays nothing towards the costs of the person being sued needs to be re-examined. That is unfair and leads to delays. I am told that the best way to win a civil case is to have a legal aid certificate and that the second-best way of winning is to have a good argument. We have read recently that Mr. Winston Silcott is to receive £100,000 of legal aid to sue the Metropolitan police. Many people, including the Metropolitan police, regard that as thoroughly offensive.

The Lord Chancellor's fourth question was whether legal aid should sometimes be regarded as a loan. Mr. Ernest Saunders told the press that he is shortly to receive a £70,000 pension from Guinness. He also receives substantial fees for lecturing and giving marketing advice but chooses not to pay anything towards his legal aid costs which, I remind the House, were £1,342,465—not a penny more, not a penny less. In such cases, the unsuccessful criminal who then comes into money should be expected to pay something towards his past legal aid fees.

I deal now with the question of an affluent life style and what could in future be called the Roger Levitt clause in legal aid. Everyone believes that those who enjoy an affluent life style should not receive legal aid.

Mr. Ashby: Does not my hon. Friend believe that someone acquitted on appeal should receive costs, or does he believe that people who are wrongly convicted should always pay into the legal aid fund and always lose out? I am thinking about Roger Levitt in particular.

Mr. Marshall: It is up to the courts to decide whether someone who has been acquitted should receive costs. It is not right to say that everyone who is acquitted should receive costs, because there might have been good reason for the prosecution. It may well be that the old Scottish verdict of "not proven" should be introduced in some cases. Were that to happen, the person involved might not receive costs. It would be wrong to say automatically that people who are prosecuted should not pay anything towards their defence.

Mr. Steen *rose—*

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor) *rose—*

Mr. Marshall: I think that I should give way first to my hon. Friend the Minister.

Mr. Steen: So do I.

Mr. Taylor: I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and for South Hams (Mr. Steen) for their courtesy. In his admirable speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South has already dealt with the five questions set out on page 35 of the document entitled "Legal Aid for the Apparently Wealthy". Would he be good enough to consider—not necessarily this morning but when he has had time to reflect further—the many other questions contained elsewhere in the document, because I would value his opinion on them, too?

Mr. Marshall: If I tried to answer every question in the document, I should have to take up the whole of the debate. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Minister was intervening because he thought that he might not have the opportunity to do so later.

Mr. Steen: My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) has touched on legal aid in criminal cases. Does he agree that, too often, legal aid is offered as of right to people charged with criminal offences? Does he agree that that should not be so and that the most stringent means test should be applied to those who have been charged with such offences, as happens with civil matters? Does he further agree that too much money is being spent on legal aid and that the problem needs to be dealt with?

Mr. Marshall: I thought that I dealt with the latter point at the beginning of my speech when I said that there had been a huge increase in the legal aid bill from under £100 million in 1979-80 to £1.3 billion in the current financial year. On my hon. Friend's first point, he is right to say that legal aid should not be given as a right. The merit of the case should be examined.

Having spoken to various lawyers over the past few weeks, I have learnt that many believe that legal aid is given in cases which are not as legally meritorious as others in which it is not given. I could cite a number of such cases involving people who come to my constituency surgery—their adversary has been awarded legal aid but they feel that the case did not merit it. I shall cite only two examples because this issue is taking my speech out of sequence, although that will reduce its length.

One constituent told me that he had been given planning permission by Barnet council to build a garage. He had bought the bricks and wood but then a neighbour said that such a garage would interfere with his light. The neighbour approached the legal aid fund and received backing. This created inequality, because the person who had received planning permission could not get legal aid and could not afford to fight his case. The legal aid fund, in effect, determined the outcome by backing one individual when the other could not afford to fight the case.

On another occasion, representatives of a Hindu temple came to see me. They had expelled someone who had broken an agreement. Had he apologised, they would have taken him back. However, he decided not to apologise but to go to court with help from the legal aid fund. It was not a meritorious case—an apology, which would have cost nothing but the loss of face, was not offered so expensive legal action was taken with only one side benefiting from legal aid. It is unfair, and a waste of taxpayers' money that could have been used elsewhere.

Mr. Hawkins: There are so many people in the category that my hon. Friend has just mentioned that they now have their own acronym—MINELA: modest income, not eligible for legal aid. Those people are now in the weakest position in the whole legal service.

Mr. Marshall: My hon. Friend is quite right. On one occasion, I was described by one of the chaps who compiles the parliamentary profiles, Mr. Andrew Roth, as a man of patience. I hope that I have demonstrated that patience by the number of times that I have given way this morning.

The Lord Chancellor said in his document that an affluent life style was difficult to define. It may be difficult to define, but we can certainly recognise it in the life style of Mr. Hashim with his seven houses, in Mr. Foxley with his £500,000 mansion, in Mr. Levitt with his £750,000 home, and in Mr. Kenneth Sinar—with his yacht Enendine, which had six berths, three cabins and four occasional berths—who lived in millionaires' row in Hove.

Those life styles are the envy of the ordinary citizen, who cannot afford luxury yachts, champagne in boxes at White Hart lane or a fleet of motor cars. It is quite wrong that the ordinary citizen, who cannot afford that life style, should have to pay taxes so that someone else can continue to afford it. Our noble Friend Lord Mackay is to be congratulated on seeking to release those resources so that they can be used to help those in real need. I shall not speak at great length about civil legal aid because I dealt, in various answers to my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), with the issues that concern me, concern him and concern the House.

The objective of legal aid, when it was set up in 1948, was that no one should be denied justice because of their income. That is no longer true because those who can afford justice in the courts today are the very wealthy and those who are legally aided. A huge swathe of middle England cannot afford justice.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): And middle Scotland.

Mr. Marshall: And middle Scotland.

That is due not to a defect in the legal aid system but to the cost of the legal system in general. That is why I welcome the appointment of Lord Woolf, whom the Government have asked to try to reduce the cost of the legal system. Lord Woolf has to look at three points: the costs involved in legal action, the delays involved in legal action, because justice delayed is justice denied, and whether some cases could be removed from the legal system altogether.

Mr. Steen: There is one more point to mention, if my hon. Friend would allow me. We should also consider the fees charged by lawyers. If the fees that lawyers charge were pegged, the legal aid fund would not have to pay

[Mr. Steen]

out so much money. It is similar with doctors, who charge whatever they like, knowing that private insurance will pay.

Mr. Marshall: I see that I am equidistant between my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams. One is obviously a consumer and the other a provider of legal services. I shall not dare to decide who gets the better deal.

Mr. Steen: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I acquaint the House with the fact that I am learned, as well as our hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby)?

Mr. Marshall: I regard my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams as learned in many matters.

I also welcome the fact that Lord Justice Taylor is reported in the press this morning as trying to make lawyers less wordy. He says that cases would be determined more quickly and less expensively for all litigants and the legal aid fund if that were so.

Legal aid was designed to ensure that no one was denied justice because of their income. That was an excellent concept in 1948. It was an inexpensive concept in 1979, but today it is a very expensive concept, which is being abused by some individuals. However, the misuse by a minority is not an excuse for destroying the system, but an argument for reforming the system. That is why I welcome the consultative document and the Lord Chancellor's positive and penetrative proposals.

The original objective of legal aid has been destroyed because many people today are denied justice. As I said earlier, only the wealthy and the legally aided can afford to enjoy justice in our courts. That is why I welcome the determination of the Lord Chancellor to reduce the cost of our legal services, why I welcome the appointment of Lord Woolf and why I welcome the reported comments of Lord Justice Taylor.

12.4 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I am grateful to have an opportunity to speak in a Wednesday morning debate in the House. I have often spoken elsewhere at such a time, but I never had the pleasure of speaking here. I shall begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on an extremely lucid description of his concerns, with which I identify. There are, of course, many people who would see things differently. I have spoken to those outside this House who have complained that far from it being the case that the amount being spent on legal aid is generous, a great deal more should be spent. I add that those people—normally—are practising in law and perhaps, therefore, are personally involved.

In answer to such people, a strong case could be made for the success of legal aid based on the amount of funding that has been made available. If one considers the latest available figures—I obtained them from the House of Commons Library yesterday—it is immediately apparent that, for example, civil legal aid in general has increased by a huge percentage; about 1,000 per cent. since 1979. The total increase, comparing last year with 1979, is in the order of 400 per cent. after adjusting for inflation. Without that adjustment, that 400 per cent. figure becomes 1,122 per cent.

The increases are apparent not only over the period between 1979 and 1993, but over the most recent years. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South quoted more figures which support that charge. In addition, the number of bills paid for legal aid show a huge increase. Civil legal aid bills increased from 104,804 in 1979-80 to 359,188 in 1993-94. For magistrates, the number of bills paid for criminal cases rose from just over 243,000 to 432,000. All those figures show that there has been a massive increase in public funding for legal aid.

I said that those figures could be used as an argument for the success of legal aid over that period, but I would not take that view. I would use those figures to illustrate that something has gone seriously wrong. There has been an excessive increase in the funding of legal aid and it should be curtailed. I do not in any sense question that it is true that many individuals have been helped over that period, and rightly so, but to concede that there should be continued increases in legal aid is effectively to concede an argument in favour of an entirely socialised legal system; it would be to say that one should increase funding of the system by a ratchet effect until everybody effectively had the right to claim some money if they wished to take legal action. I would totally oppose that.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) that legal aid, in itself, is a distortion of the system and that, by giving grants to people to litigate, we are giving them a potential advantage over others. I, too, have had constituency cases which clearly demonstrate that. People were persuaded to create litigation because they knew that there would be no possible loss to themselves as the funding would be provided by the state. Others have faced either serious delays or considerable distortions to their legal cases because of the intervention of the legal aid fund on behalf of the other party. Some of those cases have involved people who, earlier in their lives, could very well have afforded to fund their own legal action. I shall return to that point later.

Clearly it is fundamentally wrong for the taxpayer to be expected to write a blank cheque to fund unlimited private action, and especially to subsidise people with a wealthy lifestyle. There is ample evidence that that happens, and although I do not want to go over again the ground so ably covered by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South, I shall refer to two cases that my hon. Friend mentioned.

Dr. Jawad Hashim received £4 million in legal aid—an outrageous payment. A former president of the Arab Monetary Fund, he was being sued for £33 million, which he had allegedly siphoned into private Swiss bank accounts, and he owned six luxury homes around the world. Eventually he was ordered to pay £132 million in compensation. There was no question, at any stage, of that man being poor or even remotely understanding what poverty is, yet he could claim from the British legal aid fund. That is so unacceptable that action must be taken as a matter of urgency to prevent any recurrence of such a case.

Mr. Steen: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. Has he considered whether legal aid will be available to all European Union citizens? Will any Frenchman or

Dutchman who comes here be entitled to legal aid, too, and if so, will inquiries be made about the circumstances of such people in their own countries? Might that not be another way in which Europeans can take money from the British taxpayer?

Mr. Merchant: That is an important consideration. In his consultation document "Legal Aid for the Apparently Wealthy", the Lord Chancellor asked to what extent nationality should be taken into account in deciding whether to grant legal aid. That is an important topic to examine, and there is a strong argument that the taxpayers of this country should not be expected to fund the legal bills of those who are not British nationals yet who might for one reason or another appear in the British courts. Such people may have chosen to appear there, and be taking action themselves. In a number of such cases—perhaps in all of them—it is no longer suitable, right or fair that people should receive support from the taxpayer.

The other case that I wish to mention is that of Mr. Roger Levitt—another glaring example of misuse of the legal aid fund. Mr. Levitt received £3.7 million to fight fraud charges, yet continued to live what was clearly a luxurious life style. I accept that those are unusual cases—they are by no means run-of-the-mill uses of the legal aid fund, and thank goodness for that—but that does not make them any more justifiable, nor reduce the need to correct the abuse.

In the light of such cases and of other information, the Lord Chancellor last month produced a Green Paper, in which he asked some excellent questions and made some excellent suggestions. I draw the attention of the House especially to what he says about the affluent life style. That may be a difficult concept to define, but it is an important one because it has to do with equity and credibility, and with another more important factor that we are here to act upon—the views of ordinary members of the public, who feel outraged when they see their taxes siphoned off to support people who live a special life style, out of the reach of their world.

Not only should current affluent life style be taken into account, but some means should be found to examine past affluent lifestyle. I know that that is a difficult subject, but there is a considerable difference between someone who has always had a limited life style and income, and someone else who has been financially successful throughout his life and has amassed a large fortune and lived in great style, probably operating in the business world, but who for one reason or another has now fallen on financial hard times. We all know of people who, according to their bank balance, have fallen on hard times, but who still have access to funds both at present and, more particularly, in the future—especially if they have the skills required to deal in the world of finance and business.

If such people apply to the legal aid fund, it should be asked whether it is reasonable to expect them to have made plans beforehand to protect themselves against the cost of future legal action. I am thinking of insurance, or perhaps organising of their finances, especially if they were operating in the world of business, to take account of possible future legal action. Such people may have worked in a business sector in which legal action was a common phenomenon, and a reasonable business man planning his future carefully in the business world should have put aside funds for possible litigation.

It is also relevant to consider whether the subject matter of a dispute should be taken into account, especially where capital is at stake in the legal action. At present that capital is excluded from the formula, but should it be taken into account? I feel strongly that it should, and I also support the idea of a cap to limit the allowable value of a property and size of a mortgage.

There is much more to be said on the subject, but this is a brief debate, so I do not want to delay the House further. I finish simply by drawing the attention of the House to the many possible alternative ways to help those who need to take legal action that obviate the need for the taxpayer to provide a subsidy through the legal aid fund. Such methods could help those who are, in the jargon, "apparently wealthy", as well as those in the middle income bracket who would not at present be entitled to legal aid, and those who, legitimately and understandably, are now entitled.

One such method is the no win, no fee, arrangement, which represents a positive step forward in our legal history and gives us hope for the future. It would enable individuals to sue and to take other action without any risk to them, yet with the possibility of gaining compensation or other redress at no cost to the taxpayer.

I strongly support the drive to achieve a cheaper legal system for the consumer, via the courts or via alternative means. I also support an extension of standard fees, which could help towards that objective, and the encouragement of other administrative processes—there are now many of those—as an alternative to legal action. Legal action should be a weapon of last resort, not of first resort, for the ordinary citizen. There should be, and are, other means by which redress can sensibly be achieved.

I should like strong action to be taken to make the appeals system cheaper. Many parts of that system can be very expensive, and we must try to ease the passage of those with a genuine cause for grievance against a lower court, without involving huge costs to them or to the taxpayer.

We need stricter targeting, further and better checks on applications, and the elimination of abuse and fraud, whether that be abuse that is permissible at present under some of the strange twists in the legislation, or fraud that is not permissible but is not being cracked down upon sufficiently. Specifically, I urge the development of alternative ways of obtaining redress. Those developments constitute the answer that should enable us not only to restrain the growth in the cost of legal aid but to reduce that cost. That, and not the reverse, is what I would regard as a success.

12.18

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): I too am glad to be taking part in the first of our Wednesday morning debates. In the great world outside it may be commented upon that our Chamber is a little sparsely attended, but we are here as Back Benchers to debate subjects of close personal interest to us. I therefore congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) for securing us a debate on legal aid today.

The workings of legal aid services, as they are at present, remain a mystery to the general public unless and until they find that they are forced to use them. The general perception—at least of constituents who visit me

[Mr. Mark Robinson]

in my advice surgeries—is that the service has been underfunded and cut. Perhaps that is because people remember the publicity that was given in 1993 to the tightening of the eligibility conditions. That produced an outcry at the time, but it is worth reflecting on the reality of the costings today, as my hon. Friends said.

The legal aid scheme cost £685 million in 1990-91, as the Lord Chancellor noted recently, and this year the cost is increasing to £1,300 million, even with tightening of eligibility conditions—a doubling of expenditure in three financial years. That, by any standards, raises questions about good use of public money. We must ask ourselves how cost-effective that service is. If the general public knew the rate of escalating cost and what they receive in return, they would be much angrier and more stirred up about the subject than they are. What is more, unless we do something, the trend is likely to continue upward.

I was grateful for the chance to read the keynote speech about the future of legal aid given by the Lord Chancellor on Wednesday 11 January 1994, at a seminar organised by the Social Market Foundation. That was a fundamental think-piece and discussion of the way that we might consider trying to change the legal aid system.

The general public may believe that the number of people helped by legal aid is declining, but under the scheme it has actually increased from 3.5 million to 4.5 million. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for Members of Parliament such as myself to be visited by constituents who have tried to take up a legal grievance—especially through the civil courts—and who find that they are unable to do so because they fall, sometimes just an inch, outside the eligibility criteria.

Those people become extremely cross when they hear about the examples that were quoted this morning. They do not understand how people of such great wealth can obtain access to the legal aid system with such enormous sums yet, when they themselves are fighting what to them are important cases but may appear to other people to be small matters, they are unable to obtain legal aid. All that adds up to a general opinion that the legal aid system is not serving the public as well as it should.

That forces one to ask how a service based on such fast-growing expenditure can be so poorly regarded. We should probably seek the answers in the inflexibility of the present court-based system, at least as it applies to civil cases, and the remorseless increase of the cost of each individual case, leading to a commonly held opinion that the cost of civil justice is climbing beyond the reach of individual people.

Mr. Ashby: Has my hon. Friend considered that, in respect of civil justice, the responsibility for the increase lies fairly and squarely at the Lord Chancellor's door, and at the door of the Lord Chief Justice, who have introduced, as recently this year, rules that have increased the cost of court proceedings enormously? I have suffered. I have had to pay up as a result of stupid rules that have been inserted, requiring replies that previously were never necessary, which have increased the costs of cases enormously. The Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice are responsible for the increase themselves.

Mr. Robinson: My hon. Friend makes a valuable argument, because there are two sides to the equation—the increasing costs of legal aid and the cost of the court system. The latter subject alone would be worthy of a debate on another occasion, but unfortunately I do not have the time to develop that theme this morning.

However, for all the reasons that I have given, I warmly welcome the Lord Chancellor's decision to publish his consultation paper, and also to ask Lord Woolf to carry out a review of the procedures of the civil courts. I hope that Lord Woolf will bear in mind some of the arguments that were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South. In addition, some interesting ideas for fundamental reform of the legal aid system were proposed in the speech that I mentioned.

The legal aid system as we know it today emerged from the Legal Aid and Advice Act 1949, which set up the civil legal aid scheme that is very much the basis for that which exists today. It has been rather like a train that starts with two carriages, to which carriage after carriage has been added, so that it becomes progressively slower.

Assistance was introduced under the green form scheme, which was introduced in the 1970s, and the duty solicitor schemes of the 1980s. However, the essential approach is on a case-by-case basis.

The Lord Chancellor rightly asked the question—I think a good one—whether there are more cost-effective ways of achieving results, at least in the early stages of civil cases, so that they do not necessarily have to come to court. Simplification is one example.

I find the six objectives that the speech spells out especially interesting. There is no time to discuss all of them this morning. There is a need to recognise and incorporate the contributions that can be made by legal agencies and advice services, such as local law centres. Citizens advice bureaux do valuable work, but many are short of funds. They could greatly expand their work if the opportunity came to them through the legal aid system.

In selecting that specific proposal from the many that the Lord Chancellor has suggested for discussion, I urge my hon. Friend the Minister, when he replies—

Mr. Donald Anderson: Is not the hon. Gentleman aware of some contradiction between the wish to expand the work provided to the public by citizens advice bureaux and the financial difficulties of those bureaux throughout the country as a result of the pressures on local government?

Mr. Robinson: I think that that is a different issue. I am discussing the suggestion that we give citizens advice bureaux a new and expanded role, which would need to be separately funded. The other funding issues should be tackled, but there are different ways to tackle them. That is why I shall follow with great interest the pilot project that the Legal Aid Board has established to encourage the delivery of legally aided services by non-solicitor agencies.

The other aspects of the Lord Chancellor's speech that interest me are, first, better targeting of those in greatest need and, secondly, improved quality and efficiency. I know that attempts have been made to achieve that by means of the courts charter, but a case has come to my attention in my constituency, Roxborough *v.* Poffley, in which there was almost unjustifiable and outrageous delay in the court proceedings—so much so that the judge involved wrote privately to criticise the way that the delay developed.

I have written to the Minister about that case, and he has had the courtesy to reply. However, I find it extraordinary that, after all the work that went into the courts charter, it does not cover listing, because it is considered judicial rather than administrative.

The Lord Chancellor has a chance to put his house in order. The courts provide a service to the public, and that service needs to be more responsive to the public to help cut delays. I should be interested to carry out an analysis of the cases that have been mentioned this morning to find out what proportion of the high costs in those cases was due to delay, whether reasonable or contrived.

We must use the opportunity to find ways to improve the legal aid system, so that it once again gives the taxpayer value for money and makes him feel that it provides a valuable service. That is not the case now, which is why I have given such a warm welcome to the Lord Chancellor's excellent speech earlier this month.

12.30 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): We owe the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) a debt of gratitude for enabling us to discuss legal aid and legal services this morning. It is right that the topic—all too often neglected in the Chamber—should find its place on the fist Wednesday morning sitting. For that, we owe the hon. Gentleman a debt of gratitude.

During the debate we have heard a litany—a veritable rogues' gallery has been paraded before us by Conservative Members—of people who have abused the legal aid system. We heard of Mr. Levitt, Mr. Hashim and Mr. Saunders. Strangely, given the litany of rogues, one name was missing: the name of Mr. Asil Nadir. I wonder how that name came to be missed—

Mr. Ashby: I would have mentioned him if I had been called.

Mr. Boateng: I hear from one independent spirit on the Conservative Benches that, had he been given the opportunity, he would have mentioned Mr. Nadir. It is so often the case with Conservative Members that they are just about to mention Mr. Asil Nadir, that well-known contributor—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I must caution the House that, if my recollection is correct, the case is not concluded. It may be in indefinite suspension, but I think that it is still around.

Mr. Boateng: We shall be suitably cautioned, Madam Deputy Speaker, and will not pursue that matter further. Who knows—the legal aid cornucopia involving that individual may yet begin to flow.

But the serious point is that we would be most unwise to fashion a policy on legal aid and legal services based on those particular individuals, their experiences and abuse of the system. We need a more rational and coherent approach. I have listened to the contributions of hon. Members this morning and it may well be that, in fashioning that approach, it is possible to achieve some agreement on the basic principles.

There is one critical principle on which we must all agree if we are to fashion a legal aid system and legal services that are capable of meeting the interests of justice. It is vital that a system of legal aid and legal services for which the taxpayers of this country pay should be able to deliver legal aid, advice and assistance, and where necessary representation, to many more of those taxpayers than is currently the case.

The scandal of legal aid is the way in which, in civil matters, unless someone is in receipt of income support, he can forget public assistance when pursuing a just, reasonable and meritorious claim. It cannot be right that people who work, but are of modest means and contribute to the cost of the service through direct and indirect taxation, should effectively be excluded from access to justice.

Mr. Ashby: I am sorry that both I and the hon. Gentleman—who would, I am sure, like to declare an interest—have been deprived of a fee this morning. The hon. Gentleman will have heard my interventions on the way in which we are responsible for the increase in legal aid. I am sure that he will agree with that in terms of both civil and criminal matters.

Does he also agree that we are having a debate on the increased cost of legal aid without considering one aspect—we have an extremely good form of justice and legal service, which is dirt cheap? It is not an expensive service when compared with those of other countries and what they deliver.

Mr. Boateng: I am afraid that I must beg to differ. What the hon. Gentleman has to say smacks of complacency, which is unacceptable to the Opposition. I do not believe in doing down our system, but we must face the fact that it has become bloated and inadequate in terms of being able to meet the challenges of the end of the 20th century. We need to reform it in quite radical ways if it is to meet the needs of the times and deliver access to justice.

Mr. Ashby: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boateng: I regret that I am unable to give way again.

Mr. Ashby: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood.

Mr. Boateng: It is the fate of politicians to be misunderstood from time to time—I fear that that has affected the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) this morning.

We must recognise the importance of reforming the legal aid system in a way that is consistent with, and carried out at the same time as, our reform of the practices and procedures of the law. We must also reform the way in which the professions and their practices and procedures are structured. An element of restrictive practice remains in the organisation of the legal profession which requires reform.

We welcome the work of Lord Justice Woolf, but there is an urgent need to reform the procedures of the civil justice system. We need to minimise delay and unnecessary replication of tasks. We must ensure that the focus is always on moving forward litigation when it is inevitable, but avoiding it when it can be avoided.

Inadequate attention is paid to mediation and alternatives to law, particularly family law, which swallows one third of the civil legal aid budget. That attention needs to be paid not, I hasten to add, as part of a Treasury-inspired cost-cutting exercise—although it is an effective way of reducing costs—but as a way of delivering a better, more cost-efficient and effective

[Mr. Boateng]

service to consumers of legal services. The time has come to put the consumer of legal services first and to recognise that consumers are losing at the moment.

I shall give one example of the way in which the legal aid system is currently failing to meet the needs of those who deserve advice, assistance and representation. Mr. Vincent Oliver came to see me. The Legal Aid Board found that he had proper cause for action in a claim for compensation against St. Mary's hospital for an operation in which his voice box was mistakenly removed.

That is a terrible trauma in itself but, worse than that, this man has no savings or disposable capital and he does not enjoy a grand life style—there is nothing to mark him as being anything other than an ordinary bloke. He receives benefits to the sum of £343 per month, and he is being asked to contribute £44.80 towards the cost of his legal aid. He is incapable of paying that sum without considerably reducing what is already a very modest standard of living. That cannot be right.

What about those people who are denied legal aid altogether—those people who have saved a little extra, or pensioners who have worked hard and saved all their lives but are now denied access to legal aid advice and services? That cannot be right; the system needs urgent attention.

That is why I ask the Minister, in the context of this short debate, to consider how he intends to address the issue of the under-spend in the current legal aid budget. The Minister will be aware of the Lord Chancellor's commitment to reviewing the issue of eligibility for legal aid if there is an underspend in the total legal aid budget. Last year, there was an underspend of some £70 million, and it is predicted that this year the sum will rise to more than £90 million.

We recognise the need to keep a tight control on the budget, but if that is the case we must find a way of utilising some of that money to meet the needs of the many deserving people who are currently legally unrepresented and unassisted. There is scope for using that money effectively and I urge the Minister to give an assurance that the underspend will be used to meet the needs of those deserving people who, because of the changes in legal aid eligibility, are currently denied access to legal services.

By all means, have a debate about the delivery of legal services, but that debate should not be led by what are essentially Treasury considerations rather than the interests of justice. Let us put justice and the consumer first and see how we can best deliver justice to people who are currently denied it.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor): Until a few moments ago, I thought that the adversarial approach which is always present in litigation had drained out of politics this morning. However, I am reassured that it is business as usual.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) for not only securing this historic debate on our first Wednesday morning sitting but deploying his case in an extremely impressive manner, taking many hon. Members on this side of the House with him.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) on his very thoughtful contribution to the debate. I particularly single out his remarks about the citizens advice bureau. I think that it plays a tremendously important and unheralded role, and I take humble pride in the fact that I helped to establish a citizens advice bureau some 22 years ago. I think that that organisation's worth in society is under-regarded.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) made a very lucid and urgent speech, with periodic interventions from my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins), for South Hams (Mr. Steen) and for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby).

Most of what the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) said was very convincing, and he made a valuable contribution to the debate. I turn to his last point with which he wanted me to deal. Legal aid is demand-led and, as such, it is almost impossible to plan for. However, we have endeavoured to forecast, as best we can, in one of the fastest growing and erratic areas of public expenditure.

What the hon. Gentleman calls an "underspend" is actually 7 per cent. more than we spent last year. I think that Government Members will urge me to be careful when discussing what temporarily appears to be an increase of 7 per cent over last year. I do not wish to get involved in an incautious, over-rapid response to performance over a relatively limited period of time.

Mr. Ashby: In talking about a 7 per cent. increase in expenditure over last year, we should bear in mind that the recent changes in the rules of the High Court have meant an increase in the cost of litigation of about 30 per cent. The rules of the High Court need to be looked at.

Mr. Taylor: The House will not be surprised to learn that by far the highest single component in the increasing cost of legal aid is lawyers' bills. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West will know how long-winded lawyers can be. We should do everything we can to expedite litigation or find alternatives to it.

I turn now to some other points, not least the consultation paper issued by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor, which contains a chapter dealing with the subject of legal aid for foreign nationals. The Lord Chancellor and I recognise that this issue raises strong feelings. We would welcome views on whether the Government are correct in their present view that it would not be right to impose nationality restrictions on the availability of criminal or civil legal aid.

On the increasing cost of legal aid, it is useful to say that the number of people being helped is increasing. In 1993-94 therewere 3.5 million legal aid acts of assistance and just over £1.2 billion was spent. By 1997-98, we expect the number of people helped by the scheme to rise to about 4.5 million and the cost of the scheme to rise to more than £1.6 billion. We estimate that approximately half of households are currently eligible for civil legal aid on income grounds.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that, as our hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South said in opening the debate, there is scope for checking more carefully people's eligibility for legal aid? If those who

are claiming legal aid fraudulently are weeded out of the system, it will ensure that more funds are available for those in genuine need.

Mr. Taylor: I am not sure that that question needs an answer: it is self-evident that we should take care to check that people qualify for legal aid, not least in a world full of trickery—a point which my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South made rather well. He wondered whether the small proportion of people who were ultimately prosecuted represented all those who were putting their best foot forward, or perhaps doing something slightly more dishonest than that.

On the inequality between legally aided and non-legally aided parties, there are circumstances in which a successful non-legally aided defendant may seek costs against the Legal Aid Board or the legally aided opponent. The restrictions on those circumstances may seem harsh in some cases, but they establish a compromise between protecting those who would otherwise suffer financially and protecting public funds.

Legal aid is granted after both means and merits tests in civil cases. The merits test is designed to rule out cases deemed to be frivolous. I am unable to comment on individual cases, but we should not forget that what might appear relatively frivolous to someone who is not directly involved may be a matter of the first importance to the parties immediately concerned. The Legal Aid Board is responsible for deciding on the merits of the case in civil legal aid, and it takes its duties very seriously in that respect.

It may be helpful to the House in response to the points raised by my hon. Friends if I take a little time to describe the proposals on possible changes to legal aid that the Lord Chancellor set out in his speech to the Social Market Foundation on 11 January 1995 to which my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome referred in his excellent remarks.

The Lord Chancellor is considering a number of possible new initiatives. He has said that they are only the preliminary ideas. We appreciate that there is a lot of work to be done to put flesh on the bones of a reformed legal aid scheme. The Lord Chancellor and I would welcome views on the proposals.

The basis of the legal aid scheme as it exists today is that help should be provided to those falling within the qualifying limits. Up until now, that help has generally been provided in the same way since the inception of the scheme—by the private legal profession, funded on a case-by-case basis.

The legal aid scheme cost £685 million in 1990-91. In the current financial year, the cost will exceed £1.3 billion—an increase of more than 7 per cent. over 1993-94. That represents a rate of increase much faster than inflation. Unfortunately, the rise in the cost of the scheme is not only because of the greater numbers helped: far too much of the rise is attributable to an increase in the cost per case; at the same time, many people who need legal aid are excluded from it.

As has been made clear by the debate today and by previous discussions in the House and elsewhere, although the legal aid scheme is one of the fastest growing Government expenditure programmes, it is also increasingly under attack from a variety of directions. Therefore, the Lord Chancellor and I have concluded that radical change is needed. The hon. Member for Brent, South said as much as well.

The purpose of the Lord Chancellor's proposals is to establish a better, more efficient, more responsive and more flexible legal aid scheme. The overall cost of legal aid must be affordable and controllable. What is needed is a system which forces those who are providing advice and assistance to assess and reassess frequently whether what they are doing is providing value for money both for the client and for the taxpayer.

It is the Lord Chancellor's intention that a future legal aid scheme should operate under a cash limit. That will provide a discipline for the provision of a quality service, and will contain incentives for suppliers constantly to improve the quality of the service. Such a sense of discipline has been sadly lacking up to now.

It is true, as the Lord Chancellor has made clear, that some cases may not be brought under the new scheme that are being brought now. In practice, however, a cash limit is more likely to mean that more people are helped, in more deserving cases, as priority will be set on the basis of need and effectiveness.

The Lord Chancellor has made it clear that most of what he said about his ideas for future of legal aid on 11 January related to the advice and assistance and civil proceedings. In the light of the distinction between civil and criminal legal aid, we shall need to think carefully about how those ideas might apply to criminal legal aid.

We shall, of course, be considering carefully whether to consider the separation of budgets for different areas of legal aid—or ring fencing, as it is called—so that the risk of one area swallowing up another may be avoided.

The Lord Chancellor proposed that the future legal aid scheme should operate by a system of block contracts. The idea would be that the Legal Aid Board should contract for the provision of services with a range of suppliers. Each legal aid area would have a budget for the provision of a full range of publicly funded legal services. Suppliers would be contracted to supply advice, assistance and representation within their competence. Where it was necessary to refer a case on because the original supplier did not have the requisite skills, it would be to suppliers who had made arrangements with the Legal Aid Board to do such work.

The use of block contracting will enable the board to operate within a cash limit and to set priorities. It is a way to bring alternative suppliers into the provision of legal services. As the Lord Chancellor has said, very valuable work is being done by, for example, law centres, citizens advice bureaux and other advice agencies.

It has long been the Lord Chancellor's wish to see them brought into greater use within the legal aid scheme. The opportunity provided by a reformed scheme to build on the Legal Aid Board's non-solicitor agency franchising pilot project, and extend the involvement of advice agencies will be welcomed by us all.

As hon. Members will be aware, the current legal aid scheme is heavily biased towards certain proceedings and court-based solutions. The reform of the scheme should allow the Lord Chancellor to encourage different ways of resolving problems, using not only advice agencies but also mediation and arbitration, where appropriate.

[Mr. Taylor]

It has been suggested in some quarters that a cash limit will lead to the money running out towards the end of the year. Frankly, that is scaremongering. Whatever contractual arrangements are devised, we shall need to ensure that there are mechanisms to guard against unreasonableness.

The elimination of waste in the system—that is, waste of time in court proceedings or in waiting for court proceedings—is a priority for the Lord Chancellor and myself. Lord Woolf's current review of the procedure of the civil courts, referred to by many hon. Members this morning, will help in that matter, but the problem of legal aid cannot be solved simply by tackling waste in the system.

The Lord Chancellor and I understand the concerns expressed about the current scheme. We intend to establish a system that enables to us set priorities for legal aid more effectively according to need, to weigh the benefits against the costs, to break down the present lawyer-led system in a way which encourages a variety of providers and different ways of doing the work and to encourage early advice and different ways of resolving problems, and thus reduce the need for litigation.

The points raised by hon. Members today will contribute to our thinking, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South for initiating the debate.

On perhaps a slightly lighter note, in the context of an essentially very serious subject, not least to the many people involved, unwillingly and unenthusiastically perhaps, in appearing before law courts—I have met few litigants who have enjoyed the experience of appearing before a law court—I dare say that, although there are challenges for advocates in the courts, and that challenge may be enjoyable in a way—from time to time, I have enjoyed it—to be a litigant and to be a party is daunting. To be involved in such proceedings with only limited resources is even more daunting. It is frightening wondering whether one has the means to meet the costs.

The first English statute providing for legal aid dates back to 1495—it did not all begin in the 1940s. In the reign of Henry VII, provision was made for the representation of poor people in courts of law. The only trouble was—here is an echo of the same problem we face today—that Act did not attempt to define a poor person.

York Carriage Works

1 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): Trains have been built at York carriage works for 150 years, and rail engineering underpins the local economy. The York works are not a smokestack industry from the past. Asea Brown Boveri, which owns the works, has invested £50 million in York in the past four or five years in buildings, machinery, technology and training. The York factory is the most modern of its kind in Europe and produces the only trains that meet the full European crash-worthiness certification. Despite that investment and those achievements, however, time is running out for the York works.

In the course of the past year, ABB has shed 900 of its 1,600 work force, and 10 days ago the company chairman said that he had only eight weeks left to secure a further order—and that if he did not succeed the corporate board in Zurich would have to decide to close York because a factory employing 700 people cannot be kept open if there is no work.

Are the Government saying that Britain can afford to throw away an industry and a plant as important as York just because the British Railways Board has in its wisdom decided to defer for two or three years placing an order for badly needed replacement trains? The ABB board in Zurich finds the Government's attitude utterly incomprehensible. That foreign company bought a chunk of the British Rail system and invested £50 million in York and a further £50 million in the Derby carriage works; yet it is being told that that investment must be written off. What kind of advertisement is that for inward investment or for the Government's rail privatisation policies?

York is currently building the first 64 of 600 class 465 carriages promised to commuters on the Kent coast lines. That stock is to be delivered later this year—three months ahead of the agreed date, which says something for the York works. Everyone expected the contract to roll forward to a second tranche. The existing contract has a follow-on clause, which would not have been included in the contract if British Rail, the Department of Transport, the Treasury and the company had not expected a further order to be placed.

The former Minister for Public Transport, the right hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), said last year that he expected to receive British Rail's business case for a follow-on order last June and to be able to finalise an agreement with full Treasury and Department of Transport approval by September.

Just two weeks ago, however, everything was thrown into confusion. The British Railways Board announced a delay of four or five years until 1999 in any further orders for Networkers for Kent coast lines. The board said also that it did not intend to trigger the follow-on clause and felt that any future order would have to be subject to Europe-wide competition. If that happened, even if ABB were to win the contract, the York works would have closed before retendering was concluded.

The British Railways Board says that the reason for delaying is that there is no business case for ordering more stock at present, but that is not the view of Richard Fearn, director of South East Trains—the part of British Rail

which operates the service. In a letter last December to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), who was in his place a moment ago, Mr. Fearn said:

"I am currently working hard with colleagues in the Department of Transport to try to secure a much larger build so that we can fully replace our old trains on Kent Coast over the next two to three years."

The view that there was no business case for further stock was not shared either by the right hon. Member for Kettering last May, when he said at the York Rail Forum:

"There is a prima facie case for Kent coastal rolling stock."

The Central Rail Users Consultative Committee says that the average passenger loading on Kent coast trains in the morning peak is 2.6 per cent. higher than that permitted on safety grounds and that the overloading factor almost doubled in the past year. The Capital Transport Campaign produced figures this morning showing that the overloading factor on some trains is as much as 27 per cent. above the maximum allowed, including both seated and standing passengers.

No one claims that those ancient, overcrowded slum trains are fit for the purpose of carrying Kent coast passengers. They are history on wheels. In reply to a written question published in *Hansard* today, the Minister for Railways and Roads informed me that 424 out of 792 carriages on the Kent coast line date from 1959. Those carriages have been in continuous service longer than all but three Members of the House. They are clapped out and should be chucked out—I refer of course to the carriages, not to the hon. Members.

New trains would provide a better, cleaner, safer, quicker, more comfortable and more reliable service, and would divert traffic from road to rail. The introduction of new trains built at York on the Chiltern line increased the number of passengers by 40 per cent. immediately after they were introduced. If the Government are serious about shifting traffic from roads on to the railways on environmental grounds, the rolling stock replacement should go ahead.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): My hon. Friend made the point that the ABB situation applies to Derby as well as to York. At a time when investment is required, there is investment blight because the Government's privatisation plans mean that planned development cannot occur. My hon. Friend made a powerful point in respect of the provision that should be made for public transport. Derby is very much involved in the debate.

Mr. Bayley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I am aware that he and others of my hon. Friends representing Derbyshire constituencies have been campaigning hard for orders to ensure a future for the Derby carriage works. The whole country needs an investment plan that will sustain its railway manufacturing base.

New trains for the Kent coast lines would save fuel because their running costs are much lower; they would reduce maintenance costs and they would free space on Kent coast lines which is needed to provide access for Eurostar channel tunnel services until the new link is constructed.

There are also the safety considerations. The Hidden report into the Clapham junction crash stated that all slam-door carriages of 1950s vintage used by British Rail had to be either strengthened or scrapped by 1999: it did not state that they all had to remain in service until 1999, which seems to be the decision that the British Railways Board has taken.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): I know that my hon. Friend is aware of early-day motion 404, which has been signed by 48 Members who are sponsored by the engineering union. I happen to be chairman of that union, the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union. We are all concerned about the loss of manufacturing skills. The closure of the works would be a blow to York and to British industry generally. I hope that my hon. Friend will continue the campaign that he has led so magnificently. We must fight to achieve reversal of a policy that is based on privatisation and not on providing what is needed by the country.

Mr. Bayley: I am most grateful for my right hon. Friend's intervention and for the support that I have received from my hon. Friends on the Front and Back Benches. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) has been lobbying hard, and there are suppliers to the York works in his constituency.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Bayley: In view of the time, I must say no to my hon. Friend. I thank him, however, for the support that he has given. Indeed, there has been support from hon. Members on both sides of the House. The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) has supported the campaign. I know that hon. Members representing Kent constituencies have done so as well. There has been support throughout the country. I have received dozens of letters from people expressing concern about the threat to the York works. I have also had support from the EU's new Commissioner with responsibility for transport, who has taken a close interest in what has been happening.

I am not trying to score a party political point. Common sense says that the works should be saved, as does public opinion. Successive Conservative Ministers have said that the full fleet of Kent coast trains would be replaced and the present Minister has spoken to me on many occasions in the past two weeks since British Rail made its unfortunate announcement. Given the commitment of previous Transport Ministers, both to rail manufacturing and to maintaining that base, and to providing replacement carriages for Kent coast passengers, what will the present Minister do to ensure that a follow-on order is placed with the York works before the deadline, which is only eight weeks away? If no order is placed in the next eight weeks, the works will close.

1.12 pm

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): I congratulate the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) on securing this debate at such a crucial time and on the campaign that he has fought, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), whom he generously mentioned, to save the York works. I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing me a few minutes to speak on behalf of the population of Kent and of all Members representing Kent constituencies, who make common cause with him on the campaign to secure an early order so that there can be a continuation of the Networker express construction programme.

[Sir Roger Moate]

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that this is not a party issue. It is common sense that we want to keep the production lines open at York. It is common sense also that we should not be deterred from placing an order for new rolling stock merely because, even by British Rail's admission, there is a time problem of a year or two.

I endorse all that the hon. Gentleman has said about the need for new rolling stock in Kent. In case there is any misunderstanding—there should not be—I emphasise that 16 new four-car units will be delivered for the north Kent service this year. They are coming ahead of schedule. There will be high-profile new trains on the network in the autumn timetable. They are just a start. They will whet the appetite of all Kent commuters, who will want more new trains. The 16 were always seen as just a start.

To be fair, there was not a firm contract arranged for the follow-on order. There was a clear understanding, however, that we were at the beginning of a continuous process to replace the Kent rolling stock. I pay credit to Network SouthEast. In good faith, it has always expected that there would be a follow-on order. It came as a surprise to us, therefore, when we heard that British Rail felt that it could not continue the negotiations.

Kent Members had a meeting with the chief executive of British Rail. It is on record that he said that the door is still open for negotiation, and we would all be shocked if earnest and serious negotiations did not follow to ensure that a way is found of placing the follow-on order for much-needed rolling stock. The existing rolling stock will be time-life expired in the next three to four years. It would be stupid indeed not to place a new order now, merely for the sake of a dispute about perhaps a couple of years, at the end of which the present rolling stock will be even less safe than it is now. It will be clapped out and breaking down.

We also need new rolling stock for jobs in Kent. It is needed as much in Kent as the York works needs to build it. Kent is happy to make common cause. Now it is for British Rail seriously to put together a business case to submit to the Minister. I should be extremely disappointed if my hon. Friend were to say that a good business case put by ABB to British Rail and by British Rail to the Minister was not likely to receive endorsement. I think that it is the will of the House that we should get on with replacement and have first-class rolling stock in Kent and for rail passengers everywhere.

1.16 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I congratulate the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) on securing a debate at such a civilised hour and on presenting his case in such a civilised and well reasoned way. I pay tribute to his efforts and to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) on behalf of York and those of their constituents who are employed by ABB.

I acknowledge the crucial importance of railway employment in York. I congratulate ABB and its work force on the efficiency improvements that have been achieved at York and at other sites since privatisation, with the benefit of the substantial investment to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Given the age profile of the rolling stock fleet and the long life span of the stock, orders are cyclical, as was exemplified by the substantial orders—they were still under construction—for Networker trains to replace Kent inner suburban trains. It was inevitable that there would be a downturn in orders following that peak. The long-term replacement need is below the recent rate of new build.

Mr. Morley: I understand what the Minister says about the cyclical nature of orders, but the long-term investment and planning of companies such as ABB, for which my constituency is a major supplier, means that they find it difficult to switch on and off. It would be much better for rail commuters and manufacturing industry to have long-term orders.

Mr. Watts: Indeed. I recognise that it is desirable for us to have a vibrant railway manufacturing industry and, if it can be achieved, a less cyclical pattern of investment.

The downturn in commuting into London since the peak of 1989-90 has compounded the problem. In the late 1980s, it seemed that the Network SouthEast fleet would need to be expanded to meet growing demand. Instead, we have experienced a decline related to the recent recession. That has hit British Rail passenger revenue extremely hard. We expect to see some growth as recovery takes hold, but we cannot be certain when rail commuting will return to the peak of 1989.

British Rail's estimates of rolling stock requirements in the 1980s were made in good faith, as were any related comments made by my predecessors, my right hon. Friends the Members for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) and for Kettering (Mr. Freeman). With hindsight, it is clear how commercial demand for new trains has changed since the 1980s.

The Government would welcome a further BR leasing deal following the current £150 million contract with ABB for Networker trains, subject to two points. First, there must be a commercial need for new rolling stock and a good business case for it. British Rail cannot scrap sound and serviceable trains prematurely. Those are matters of judgment. I have no intention of going further in commenting on the sound and serviceable nature of trains, because to do so would be inviting hon. Members, particularly my hon. Friends from Kent, to seek to lynch me or have me certified under the Mental Health Act 1983.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Should not British Rail take into account what its passengers think about its carriages, and also the commercial consideration that, if passengers do not think much of its carriages and switch to the coaches which run from Kent to London every day, its revenues will suffer. British Rail should take that into consideration.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is right. I am sure that one of the features of the privatised railway industry will be a much greater responsiveness to the needs of passengers.

Those must be matters of judgment for British Rail. The Government cannot generate that commercial need or second-guess BR's judgment, although my right hon. and hon. Friends are free to do so.

Secondly, the financial terms offered by the private sector for financing the acquisition of trains must be acceptable as a long-term lease. Transfer of risk is

paramount here. A "genuine and substantial" proportion of risk must be taken by the lessor. It is not possible to lay down mechanistic rules, because of the complexity and subjectivity of the issue, but residual value risk is considered to be pre-eminent.

The previous £150 million leasing deal did not satisfy private finance initiative guidelines, but was approved exceptionally as a step towards developing a rolling stock leasing industry. Any subsequent deal will need to go much further on risk transfer. The industry has always been fully aware of that position and the Department is ready to do whatever it can to clarify the PFI rules and to assist in configuring the deal, for which there is a good business case to fit within those rules. I have given that undertaking on many occasions, both in the House and in discussions outside.

The Government are committed to privatising the rolling stock leasing companies during the course of this year, but at present it is British Rail's responsibility, as owner both of the RoSCos and of the operating companies, to assess the business requirements for new trains. There is therefore no question, as the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) suggested, of privatisation being responsible for the present position on orders. Uncertainty is not a factor. If there is a good commercial case and acceptable leasing terms, I am sure that the legal structure of ownership need not be an obstacle.

In making that assessment, BR looks at such factors as the capital cost of the trains, the projected cost of maintenance and any revenue to be gained from greater speed or reliability—points to which some of my hon. Friends have referred. It also looks carefully at the comparative cost of maintaining existing units. This is not a theoretical exercise, but one based on detailed experience of the condition and current repair cycles of components.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): When the rolling stock is passed over to the companies later this year, will the work and analysis that BR has done on the proposal to provide new trains on the Kent coast route be passed over to the leasing company?

Mr. Watts: I am sure that the work and the knowledge that has gone into the assessment of rolling stock requirements will not be lost when the RoSCos are privatised.

As we know, British Rail reached a decision not to exercise the option offered by ABB for replacement trains for Kent coast services. BR concluded that the current fleet could continue in service until 1999, when substantial expenditure on heavy engineering costs would have been required to keep the trains in service. That conclusion is clearly unwelcome news to many commuters and to many of my hon. Friends, but BR has a duty to look at the matter on a commercial basis.

Following the recent meeting between BR and hon. Members representing constituencies in Kent, however, BR indicated that it would wish to re-examine the commercial case if an improved offered were received from ABB. If BR then concludes that the negotiated deal represents good value for money, it would come to the Department with a case under the private finance initiative, and I give an undertaking to look at any such case urgently with my right hon. Friends both within the Department and elsewhere.

BR's recent decision not to exercise the option is not due to a lack of Government funding. BR rejected the proposal based on its assessment of the commercial need for trains. The November Budget settlement had no role to play in that judgment.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Tell us another fairy story.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Lady may like fairy stories, but I am trying to give the House the facts as they are.

British Rail has invested £4 billion in new rolling stock since 1979. Almost 4,000 new vehicles and locomotives have entered service in the past 10 years. In the former Network SouthEast area alone, more than 1,600 new vehicles have been delivered since 1986 for various lines. Overall support for the railways provides this year for investment of about £1 billion.

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): Will my hon. Friend bear in mind that if the issue is to be looked at again in 1999 or thereabouts and ABB has gone out of operation, the lack of competition in carriage production will mean that it may cost BR a lot more than it would if it went for the order now?

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend makes an important point which reinforces what I said earlier about the desirability of maintaining a vibrant manufacturing industry.

The hon. Member for York raised important questions about the safety of the remaining mark I electrical multiple units on former Network SouthEast services. It is an acknowledged fact that modern rolling stock designed with integral bodies has greater collision resistance than the older mark I stock. The same is true of developments in other modes of transport.

As regards day to day service, condition rather than age is the critical factor. All rolling stock is subject to a rigorous inspection and maintenance regime. Mark I rolling stock is fit for purpose in spite of its age. Rolling stock would not be put into service by BR if it was not fit for purpose.

I shall now deal with the specific recommendations in the reports on the Clapham and Cannon street accidents. Appendix G of Sir Anthony Hidden's report recognised:

"The inventory of Mark I coaching stock is large, and much of it has not reached an end of its economic life, nor will do so by another decade or more."

The report went on to say,

"it could be forcibly argued that there are more rewarding candidates for large capital investment in the railway than would be incurred by early replacement of these vehicles."

Sir Anthony Hidden did, however, recommend that British Rail

"shall carry out its stated programme of research into the structural integrity of its rolling stock within its planned timescale of completion by April 1991."

Recommendation 55 went on to say:

"On completion of the programme BR shall discuss its conclusions with the Railway Inspectorate and obtain their agreement to the structural changes necessary to strengthen all relevant rolling stock with a subsequent lifespan of eight years and over."

In April 1991, BR concluded that it would not be reasonably practicable to carry out structural changes to mark I vehicles. I understand that the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate agreed with BR's conclusions.

[Mr. Watts]

The decision to replace the rolling stock involved in the Cannon street accident had already been taken by BR at the time that the inspector's report was published. I understand that the replacement programme for Kent link trains should be completed this April, when all the older trains will have been withdrawn on that route.

Turning again to Kent coast services, I recognise the urgency of the issue for ABB Transportation. BR is continuing discussions with ABB on a modified proposal. I am keeping closely in touch with developments and will continue to maintain close contact with my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby, my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale and the hon. Member for York as matters develop. I think that we have had constructive discussions as the matter has developed, and I offer an undertaking to keep in touch with the right hon. and hon. Members concerned.

We are ready to help with the private finance aspects of any proposal that BR might submit to the Government. We are considering with British Rail how best to deal with that component. We do, of course, have recent experience of how a rolling stock deal can be fitted within the rules of the PFI, because we have recently concluded the agreement for the supply of Northern line trains for London Underground within the terms of the PFI.

This is not uncharted territory. There is a pattern, there are ground rules and there is experience on which we can draw. More immediately, however, it is for British Rail to decide whether there is an acceptable proposal which meets its business requirements, and it is for ABB to decide whether it can offer such a deal. If it can offer British Rail a deal that it cannot afford to refuse, with the help of my Department it should be possible to fit it within the rules of the PFI. I hope that the interests of both York and Kent can then be better served.

Mr. Nigel Dedman

1.29 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): I rise today knowing full well that this is the first day of individual debates under the Jopling reforms. I must say, as a small aside, that I was no great supporter of the Jopling reforms and I remain somewhat cynical and sceptical about them. None the less, I am happy to have the opportunity to raise a particular issue of grave concern.

I am also grateful and happy to see my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) on the Front Bench. He has a great sense of justice and a concern that people should be treated fairly. I urge him to retain his usual talents in that regard, as I lay out the case before him.

I make no apology for the fact that the debate is peculiar in that it is about one particular individual, a constituent of mine. It may seem strange that I should have gone to the lengths of applying for a debate, but the case has wider ramifications. There are probably many other Mr. Dedmans throughout the country who suffer much the same sort of problem. I hope that they will be given some heart by my raising the matter. The case is fairly complicated, so again I make no apology for walking hon. Members through it slowly and in some detail.

On the night of 7 July 1992, the police were called to a boatyard at Point Clear, St. Osyth, Essex at the request of the yard owner. On arrival, they spoke to a Mr. Brown who claimed to be the owner of a boat called the Five Pennies. Mr. Brown produced three documents relating to the boat—a letter from the Metropolitan police about the theft of the boat, a witness order to attend the trial of a Mr. Lewis who was charged with the theft of the proceeds of the boat and a photograph of Mr. Brown with the boat.

Despite the fact that Mr. Dedman was known at the time to be the owner of the boat by the boatyard and had been so certainly for an established period, no one thought to contact him to counter the claim that a new owner had arrived on the scene.

The police officers looked at the documents and talked to the man and then gave their permission for the boat to be taken away. Mr. Dedman has believed for some time, and I suspect that he is right, that the police should have been much more suspicious about the time at which the individual chose to arrive at the boatyard and the fact that he at no stage urged them to contact Mr. Dedman to establish his claim. They should have been more cynical and, at the very least, made sure that the boat was impounded rather than allowing it to be handed over.

The problem is that the police officers clearly gave credence to Mr. Brown's story, and the security guards at the boatyard then bowed before them. A statement was taken from Mr. Brown and documents were photocopied, but he was allowed to take the boat away, and that is where the complications start. It was only the following day that Mr. Dedman was told about the removal—I say theft—of his boat, well after the individual had been and gone, at which stage he had no redress.

As I have said, at no time was Mr. Dedman contacted by the police, or by anyone for that matter, before the boatyard contacted him to tell him that his boat had gone. To put the matter in another context, I cannot imagine that, if the police were called to an incident concerning

an important object of transport such as a car, they would never have assumed that someone else was the owner. They would have sought to check, using the numberplate, who was the licensed owner and to discover the correct procedure. Yet here the procedures seem to have collapsed and the police were happy to let the boat go.

Mr. Dedman contacted the police about the boat and was told by the officer concerned at the time that he had been satisfied from the documentation that Mr. Brown was the legal owner. I find that immensely strange because I have always understood the police to be cynical about getting involved in such cases, and that if they are sucked into them, they seek to make sure that they understand both sides of a case before pronouncing any opinion on a matter. Even then, they would be more likely to be reticent about giving approval. Yet here, approval seems to have been given, which carried huge weight.

It was subsequently proved that Mr. Brown was not the owner of the boat and knew so at the time of taking the boat from the boatyard. The Essex police then claimed that they could not have prevented it from being removed, yet they had been involved. Mr. Dedman discovered that the boat had been involved in a number of court disputes before he became its owner.

Mr. Dedman then sought redress through the courts. He sought redress against the police for their actions, but was told by the judge at Southwark Crown court that there was no case against the police. On 12 October 1993, the presiding judge dismissed Mr. Dedman's claim against the first defendant, Mr. Simkins, from whom he bought the boat in 1990, and his claim against the third defendant, the Essex police. Mr. Dedman was ordered to pay the costs of the Essex police and told to recover his costs from the second defendant, Mr. Brown. However, Mr. Brown was declared bankrupt on 16 March 1993.

All Mr. Dedman's efforts to obtain further information about the witness order addressed to Mr. Brown regarding the Lewis case, which Mr. Brown produced to the police on 7 July, have been unsuccessful. Therefore, Mr. Dedman has been unable to find out what Mr. Brown's involvement was in the case. The police and the courts have seemed unable, if not unwilling, to assist him.

So far, I have described many of the events that have led to Mr. Dedman's predicament. Now Mr. Dedman finds that he has to pay not only his own legal costs of £3,000 or more, but he is being hounded by the Essex county council's legal department for their costs of some £3,000. To top it all, our great judicial system leaves Mr. Dedman still without the boat of which he can prove ownership. On many occasions, Mr. Dedman has requested the police to impound the boat, so that once the matter is clarified he can take possession of it, but the police have refused to become further involved in the matter.

It is a remarkable position. Mr. Dedman seems to be being treated as though he has committed a crime. His crime, it appears, was to be stupid enough to own a boat of which somebody else decided that he should no longer have possession. It could be a comedy, were there not the personal tragedy in the middle of it that Mr. Dedman finds himself subject to injustice when he had expected a just outcome.

I became involved in the case when Mr. Dedman came to me as a final and last resort, explaining that he did not know where to turn. He was being hounded for money, which he had great difficulty in finding. He had no boat to offset against the costs should he be forced to pay them because he could not take possession of it. It seemed that no one wanted to listen to him. In other words, he was a little man whose case no one wanted to resolve.

I took up the matter with the Essex police and it struck me that they wanted the matter dead and buried, but I suppose that that is no surprise. Superintendent Cotgrove wrote to Mr. Dedman saying:

> "While the actions of Mr. Brown can clearly be shown to be shabby, it is the likelihood of proving dishonesty at the time of the offence that is relevant in the case of theft . . . I do have sympathy for the situation you find yourself in through no fault of your own in the light of the criminal law. Where that does not apply then, the police have no powers to prevent the removal of property."

In many senses that misses the real point. The police were present at the time and it was their involvement then that had a powerful influence on the case.

Superintendent Cotgrove continued:

> "Having read the documents, the officer was certain that in 1989, Mr. Brown was the owner and therefore he could not stop him from taking the boat away, unless he had reasonable grounds for suspecting an arrestable offence was about to be or had been committed by Mr. Brown."

Why did no one contact Mr. Dedman?

The attitude seems to have been that perhaps there had been a small mistake or problem, but, "For God's sake let us clear it out of the way and shut up shop. Mr. Dedman will have to sort out his own problems. Perhaps we should not have become involved, but it is not our fault." No one thought to contact the legal owner of the boat. I find that one failing remarkable: having chosen to be involved and to give their opinion, the police did not even bother to find out whether the legal owner disputed the change of ownership.

I took the matter up with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and with the Lord Chancellor. Their letters to me expressed sympathy, but made it clear that they could do nothing to assist Mr. Dedman. I am fully aware of that. I brought the matter to their attention as much because I felt that there was a problem in the operations of the police and the courts if such a problem could arise as because I wished to resolve Mr. Dedman's individual difficulty.

The age-old concept of justice not only having to be done but having to be seen to be done cannot be sufficient if cases such as this arise. It is clear that Mr. Dedman has not been treated fairly. It seems far more important that justice can sometimes be interpreted as "having your day in court", that is good enough; case dismissed. This case is really more about right being done through the legal procedures, which has not happened.

I seek the advice of my hon. Friend the Minister. What can my constituent do? I suspect that my hon. Friend will find it as hard as I do to say where we go from here; the options are clearly limited. There are several possibilities, however. The public may ask why on earth the police and others are not co-operating to try to resolve the issue, rather than shutting the door on Mr. Dedman: there must be a way of resolving it.

The case may seem petty, but it is not. If Members of Parliament have a purpose, it is surely to make certain that the Mr. Dedmans of this world are not crushed by the system. The system clearly could not care less what happened that night; it seems that those involved merely wish to bury the case as fast as possible—and, if necessary, to bury Mr. Dedman with it. Does my hon.

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

Friend agree that there is a case to answer? If only those involved had learnt to co-operate, the issue might well have been resolved at an early stage. I urge my hon. Friend to act, or at least to advise me.

1.42 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) for raising an important matter concerning what he believes to have been an injustice. He mentioned the Jopling rules. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) is my neighbour in Cumbria; while some of us greatly appreciate the benefits of the Jopling rules governing Thursday evenings, those benefits will sometimes be offset by the inconvenience of having to cancel Wednesday morning appointments.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford that I appreciate the anger and frustration that his constituent must feel. I am not a boating enthusiast—I get rather scared on any boat smaller than the QE2 with full stabilisers, not that we can afford to travel on the QE2 on our parliamentary salaries. It is said, however, that there are two happy days in the life of a boat owner: the day he buys his boat, and the day he sells it. I do not know about that, but I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituent rues the day on which he bought the Five Pennies. Some might feel that there is an irony in that name, in view of how much the purchase has cost him. I assure him, however, that he has the House's sympathy in what has been a most unfortunate case.

My hon. Friend explained in some detail how his constituent has been left without his boat and with legal bills amounting to some £4,000, and I do not think that there is any dispute about those facts. It may be useful if I summarise the events that led to the case coming before the House; in doing so, I shall draw particularly on the judgment of His Honour Judge Simpson, who presided over the civil action brought by my hon. Friend's constituent.

In 1990, Mr. Dedman bought a motor boat and took it to a boatyard in St. Osyth, in Essex. The boatyard was a secure compound, and about 20 boats were kept there on trailers. Between September 1990 and 1992, Mr. Dedman and his brother used the boat on most Sundays during the season, but all that changed on 7 July 1992, when a Mr. Brown took the boat from the yard.

As my hon. Friend has explained, Mr. Brown was the previous owner of the boat; but he had sold it, using a third party as agent. The boat was properly sold, and a good title eventually came to the Dedman brothers. However, the third party who acted as agent did not pass on the sale price to Mr. Brown, and as a result the agent was later charged with the offence of theft and appeared at Snaresbrook Crown court.

Mr. Brown, however, thought that his boat had been stolen, and His Honour Judge Simpson specifically said that he could not be criticised for that. Mr. Brown saw the boat at the St. Osyth yard and announced his intention to tow it away, whereupon the manager of the yard called the police.

A Police Constable Summerfield answered the call and arrived at the boatyard. Mr. Brown showed him three documents, one of which was a letter from the Metropolitan police dated 4 December. Unfortunately, the letter referred to the theft of the boat rather than to the theft of the proceeds. The mistake was important: if the boat had been stolen, under the Sale of Goods Act 1979 Mr. Dedman would not have had good title to the boat, and Mr. Brown would have been fully entitled to do as he did and take it away.

The judge accepted that PC Summerfield did not know of the inaccuracy in the Metropolitan police report. PC Summerfield did not get in touch with Mr. Dedman at the time because he was called away to investigate a burglary, but he contacted Mr. Dedman the next day and told him what had happened.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I accept that the police constable was called away. Surely, however—having felt some sympathy with Mr. Brown and, perhaps, established in his own mind that Mr. Brown was the boat's owner—he should logically have said that the boat could not be removed until he had confirmed Mr. Brown's ownership by talking to Mr. Dedman and seeing what documents he produced. Surely it was wrong for the police constable to make such a judgment—rushed or otherwise—at the time.

Mr. Maclean: Police officers are not judges in civil disputes; they are not civil arbiters. They must make a judgment about whether a crime is being committed, has been committed or is about to be committed. Was this likely to be a theft, or was a theft about to take place? The police constable formed the view that a crime had not been committed and was not about to be committed, and it was not up to him subsequently to determine the validity of the civil case. I shall say more about that shortly.

My hon. Friend's constituent later sued Mr. Brown, the person from whom he had bought the boat. He also sued the police. The case was heard at Southwark Crown court in October 1993; Mr. Brown did not appear to defend himself, and an interlocutory judgment was entered. Mr. Dedman, however, was unsuccessful in obtaining compensation from Mr. Brown, who claimed to have sold the boat and was declared bankrupt.

I think that the House will accept, as I do, that my hon. Friend's constituent has had a very raw deal. Unfortunately, that sometimes happens. Where I must part company with my hon. Friend is in his belief that his constituent's misfortunes are the fault of the police. In coming to that conclusion, I am not making a personal judgment in my capacity as a Minister: I am relying on the judgment of the courts.

As my hon. Friend is aware, the investigation of crime, the action and decisions which are taken by police officers in the course of their duties are operational matters. They are the responsibility of the chief officer of the force concerned, and Ministers have no authority to intervene. Therefore, it would not be right for me to comment on the way in which an individual operational case was handled.

As the House is aware, my hon. Friend's constituent brought a civil action against the chief constable of Essex and, as I have mentioned, the court dismissed the case. I think it might be useful if I read from Judge Simpson's judgment. It is a long quote but it is useful to put it on the record as my hon. Friend will wish to be aware of it. The judge said:

"PC Summerfield himself .. told me that he examined the boat, read the documents, took a statement from Mr. Brown who was adamant that he would take the boat unless he could be given some reason why he should not. Having read the document, PC

Summerfield felt 100 per cent. certain that, in 1989, Mr. Brown was the owner, and that he could not stop him from taking the boat away. PC Summerfield explained the powers that he had as a police officer and said he could not restrain Mr. Brown unless he had reasonable grounds for suspecting an arrestable offence was about to be committed. He did not give permission or encouragement and could not stop him. The officer cannot be criticised merely because he read the document and had no powers to stop Mr. Brown. In those circumstances I have no hesitation in saying that the action against the Chief Constable of Essex was misconceived. They had no powers to prevent Mr. Brown and no permission or encouragement was given, the action is dismissed as against the third defendant."

My hon. Friend has also criticised the police for failing to prosecute Mr. Brown. As my hon. Friend is aware, a file was passed to the Crown Prosecution Service, which decided that there was insufficient evidence to show that Mr. Brown had acted with dishonest intent. Therefore, no action was taken against him.

The decision whether to prosecute rests entirely with the Crown Prosecution Service and not with the police. The police's involvement in the decision on whether to proceed ends when the file leaves their hands and is passed to the CPS.

My hon. Friend asked where to go from here so that his constituent could get some satisfaction. If my hon. Friend's constituent is still dissatisfied, as I perceive he is, it is of course open to him to register a complaint against the police. I understand that at no stage has he decided to take that course, not even in 1992 before the matter went before the courts. No doubt, before considering that step, Mr. Dedman would wish to consider the finding of the court that the police constable who was involved in this matter was in no way to blame. The complaints system exists so that members of the public see that their concerns are scrupulously investigated.

I shall now deal with the role of the Police Complaints Authority and remind the House of how the system works. Under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, members of the public can register complaints not only with the force concerned but through a citizens advice bureau, through hon. Members or direct to the Police Complaints Authority. All these avenues were open to my hon. Friend's constituent.

The Police Complaints Authority is required by the Act to supervise the most serious complaints. This is defined in the Act but, briefly, it covers those cases which involve death or serious injury. It also has discretion to supervise other complaints, and a duty to supervise non-complaint matters voluntarily referred by police forces because of their potential gravity, and to make reports to the Secretary of State. Finally, the Police Complaints Authority must review the outcome of every investigation, whether supervised or not, and decide whether disciplinary action should be taken against any officer.

I understand that my hon. Friend wrote to Sir Leonard Peach, chairman of the Police Complaints Authority, on 2 August of last year requesting an investigation into the way that Essex handled this case. Sir Leonard wrote to my hon. Friend saying that he understood Mr. Dedman's sense of injustice but warning my hon. Friend that it was unlikely that the Police Complaints Authority could be of much practical assistance in view of the judge's comments.

Sir Leonard also pointed out that the legislation required complaints to be formally recorded by the relevant force. He offered to make the necessary approach to the chief constable but required confirmation that Mr. Dedman wished to pursue a formal complaint against the officer concerned. It may be helpful if I read to the House Sir Leonard's reply.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I am grateful to the Minister for taking so much time over this matter. However, the point that must be made is that, in the midst of all this, Mr. Dedman is being hounded for costs. In many senses he is worrying about his financial state and is not thinking any more about taking the matter further because, frankly, he cannot afford a moment. The fact that he is being hounded is very much part of the reason for the tremendous hesitation about where he goes from here.

Mr. Maclean: I understand that there is no cost for registering a complaint with the Police Complaints Authority. The difficulty is that Mr. Dedman pursued a case in the civil court against Essex police. The judge said that the case was misconceived and, rightly in my view, did not award the compensation that Mr. Dedman wanted. Mr. Dedman lost that misconceived case and has inevitably incurred costs of his own and police costs. However, Mr. Dedman won the case against Mr. Brown and that would be the perfect solution to the problem. Mr. Brown had a liability to compensate him but the problem is that Brown was declared bankrupt. Therefore, Mr. Dedman has not got his compensation from the one person who should compensate him. Because he failed to get that from the appropriate party, it is not right to sue others such as the police.

It is misconceived to look to an alternative pocket. I am relying on the judgment of the court in favour of Mr. Dedman against Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown is the one who should pay compensation. The court ruled that it was entirely misconceived to try to sue Essex police, and I must rely on that judgment. I think that it is right.

I was about to quote from the letter of Sir Leonard Peach but as my hon. Friend has seen a copy I shall skip that. It is of great interest to my hon. Friend but perhaps other hon. Members are not so interested.

The Police Complaints Authority does not supervise investigations or consider complaints about operational matters. While I appreciate that this must occasionally seem unfair to members of the public, I must invite the House to consider that there really is no alternative. Unfortunately, crime has been in existence as long as ownership. The police work extremely hard in crime prevention and at detecting the perpetrators of crimes. The House recognises that they have a very difficult job.

It would be wholly unreasonable to require the police to take responsibility for being unable to prevent a crime taking place. If it were otherwise, we would need to recruit half the nation as police officers and have them keep a 24-hour watch on the other half. The courts have accepted that, as a matter of public policy, the police have immunity from action over their conduct of an investigation of a particular case, but such immunity was not an issue in this case, which was considered on the facts. I certainly would not like my hon. Friend or the House to get the impression that it is not possible successfully to bring a case against the police.

In general terms, the police are liable for their actions in the same way as other members of society. Under section 48 of the Police Act 1964, a chief constable is liable for torts which are committed by members of the

[Mr. Maclean]

force under his direction and control. The police authority must pay any damages which may be awarded against him by a court.

I accept that this provides little comfort to my hon. Friend's constituent. Unfortunately, it is not possible for the law to be able to satisfy every eventuality. I am aware that in this case my hon. Friend's constituent had good title to the boat. His redress should have been through the civil courts. What was particularly unfortunate about the case, as I said to my hon. Friend a few moments ago, was that, having won the court case against Mr. Brown, the fellow who took the boat away, my hon. Friend's constituent did not receive any compensation because Mr. Brown had been declared bankrupt. I accept that this may be scant comfort, but the liability against Mr. Brown still exists.

Many others, apart from my hon. Friend's constituent, have lost out because of difficulties surrounding title of goods. People who inadvertently buy stolen goods, maybe stolen cars, boats or anything else, do not have any recourse to law. That is a matter of real concern to people who make purchases in the second-hand market.

The Government have taken action through the crime prevention strategy to reduce the opportunity for crime by encouraging the public to undertake a range of measures such as property marking.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Time is up.

Health Authorities and Trusts

2 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): To put this brief debate in context, I must refer to the current discussions in the Nolan committee and the evidence that has been given to that committee. I can best illustrate the significance of the health appointments by quoting from an article by Mr. Simon Jenkins in *The Times* last Wednesday, entitled "Is Nolan just a paper tiger?" Mr. Jenkins is a former editor of that paper and he is scarcely a dangerous radical, so his recommendation that the Nolan committee should ask for an independent royal commission on appointments deserves the attention of all hon. Members.

Mr. Jenkins wrote:

"If ministers protest hand on heart that no thought of party gain ever crosses their minds when it comes to jobs or honours, a way is open to them to set the public's mind instantly to rest. They can divest themselves of these powers. Ministers should continue to propose appointments, but to the new commission, not to Downing Street. The commission would be expected to listen and act reasonably. Some 42,000 posts in executive quangos are now available for public appointment. More Britons are appointed in a lay capacity to oversee such services as hospitals, schools, the police and social services than are chosen at elections."

He goes on:

"As for the 15,000 health authority posts that had to be filled in 1991, it was that most undignified case of catch-as-catch-can in the history of public patronage. On seeing his list, one health administrator paraphrased Wellington and hoped they would 'terrify the consultants as much as they terrify me.'"

In the south-west, we have had a number of terrifying incidents in the way in which health trusts have performed their duties. We had, first, for example, the collapse of confidence in the Westcountry Ambulance Service trust, which resulted, after pressure from hon. Members on both sides of the House, in the exit of the chief executive. Secondly, we have had the suspension of Sister Cooksley at the Plymouth Hospitals NHS trust; again, a U-turn and reinstatement resulted. Thirdly, we have had a series of important and worrying incidents at Treliske hospital, run by the Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS trust. With the latter, of course, a number of inquiries are going on.

The questions that all hon. Members will wish to have answered are: who is in charge, who is answerable and to whom? Who says, "Out you go," if a trust fails? A crisis of confidence exists in the trust leadership. Why? One reason is that the public, the patients and their elected representatives feel that they have no significant role in the appointments procedure.

There was a perceptive series of articles in the *Western Morning News* at the end of last year entitled, "Who really runs the west?" I wish to quote briefly from an important article, headed "Why Tories tend to be picked to serve on health quangos." The article starts:

"A glance down the list of Westcountry health quangos shows a distinct bias towards Conservative chairmen and board members."

It continues:

"At the top of the health pyramid is the South West Regional Health Authority, which nominates chairmen of local hospital trusts and passes names on to health secretary Virginia Bottomley.

One of the SWRHA's six board members is Dame Margaret Fry, a leading Conservative grandee who chaired the annual party conference three years ago."

The article then takes a number of examples of people who, in recent months or years, have been appointed to health trusts. For example, Mrs. Sylvia Russell is described as

"a frank speaking former Tory councillor who was given the £17,000-a-year job of running the Exeter and District Community Health NHS Trust."

Mrs. Russell is reported as saying:

"Mrs. Bottomley has been very keen indeed to promote women into management. Rennie Fritchie (SWRHA chairwoman) is keen to promote women."

The article gives another example of Mr. Graham Andrews, a former North Devon Conservative councillor, who again was appointed as a director of the Northern Devon Healthcare trust.

The main body of the article concerns the curious saga of the appointment of Mrs. Abigail Kirby-Harris, who is described as follows:

"once chairman of the St. Mabyn Conservative Association in North Cornwall, who said that it was not the slightest bit surprising that the Government should choose Tories to push through health reforms.

She added that it was natural for Ministers to pick allies to run NHS trusts ahead of people who wanted the reforms to fall flat on their face.

It was Mrs. Kirby-Harris's appointment, in the face of outspoken opposition from local Members of Parliament and some members of the NHS trust itself, which focused Westcountry attention on the way people are chosen for key quango jobs.

She was nominated by a member of another quango—Dame Margaret Fry—and rubber-stamped by the Secretary of State for Health, who was determined to put more women into top NHS jobs."

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: I shall not give way, because I want to leave time for one of the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends, who told me in advance that he wished to take part in the debate, as is the normal convention.

As the *Western Morning News* correctly pointed out, Mrs. Kirby-Harris's appointment was controversial. First, Sir Godfrey Milton-Thompson, who was the chairman in situ, was expected to continue. Having had a distinguished career in the services, rising to surgeon vice-admiral, he clearly had great expertise. Secondly, when consulted, all five Cornwall Members said that they were happy for him to continue. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) said:

"I don't see any reason why he should not have been reappointed. I thought it was Virginia Bottomley with her obsession with every post going to a woman."

The hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) asked if he might take part in the debate and I hope that he will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As a parliamentary neighbour and former sparring partner, I welcome him to the debate.

Thirdly, in December 1992, before the appointment was confirmed and publicised, other Cornwall Members and I corresponded with the then Minister for Health, the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney). I wrote a fairly quiet letter. The hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East wrote in more robust terms. The Minister's answer shows what had happened. The Minister wrote to me:

"When my office passed on to me your further message about the appointment of the Chairman of the Cornwall Healthcare NHS trust, I instituted an urgent enquiry into the handling of the information you conveyed to South Western Regional Health Authority in your telephone call.

I can confirm that your message was received by the Region after the submission being sent to me by my Appointments Unit. Your views on Sir Godfrey and Mrs. Kirby-Harris were, therefore, not expressed in that submission.

It appears that, if your views were relayed to the Appointments Unit at the Department, they were not recorded and were certainly not passed on to me at any time. I have made it clear to the staff concerned that this is not acceptable and that our arrangements have got to be tightened up in future. I am extremely sorry that the system did not work on this occasion.

The submission I received did inform me however that Robert Hicks and David Harris both favoured Sir Godfrey being appointed. Having said that, for reasons I sought to explain to you when we spoke and which I have already explained to Robert, the advice I received from a range of other sources strongly recommended that Mrs. Kirby-Harris should be appointed. I felt, therefore, I was not able to accept Robert's and David's and, I now know, your advice on this particular occasion."

I want to get some positive lessons from this unfortunate incident. First, what references were taken up for this appointment? Secondly, what references are today taken up for such appointments? What written reports were available to the Secretary of State for Health? In this case, the person concerned had served from the Army and we now know from the industrial tribunal that has taken place since that the disclosed reports in the Army would have made it clear to the Secretary of State that there was no way in which this candidate should be even considered for half a minute for such an important appointment. The reason why she has been to an industrial tribunal is that she is claiming £500,000 for wrongful dismissal due to pregnancy. Thirdly, what is the point of consulting local Members of Parliament if our advice is then ignored?

Fourthly, there seems to be at least the suspicion of a hidden agenda, some sort of discrimination on grounds of gender, age or political orientation. Fifthly, why not advertise openly and set out the experience and criteria for which the Secretary of State is looking? After all, we are talking about considerable responsibilities—whether on an authority or a trust—and the people appointed exercise considerable control on the public's behalf over huge budgets.

I believe that Mr. Simon Jenkins's suggestion that there should be a royal commission on appointments and that there should be an open and honest process for such appointments is the only credible way forward to regain public confidence in the integrity, objectivity, ability and representative nature of those who run the national health service.

People do not trust the trusts and it is in the Secretary of State's hands to set that right. I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure us at the end of this brief debate.

2.10 pm

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): I am grateful to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), my parliamentary neighbour, and to the Minister for allowing me two or three minutes in which to make a

[Mr. Robert Hicks]

contribution to this important debate, which clearly has national implications as well as implications in Devon and Cornwall.

I would not necessarily go along with all that the hon. Member for North Cornwall said about the importance of political connections in this respect. There may be a political dimension to the examples that I shall cite, but what concerns me more is that some elements of the appointments affecting my constituency have too many characteristics of a Whitehall farce. I shall therefore concentrate on the procedures followed in making such appointments.

I begin by paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport who, when he was Minister for Health, was most helpful and forthcoming. When I attempted to investigate the procedures followed in such appointments, it was not clear who, under the existing arrangements, was prepared to accept the ultimate responsibility. In the three examples that I shall cite, the Secretary of State played a significant part, whether in her present role or in her previous position in the Department of Health.

It is not clear whether the ultimate responsibility lies with the Department or with the regional health authority. Ministers tend to say that they can act only on what appears on their desks and it is not clear what terms of reference they have issued to the RHAs in the first place. The RHAs themselves say that they have certain parameters within which to work, but one then calls into question the sifting mechanism that they have deployed when names have supposedly come to their attention from the grass roots.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall outlined the sequence of events that accompanied the appointment of the chairman of the Cornwall Community Healthcare trust. I shall not duplicate his comments but wish to refer to the initial appointment of the chairman of the Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS trust. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State consulted certain politicians representing the county, although she did not ask the advice of the two then longest serving Members, David Mudd and myself. Perhaps she did not expect to hear the response that she was seeking. In any event, she went ahead—as was her right—and made an appointment.

It is not without significance that, when the time came for a reappointment, the Secretary of State's original appointee was dropped and replaced by the person whom some of us had advocated in the beginning.

There then followed a sequence of events beyond one's imagination, involving the appointment of the chairman of the Plymouth Hospitals NHS trust. My right hon. Friend appointed the late chairman and managing director of Brymon Airways to a trust that had not even been designated at the time. Within a few weeks, he had to resign from the non-existent trust and, as it so happens, the person whom we thought was being groomed locally for the position—then the chairman of the Plymouth health authority—was appointed chairman of the Plymouth Hospitals NHS trust, now that it finally exists. If the procedures had been correct in the first place, I suggest that we should not have reached this farcical situation.

We are talking about the administration and provision of health care for a large number of people, including my constituents. Public confidence in that administration and provision is absolutely essential. When the public read objective reports of what has happened in the three cases that have been mentioned, they understandably feel a little apprehensive.

I measure my words carefully. I believe that, if the litigation involving the former chairman of the Cornwall Community Healthcare trust turns out in a particular way, those responsible at the ministerial level for appointments and those who still hold senior positions within the regional health authority must examine their own positions. It is clear that what has been happening hitherto must not be repeated in the future if we are to retain the public's confidence in the standard of health care in the parts of Cornwall and Plymouth to which reference has been made this afternoon.

2.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I am sorry that we do not have more time to debate the important matter raised by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler). I could not help noticing, from the Order Paper, that a pile of earth in south-east Asia is deemed to be so important that it takes up three times as much time as the question of who runs the national health service. Perhaps that is a manifestation of the extent to which we are ruled by the headlines these days. This is an important subject because enormous responsibilities are placed on non-executive members of boards and the chairmen of health authorities and trusts in the health service.

I must correct the impression given—unintentionally, I am sure—that everything was wrong with the appointments that have been made. There are cases with which hon. Members are dissatisfied but some splendid people have become chairmen and non-executive members of trusts and health authorities. I visit a great many trusts—acute trusts, community trusts, ambulance services and health authorities—and meet many non-executive and executive directors who are extraordinarily committed to the health service. Many would die for the hospital with which they are involved, which is very rewarding. Indeed, the level of accountability and responsibility that they feel is one of the reasons that there have been some remarkable successes.

Mr. David Nicholson: Since the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) started his speech by saying that he was referring to the whole of the south-west, does my hon. Friend agree that the Taunton and Somerset hospital trust in my constituency, among others, has been remarkably successful, that on its board there are members of all parties and of none, and that its success is despite the vigorous opposition of the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats before it was set up?

Mr. Sackville: I could not agree more. Taunton and Somerset is a good example of a trust that knows where it is going and is well led, which is exactly what we have been trying to achieve.

Obviously, one can find problems in a huge organisation such as the health service, with some 8 million in-patients, another 35 million out-patient contacts and nearly 1 million employees. There is room for many

things to go wrong. I am not quite sure of the connection between the three examples with which the hon. Member for North Cornwall began his speech—the Westcountry Ambulance Service trust, Sister Cooksley and two incidents in the press recently about Treliske—and non-executive appointments. Therefore, we need to be careful about using the material provided by headline writers, serious though some of those incidents may be, to make a wider point.

I have paid tribute to the non-executives of our trusts and health authorities because under them there has been remarkable progress. Many, many more people have been treated. Over 120 patients are treated today for every 100 treated before the reforms came into place. That is a tribute not only to the boards but to the staff generally for taking on an extraordinarily larger work load, albeit with some additional resources. Hospitals have become much more efficient—they have had to cope with the rising demand for health care.

Waiting lists and waiting times are much in the news. Under the reforms, in hospitals and authorities on which those non-executives serve, we have found that the average waiting time for operations has fallen from nine to five months and that the time people wait for a first consultant appointment has fallen radically. Many health authorities, before we set any national standards, were demanding that people should not wait more than a certain number of months, usually in single figures in good cases, for their first consultant appointment. So much progress has been made.

Partly, the chairmen and non-executives have been driving that progress, sometimes with not much encouragement from medical staff who have said that to think constantly about waiting lists distorts priorities and medical staff should have total control over the priorities of any hospital. However, we know, from our constituents and from everything that we find, that waiting times are important to patients, however lacking in urgency their conditions, and they should not be told that they will have to wait two years to see a consultant. Certainly, they should not discover that they need certain treatment and be made to wait years for it.

We are bringing those times down to 18 months, to 12 months and to less, so that people will not be able to say that they do not know when they will be treated. That will become a thing of the past. Under the leadership of some of our chairmen and chief executives, that has happened. However, I agree that there is a lack of uniformity in the appointment system, although it has thrown up thousands of good, committed people. Because people have found the opposite in some cases, we have sought to find a more formal system which people outside will be able to understand.

The first stage of the process is to require all regional health authorities or regional members of the policy board, as there may be if the Health Authorities Bill reaches the statute book, to advertise all posts or groups of posts—there may be difference in procedure between one area and another. There should be free and open advertising so that people can write in to say that they would like to serve on a trust or health authority.

When that stage is complete, a panel of non-executives, usually from around a region, will sift through those names to decide which of those people would appear on the face of it to be suitable to serve on trusts and health authorities. The panels should do that according to agreed criteria.

Mr. Tyler: I am conscious of the limited time, but could the Minister specifically address the question of short lists in the cases to which the hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) and I referred? As we all know, there was an unmitigated disaster with one appointment because only two people were on the short list. The person appointed turned out to be totally unsuited to the post, while the person who was, in effect, ejected, was subsequently to take the Department to an industrial tribunal. Again, in the *Western Morning News*, headlines said:

"Payouts settle complaint of jobs for girls",

and:

"Bottomley spared appearance in sex discrimination case".

All that could have been avoided if the short lists had not been so short.

Mr. Sackville: I understand why the hon. Gentleman is harping on about that unfortunate case, although I repeat to those hon. Members just arriving in the House that it was totally unrepresentative of the generality of health appointments. However, clearly the hon. Gentleman is quite right: we need a larger pool of names from which those who have the task of sifting can draw candidates. Competition is likely to hot up because, surprising though it may seem given all the difficulties and all that is said about the health service, large numbers of people wish to serve as non-executives on health authorities and trusts.

As I said, having advertised, the candidates must be looked at against published criteria. We shall be dealing with guidelines on that criteria in the near future and it will be open for everyone to see the personal and career criteria that we would like to see for those people who serve in that position in the health service.

There is also of course a code of conduct and accountability, very much along the lines of the Cadbury report, covering all matters of governance of public companies and public organisations. All those who serve and who are appointed will be reminded that they must have very high standards of achievement in those sectors. They must maintain standards of discretion, and in all the areas that one expects of someone who is put in a position of great responsibility in a public organisation. That is important.

I very much regret the cases—some may be quoted—when the system has failed to satisfy or, indeed, has resulted in the appointment of people who turned out to be unsatisfactory. While they are in a minority, we seek to avoid such cases.

I shall deal with the objections put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks), who said that he and local Members of Parliament were consulted on appointments and it appeared that their advice was not taken. We cannot give an absolute guarantee to hon. Members, because, clearly, as the House will understand, views of local Members of Parliament are one source of advice on appointments and there may be many other views from other organisations, from individuals and, indeed, from an interview process that, up to now, has been conducted by regional chairmen or district chairmen. Interviews tended to be conducted by regional chairmen when appointments of chairmen for districts were being made.

[Mr. Sackville]

We cannot guarantee that the advice of our parliamentary colleagues will be taken in every case, but we can at least say that consultation is taken extremely seriously and that all views, especially those of our parliamentary colleagues, are taken into account and always have been.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East asked who is responsible in the Department of Health. Clearly my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is ultimately responsible for all appointments, but there are some divisions of responsibility. She takes advice from different ministerial colleagues within the Department, depending upon which part of the country is involved. An enormous selection process has to take place. It happens mainly at regional level, but it also requires a great deal of work by Ministers, who monitor the recommendations made by the regions. That process is shared out round the country.

There will be a more codified system of appointments in the health service, and it will be open and understood. We value trust boards enormously as a central part of the reforms; they cost the NHS 1p out of every £11 spent by a trust, and we think that that is good value. I pay tribute to all who serve on trusts and health authorities, often in difficult circumstances, for the wonderful job that they do.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, pursuant to Order [19 December].

PRIVATE BUSINESS

Sheffield Assay Office Bill

Read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

A9

1. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to change the current policy on roadside services on the A9 between Perth and Inverness.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): My right hon. Friend will consider carefully the responses to our current consultation exercise before deciding whether any change in A9 policy is desirable.

Mr. Walker: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. He will realise that the A9 north of Perth is not a dual carriageway, although it should be. The plain truth is that the local communities—the bypass communities—wish to maintain the situation whereby they provide the services and facilities, because that means jobs. Lay-bys with toilet facilities and picnic facilities are required on the A9; that would adequately meet the demand both from the tourist trade and from other motorists.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My hon. Friend makes a powerful and persuasive case, and we shall consider it sympathetically in the consultation exercise. The business interests of the bypass communities are extremely important, and our aim is to enhance the welfare of all the communities concerned. Tayside regional council's preferred location for a large roadside service area would be on the northern outskirts of Perth, and we shall keep my hon. Friend's thoughts on the subject very much in mind.

Renewable Energy

2. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken in the past year to expand the usage of renewable energy in Scotland.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): I announced the details of the first order under the Scottish renewables obligation on 20 December 1994. That obliges the two public electricity supply companies in Scotland, Scottish Power and Scottish Hydro-Electric, to obtain 76 MW of new capacity from renewable sources.

Mr. Gallie: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the expanded use of renewable energy sources adds a cost burden for Scottish electricity consumers? Will he point out to Opposition Members that if they wish to pursue high energy cost options, they should do so at a reasonable level? I congratulate my right hon. Friend on getting the levels right.

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for saying that. He makes a reasonable point, but I am sure that he will welcome the fact that renewable energy sources are being developed in that way. The additional costs, spread over three or four years, will amount to less than 0.5 per cent., which is an acceptable increase against a background of electricity prices that have fallen substantially in real terms since privatisation.

Mrs. Liddell: I am surprised at the Secretary of State's statement, and would be grateful if he explained how he can say that about renewable energy when he has turned down a pioneering proposal for the Dalmacoulter landfill site, in my constituency. The proposal—to burn off methane gas to generate electricity—would provide enough fuel to heat 1,000 homes for 20 years, and fits in with the Government's new much-vaunted private sector initiative. What is more, it would require an investment of only £100,000—less than half the salary of the chief executive of Scottish Power.

Mr. Lang: I have to point out to the hon. Lady that the bid was not successful because it was so expensive. The Dalmacoulter landfill site bid failed to obtain a contract because it was the most expensive of all the eight landfill gas projects bidding for a contract, and was priced considerably in excess of the director general's recommended ceiling price. It was for that reason, and no other, that it was unsuccessful.

Dunbartonshire Enterprise

3. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet Dunbartonshire Enterprise to discuss the future of the industrial site at Gartcosh.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): My right hon. Friend and I are fully aware of the position at Gartcosh but we have no plans at present to meet Dunbartonshire Enterprise to discuss that.

Mr. Clarke: Does the Minister recall that that site has lain empty since 1986? Will he tell us how much has been paid, or will be paid, to Dunbartonshire Enterprise by North British Newsprint? Will he tell us whether the Government will give positive support to that project? If it does not succeed—and we need to know very soon—will the Government use their influence, including their influence with Locate in Scotland, to ensure that jobs, investment and training are made available to a job-starved community?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman has a long-standing and respected interest in that site. I share his regret that North British Newsprint has yet to find a partner to invest in newsprint production facilities. We are still hopeful that that can be achieved in the near future.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the present position cannot be permitted to continue indefinitely. Scottish Enterprise will soon need to consider the future of the whole site. Discussions are taking place with potential inward investors who have expressed an interest in parts of the Gartcosh site. If the hon. Gentleman wants a meeting to discuss the present position in more detail, I would be happy to agree to that.

Mr. Worthington: When the Minister meets Dunbartonshire Enterprise, will he discuss its future shape and size? Will he please reject the opinion of those who propose that Clydebank and Milngavie be put in with Glasgow or, even more absurdly, that Dunbartonshire be linked with Renfrew? Will he reject such absurd proposals and retain the current boundaries?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman and a number of his colleagues met me this week to express their very clear views on those matters. We are formally in a consultation period; Scottish Enterprise is consulting on those matters.

However, perhaps I may reassure the House by saying that I take very seriously the well-considered views that were expressed to me by hon. Members.

Commercial Property Law

4. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the commercial property law in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: During 1994, representations about commercial property law were received from the British Retail Confederation.

Mr. Thurnham: For the benefit of Mr. Max Davidson and others, can my hon. Friend confirm that the law in Scotland is different from the law in England, in that Scotland does not have the iniquitous privity of contract that we suffer here? Will he remind his colleagues in the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Department of the Environment how much better Scottish law is?

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those compliments. Of course, he is essentially correct.

Mr. McAllion: That is why we need a Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Stewart: I shall not be diverted by the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion).

My hon. Friend rightly pointed out to the House that privity of contract does not apply in Scotland. In Scots law, when a lease is assigned to a new tenant, the previous tenant is released from liability unless the parties specifically contract otherwise, in contrast to the position in England. I know that my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor intends to introduce legislation at the earliest opportunity, and I hope that my hon. Friend's long campaign on that issue, which I think commands support on both sides of the House, will therefore shortly reach a successful conclusion.

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the Minister institute a review of the effects of recent legislation on commercial railway property in Scotland? What is the sense of legislation that will lead to the closure of lines, a loss of key services such as sleepers and the criminal neglect of public assets such as the Forth railway bridge?

Mr. Stewart: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his ingenuity. I can reassure him that the structure of the railways in Scotland will remain intact.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: While the Minister rightly extols the virtues of Scottish law, will he reflect on the fact that the Scottish legal system is the only domestic system of law in western Europe without its own Parliament? Do not the merits of the Scottish legal system now justify a Parliament in Edinburgh?

Mr. Stewart: There is, of course, an arguable case for independence, although I do not agree with it. There is not an arguable case for the proposition being put forward by the Labour party, which does not seek to answer any of the serious questions. When challenged on serious issues such as the West Lothian question and others, the only answer given by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) is to say that they are all red herrings—what a way to conduct a serious policy.

Local Government Employees

5. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are estimated to be currently employed in local government in Scotland; in how many local authorities they are operating and at what overall cost per head of the population of Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: As at September 1994, 304,532 people were employed throughout the 65 local authorities in Scotland. Staff costs per head of the Scottish population in 1993-94 were £898, compared with only £668 per head in England.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Why does it take so many people—

Mr. Michael J. Martin: What does it have to do with the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Greenway: What does it have to do with me? The English are paying for it—partly, anyway. That is a fact. My constituents are partly paying for it. Why does local government in Scotland cost so much, when, presumably, wage costs there are a little lower than they might be in London, where I have my constituency? Why does it involve so many people at such a high cost? Why do we have senseless demands for a Parliament for Scotland, which would impose even more government—another layer at even greater costs—on Scotland?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend makes some sound points. One must ask why, when there are constraints on public expenditure and local authorities should be considering the burden that they impose on council tax payers, staff numbers have been increased by 2,500—about 1 per cent.—in the past year, when in England, local government staff numbers have been reduced by 2 per cent.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The Minister will know that, because of all the redundancies in the traditional engineering works in and around Glasgow, local authorities have become an important source of employment. I hope that he will not use the new reorganisation of local government to sack local authority workers.

Mr. Lang: Decisions about the employment levels of local authority staff are a matter for local authorities. While I anticipate that there will be some saving from the 300,000 and more people employed in local authorities, it would be a relatively small saving. The hon. Gentleman makes a fundamental mistake in pretending that employment in a local authority offers the same productive contribution to the wealth of a nation and the output of its economy as employment in private industry—there is a world of difference. The taxes generated by the profits of the private sector sustain the bureaucracies in the public sector.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the real threat to local government services and jobs in Scotland comes not from our plans for reorganisation, but from plans for a tax-raising Scottish Assembly? If it is to have a meaningful role in the life of the nation, the Assembly will take powers from the House and plunder town halls and council chambers throughout Scotland, taking away their powers to centralise them in Edinburgh. Does my right hon. Friend

agree that anyone who believes in strong, responsive, sensitive and genuinely local democracy should join us in opposing Labour's plans?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. At a time when the Government have been seeking to reduce bureaucracy and simplify local government by introducing a single-tier structure, the Labour party is bent on creating another centralising Parliament in Edinburgh that will increase bureaucracy and the burden of administration and centralise power from local government to Edinburgh.

Mr. Wallace: Given that the Secretary of State used the increase in local government employment as one reason for imposing an unjustified and unacceptable squeeze on local authority funding in the forthcoming year and given that he seems to be well armed with figures, will he answer the following question? How much of the increase that he mentioned will be accounted for, first, by the number of people employed in full and part-time work to clear up the mess of the poll tax and implement the council tax and secondly, by the increase in the number of staff employed in social work departments to implement the Government's community care policy?

Mr. Lang: There is no reason why the number of staff employed in local government should be increased to clear up the backlog of uncollected poll tax. That should have been cleared up substantially in previous years.

Central services alone increased by almost 5 per cent. last year in Scotland. In the constituency of the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), there has been a 9 per cent. increase in the number of full-time staff. Such increases bear no relation to the needs of the local electorate and they take no account of the burden that they impose on council tax payers.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the increase in the number of jobs in local government is nothing more than jobs for the boys and another example of loony government spending?

Mr. Lang: If the House will not accept my hon. Friend's word, perhaps it will accept the word of Mr. Leo McKinstry, a former Labour councillor in Islington, who last week wrote in *The Spectator*:

"The electors can be warned now of things to come under Labour. They need look no further than the present record of Labour in local government".

Mr. Graham: Will not the Secretary of State do the right thing and congratulate the local authority workers who responded to the flooding in Scotland? If they had not been there, our folk would have suffered a tragedy because of the inaction of the Scottish Office.

Mr. Lang: That is unworthy of the hon. Gentleman. I congratulate all those who took part in the emergency services operation following the flooding in Scotland. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me in congratulating them and also those in local and central Government who have done so much to ease the problems arising from that emergency.

Mr. McAllion: Will the Secretary of State try to understand that the higher levels of spending and employment in Scottish local government reflect the higher levels of social deprivation and illness in our country; they reflect the outstanding success of local authority schools in Scotland; and, above all, they reflect the increasing burdens that the Secretary of State has placed on Scottish councils, with 65 per cent. of the 2,500 staff to whom he referred employed in the areas of social work and policing?

If the right hon. Gentleman is genuinely concerned about the comparisons between Scotland and England, will he explain why, for the past two and a half years, he has refused to take up the offer by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to commission jointly an independent study into those comparisons? Is he afraid of the truth and the light that the study may shed on the prejudiced hysteria that passes for Government policy in this area? It is time to put up or shut up. Will the Minister accept COSLA's offer and put an end to the political poison levelled against Scottish local government?

Mr. Lang: I am trying to save the hon. Gentleman from himself, because he is totally misinformed. I invited the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to undertake that study two or three years ago. It said that it would undertake the study, but it did not do so.

Homelessness

6. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to outline the Government's proposals on homelessness following the responses to the consultation paper "Tackling Homelessness"; and when he intends to resume the planned consultation exercise on amending the 1991 code for guidance.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We are still considering the 160 responses received to the consultation paper, "Tackling Homelessness", and we shall announce our decisions in due course. A revised draft code of guidance on homelessness, taking account of those decisions, will be issued for comment later this year.

Mr. Welsh: Does the Minister accept that homelessness is an acute and growing problem in Scotland? He issued a consultative document entitled "Tackling Homelessness", but he has done absolutely nothing about it and his reply today is a disgrace. Will he acknowledge publicly that 97 per cent. of responses want local authorities to retain a duty to house homeless persons in priority need? In England there was action within four months, but six months have passed and the Scottish Office has done nothing. That is quite unacceptable.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman is completely incorrect: the Scottish Office has done a substantial amount in that area. I recently attended the opening of a homelessness advisory centre in Dundee, not far from the hon. Gentleman's constituency, which was funded to the tune of £80,000 by Scottish Homes. Earlier this year, an advisory service run by Shelter was established in Edinburgh with funding of £94,000. We have given £29 million in capital allocations for homelessness.

The hon. Gentleman's constituency received a supplementary payment of £290,000—which it asked for—in February 1992. Since then, his district council has not asked for any further supplementary allocations in that area, so he is incorrect on the first point. With regard to

the hon. Gentleman's second point, we shall give the matter the most thorough and complete consideration and we shall announce our decision.

Mr. McMaster: Will the Minister confirm that many hundreds of families in Strathclyde are still homeless following the floods in December? Is he aware that those families do not wish to return to their homes until they know that there are adequate flood prevention measures to ensure that such floods will never happen again? Instead of passing the buck to cash-starved local authorities, will the Minister admit today that, under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, he has the powers to introduce flood prevention schemes? If he does not, will he support my private Member's Bill on 10 February, which will give him those powers?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We shall need to study the fine print of the hon. Gentleman's Bill. With regard to his question about section 155, that is why we have Bellwin. As I promised the hon. Gentleman when I visited his constituency and saw the houses in Ferguslie park, we shall be looking fully at the entire housing budget before we make final decisions on housing. We shall have the issue of flooding particularly in mind and the interests of his own district council and other interested district councils, including Strathkelvin and elsewhere.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: Is the Minister aware of the growing concern in Inverness specifically and the Highlands generally about the homelessness problem there? On Monday this week Albyn Housing, a local housing association, briefed my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) and myself on the problem and told us of the alarming rise in the number of homeless people sleeping rough in the streets. It was highly critical of the Scottish Office in particular, for the continuing squeeze and cuts in real terms on the housing budgets for both Scottish Homes and the relevant local authorities. Will he look again at Inverness and the Highlands with urgency? It is now a matter of considerable public concern.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman's housing association is impressive and has done an extremely good job in Inverness. About £900 million will be spent on capital investment in housing this coming year. That is a very substantial sum. We expect the work of housing associations, such as the one that he mentioned, to be on-going, and we shall give them the necessary support.

Mrs. Fyfe: The Minister mentioned Shelter. Has he had any discussions with Shelter and other organisations about the scandal of homelessness among young people who have been in local authority care and who end up on the streets? Does he know that children coming out of care are 70 times more likely to become homeless than their contemporaries? Does he agree that, if local authorities should have powers to advise and assist care leavers up to the age of 21, they should have the resources to do so?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Homelessness is one of the top strategic priorities for all local authorities. We are giving hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of grants to voluntary bodies such as the Scottish Council for Single Homeless, Borderline and other bodies and initiatives. In the Bridges project, one initiative in Edinburgh, we are ensuring that all the voluntary and statutory agencies work together. We expect local authorities to give the subject top priority.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Scottish Homes rural initiative in my constituency, whereby empty properties have been brought back into use at low cost, goes some way towards dealing with some of the homelessness? In addition, is he aware that the help given to Perth and Kinross district council after the flooding was very well received?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Scottish Homes has an impressive record. It will provide 2,500 units for homeless people this year, and the rural empty homes initiative developed in Tayside in conjunction with the Scottish Landowners Federation has been evaluated as a success. There have been other initiatives such as the lead tenancies initiatives, under which housing associations are enabled to lease empty properties and sublet them to the homeless. There is also an important initiative in many towns in Scotland, to identify empty properties in upper floors in town centres and bring them back into use. Grants for rent and ownership are also a help in that respect.

Burns Day

7. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will bring forward proposals to make Burns day a national holiday.

Mr. Lang: Although there are no plans to propose that Burns day be made a national holiday, I do not think that we need such an event to remember our greatest poet. We have continued to celebrate his works since his death almost 200 years ago, and I am sure that we shall do so for many years to come.

Mr. Canavan: Does that negative, disappointing reply have anything to do with the fact that Burns was an ardent supporter of a Scottish Parliament and a fierce critic of the Unionists, who used treachery, bribery and skulduggery to destroy Scotland's last Parliament?

> Why are the Tories' prospects dim?
> Could it be the reputation
> Of Ian, Allan, Hector and Jim—
> Such a parcel of rogues in a nation?

Mr. Lang: Now I know what the poet meant when he spoke of

> "A rhyming, ranting, raving billie".

I will say to the hon. Gentleman:

> "Hale be your heart, hale be your fiddle,
> Lang may your elbuck jink an' diddle."

As to Burns being a supporter of a Scottish Parliament, I remind the hon. Gentleman of his words in "The Dumfries Volunteer":

> "Be Britain still to Britain true
> Amang oursels united
> For never but by British hands
> Maun British wrangs be righted."

Mrs. Ray Michie: If the Secretary of State will not honour our national poet in that way, will he consider making 30 November, St. Andrew's day, a national

holiday? I wonder why Scottish Office Ministers lack a sense of adventure, which would allow them to dare to make a change, go out on their own and do something about a national holiday for Scotland. Never mind the Prime Minister and his dark words of danger and more danger.

Mr. Lang: I take the opportunity to welcome the decision by the Royal Mail to publish a set of stamps to commemorate the bicentenary of Burns's death. As to another public holiday, I do not think that it would be an appropriate step to take at this time. As the poet said:

"I am the keeper of the law
In some sma' points, altho' not a'".

Mr. Donohoe: As the only Ayrshireman in the House, I believe that the proposal of my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) should be considered much more seriously than the Secretary of State suggested. I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to a bizarre decision in Irvine to shift the Burns monument from the moor to the middle of a busy roundabout. If anybody is killed, will the Secretary of State take responsibility for that crazy decision, which was taken partly by Ayrshire Enterprise? Instead of such officials' salaries being increased, perhaps they should be docked.

Mr. Lang: I was not aware of the case that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, but if he will send me details, I shall have the matter investigated and—to the extent that the matter may be the responsibility of the Scottish Office, although I suspect that it lies primarily with the planning authority—I shall see whether there is anything appropriate for me to do.

Mr. Gallie: Given that Robert Burns was born in Alloway in my constituency, will my right hon. Friend congratulate Ayrshire Enterprise and all those who are supporting the Burns bicentenary next year on ensuring that the works and words of that poet are broadcast loud and clear world wide?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend makes an important point. There will be major opportunities for not only his constituents but Scotland as a whole to celebrate that important occasion, which will be internationally recognised. I am sure that the poet would approve of the actions of those who, as he put it,

"doucely manage our affairs in Parliament".

Mr. Salmond: Before the Secretary of State determines whether to make Burns night a national holiday, will he tell the House whether he has seen the cartoon in *The Scotsman* today, which depicts the Prime Minister as a giant puddin' over the caption:

"Great Chieftain o' the Puddin' Race"?

Is the Secretary of State in any way offended that he was not depicted as a wee puddin' in the same cartoon?

Mr. Lang: I am impervious to all cartoons and all other comments, whether written or drawn.

Hospitals

8. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for new hospital development in west central Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are proposals for new hospital development and refurbishment in west central Scotland, most notably in the Greater Glasgow and Lanarkshire health board areas.

Mr. Hogg: Is the Minister aware that in 1992, and immediately prior to the general election, the then Scottish Office Minister with responsibility for health, the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), had a positive approach to the building of a new hospital in Cumbernauld, and announced that it would be built?

Is the Minister further aware that the Minister who now has responsibility for health appears not to have done anything about the hospital? He appears to be bewildered by the breadth of support for it and fumbles with health matters to the extent that we do not know what is happening with regard to the hospital. Lanarkshire health board does not even do me the courtesy of replying to the letters that I write on the subject. Will the Minister intervene personally to ensure that the hospital is built, and built soon?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The health board is working on revised proposals, which we have not yet seen. The latest proposals will give future occupants much more privacy and comfort. The aim is to continue to assess demand against need. It would not be right for us to impose an artificial deadline on the board's deliberations. The hon. Gentleman's letters should have been answered, and I shall draw that to the attention of the board.

Mr. Hood: The Minister will be aware that the present trust management at Law hospital in my constituency will be in charge of the new trust hospital, New Law hospital, in Netherton. Will he comment on the announcement this week that the management has put out press releases telling people not to turn up at the casualty and emergency department? As a result of its mismanagement, it has failed to get contracts signed to man the department after 1 February, in a few days time. Is it not truly alarming that our health service is being run with a so-called market and trust philosophy, and that in less than seven days a casualty and emergency department which served 40,000 patients last year faces closure?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have made inquiries. The proposed restrictions at the accident and emergency unit at Law hospital are the result of recruitment difficulties. There is no substance in the allegation that there are funding problems. The temporary arrangements involving locums will ensure that an adequate service is maintained. All emergencies will be dealt with. Only those patients with minor injuries and ailments are being asked to consult their general practitioner first. Efforts are being made to find a more permanent staffing solution. The intention is that Law

hospital will transfer to the new district hospital at Wishaw. Services at Stonehouse will transfer to the redeveloped Hairmyres hospital.

Mr. George Robertson: Is it not a fact that the latest and newest hospital in west central Scotland is the Health Care International in Clydebank, which survived the Secretary of State's official opening for only 110 days before going into liquidation? Is it not also a fact that 80 per cent. of the multi-million pound regional assistance given to Health Care International was provided on the basis of only a third of the jobs promised at that time? What possible defence is there for making another £4.4 million of taxpayers' money available to the financial drainpipe of HCI, other than that it will be a sweetener to those who are already to get a bargain basement deal, with a hospital without debt costing the entire country £180 million, or an expensive face saver for the Secretary of State for Scotland after the fiasco of the decade?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, he is not correct in saying that it cost the country £180 million, because £30 million was committed from the public sector and £150 million from the private sector. No further offer of assistance has been made. There is no reason in principle why the balance of the existing offer should not be transferred to a new operator, subject to appropriate conditions, if the project is being taken forward as originally envisaged and the planned new jobs are being created. I must remind the hon. Gentleman of his words on 10 January, when he said:

"We are not opposed to public/private partnerships—they bring in much-needed money".

He is right on that. It was an inward investment project. If one takes all the investment projects in Scotland together, one can see that they have brought in more than 50,000 jobs, which have enormously benefited our countrymen. We very much hope that these matters will be sorted out shortly and that 350 jobs will be secured.

Land Register

9. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects work on the land register for Scotland, as defined by the Land Registration (Scotland) Act 1979, to be completed.

Mr. Stewart: The operation of the land register in Scotland is being progressively extended to cover all counties by 2003.

Mrs. Ewing: Given that the Minister must be aware of the criticisms contained in the 46th report of the Public Accounts Committee, which indicates quite clearly that there was a 14-year delay in completing land registration in Scotland, will he tell the House why that delay has occurred, particularly as there will be conveyancing cost benefits to many people when it is completed? Will he also tell me why no county north of Stirling has yet been subjected to land registration, given that the land issue in the highlands and islands and in the north-east of Scotland is very topical—indeed, even contentious—at times, against a background of Scottish islands being won in German game shows?

Mr. Stewart: The timetable was announced in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) in June 1992. If there is any delay, it is the hon. Lady's delay of two and a half years before complaining about it.

Our response to the report of the Public Accounts Committee will be published shortly.

Mr. Wilson: Can the Minister tell me any good reason why instead of a 14 or 20-year process to find out who owns the land in Scotland there should not be a fixed date on which every land owner, irrespective of nationality, is required to produce title deeds and thereby register his ownership of the land? Is it possible that one of the reasons why that is not done is that many of the grand old Scottish lairds, clan chiefs and all the rest of that social detritus might have great difficulty in providing title deeds?

Mr. Stewart: That is the usual load of nonsense from the hon. Gentleman. The process of extending the land register was announced two and a half years ago and it is going ahead as announced in the original programme.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Does my hon. Friend find it rather strange that the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) chose to raise her question, when her own party's administration in Grampian region has recently sold off large tracts of Aberdeen to an English company and is refusing to sell it to the Aberdeen tenants?

Mr. Stewart: The House will note with interest what my hon. Friend says. I have always understood the policy of the Scottish National party to be independence in Europe, which, in principle, means that Scottish land can be sold—and should be sold—to anybody in the Community, including the English.

River Clyde

10. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to meet representatives of the Clyde port authority to discuss the dredging of the River Clyde.

Mr. Lang: Responsibility for flood prevention measures on non-agricultural land lies with regional authorities under the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961. Clyde Port Ltd. has no statutory duty to dredge the River Clyde but has a permissive power to dredge to the extent necessary for its operational needs.

Mr. Dunnachie: Will the Secretary of State cast his mind back to when his hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) piloted a Bill through the House, making the Clyde port authority a private firm and making three of its directors near-millionaires? It appears that the only thing that was dredged at that point in time was its accounts, not the River Clyde. Can the Secretary of State give me an assurance that, when he returns to the Back Benches, he will not become a director of that company?

Mr. Lang: The Bill under which the Clyde port authority was privatised was general, permissive legislation. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would welcome the fact that, under the present management, Clyde Port Ltd. has been reorganised and has grown considerably. It is now valued at £55 million and increased profits last year to £4 million.

Mr. Galbraith: Does the Secretary of State realise that my constituents are convinced that one reason for the

recent flooding is the failure to dredge the lower Kelvin and the upper Clyde? Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore fund a study of the contribution that the non-dredging of the Clyde made to the flooding and, if it is shown to be a contributory factor, fund the necessary restructuring work to prevent it happening again?

Mr. Lang: I have already made it clear that the Government are willing to consider all such studies that are put to them by the relevant regional authorities, and have already undertaken to contribute to the funding of the study by the Clyde river purification board. I imagine that the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the River Kelvin once it enters Glasgow, falls some 30m to reach the Clyde, so it is unlikely that the Clyde itself can be the cause of flooding in Strathkelvin.

However, I can tell the hon. Gentleman today that, following my consideration of initial estimates now received from local authorities, I propose to increase Renfrew district's housing capital allocation for next year by £2 million and Strathkelvin district's by £500,000. I also propose to approve Glasgow district's bid for an extra £200,000 in the current year. I am sure that the House will welcome those announcements.

Mr. George Robertson: Is not the Secretary of State worried that the interest in Clyde Port Ltd. is not just in its dredging activities but in the gold digging of those who were lucky enough to be on the board at the time that it was privatised? Is not he aware of the widespread disgust and outrage felt throughout the country at the displays of corporate greed? Is not that a classic example of where an investment of as little as £75,000 in public assets has led, through the Government's fruit machine economics, to pay-outs of upwards of £5 million to directors?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman seems to be unaware that the company was marketed entirely openly and that the best bid secured it. That is the way in which industries have been privatised to the great benefit of the taxpayer, of those who in the past have had to fund loss-making organisations, and of those organisations themselves who have not been able to raise capital resources because they have been dependent on an external financing limit controlled by the Government. Surely the hon. Gentleman has learnt by now that national ownership has been the death and damage of many major British industries which are now released, liberated, productive and tax generating to the Exchequer as a result of privatisation.

Investment

11. **Mr. Kynoch:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of Scottish business and industry to discuss future investment plans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I regularly meet representatives of Scottish business and industry to discuss various matters, including investment.

Recent business surveys show increasing business confidence and positive investment intentions in manufacturing and other sectors of the Scottish economy. I welcome this further evidence of the success of the Government's economic policies.

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has already referred to the article in *The Spectator* by Leo McKinstry, the former top Labour party aide. Did my right hon. Friend read his comments regarding Labour's proposal to return business rates to the control of local authorities? He said that under those circumstances business rates would soar. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that proposal, along with the tax raising proposals of a Scottish Parliament which would inevitably bring higher taxation to Scottish business, would mean that inward investment would be driven away from Scotland—in short, that Labour's policies are bad for Scottish business, bad for the Scottish economy and bad for the Scottish people?

Mr. Lang: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. He will be aware that, as a result of the Government's policy, business rates in Scotland have fallen from 76p in the pound to 43p. Only last week I wrote to the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), to which letter I still await a reply, asking him to confirm whether the policy announced for England to abolish capping and to allow local authorities to depart from the uniform business rate, will apply in Scotland. Perhaps he will take the opportunity of this Question Time to make his party's position clear.

Mr. Ingram: The Secretary of State's response to the announcement by Rolls-Royce of its intention to axe 600 highly-skilled jobs smacked of complacency and indifference. Does he agree that Scotland and Lanarkshire cannot afford to lose such jobs? Has he any plans to meet the company to seek a reversal of that decision and, if not, why not?

Mr. Lang: Of course I regret the fact that Rolls-Royce plc is to shed some 600 jobs, reducing its work force in Scotland to about 4,000. It has carried out major rationalisation programmes in all parts of the United Kingdom, and I am sure that it is in its long-term interests to face, in a sensible and realistic way, the commercial decisions that it must make.

I invite the hon. Gentleman to join me in welcoming the fact that, last month alone, unemployment in Scotland fell by 4,500 jobs. In the past seven years, unemployment in East Kilbride has fallen by 2,300 jobs, and unemployment in Scotland is now down to 8.5 per cent. It is falling month by month, and remains lower than unemployment in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. McFall: When will the Conservative party stop telling lies about Labour's proposals for a Scottish Parliament? We have met business people and put our views to them; it has been accepted that there will be no change in corporate taxation, in the framework of financial regulation or in banking regulation. Does not the Conservatives' peddling of crude nationalism damage Scottish business? Do not they realise that decentralisation and the establishment of a Scottish Parliament will stimulate investment in Scottish industry, and do something for the 2,000-odd unemployed people whom the Government have put on the scrap heap?

Mr. Lang: I note that the hon. Gentleman asked that question, rather than his hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), whom I invited to answer a question that I had asked him in writing. I also note that, in his long diatribe, the hon. Gentleman did not answer the specific points that I put to him. Will the Labour party abolish the uniform business rate in Scotland? Will it abolish capping? Will it allow business rates to run riot as they did in the past, and will it impose high income

tax rates on the people of Scotland through a Scottish Parliament? If the Labour party does that, it will drive away business and drive up unemployment.

Mr. John Marshall: When he meets business leaders, does my right hon. Friend encounter any enthusiasm for a national minimum wage or the adoption of the social chapter? Does he agree that the business community realises that, while Labour may promise to freeze corporation tax, that would merely mean a tax-raising assembly having to increase the burden of taxation on individuals in business?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. I have found no enthusiasm whatever in the business community for either the social chapter or the minimum wage—or, indeed, for the Scottish Parliament itself. Business men who are realistic and live in the real world are well aware of the huge burdens that it would impose on Scotland, making it the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom and driving away both inward and existing investment.

Deep-mine Coal Industry

12. **Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future of the deep-mine coal industry in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: Following the successful privatisation of British Coal, the future of the deep-mine coal industry in Scotland lies with the private sector. The Government believe that privatisation is the key to achieving our aim of securing the largest economically viable coal industry in the longer term. I wish Mining Scotland Limited every success.

Ms Squire: Does the Minister agree that it is vital to the future that he has just outlined for the pumping operations at Frances colliery in Fife to continue, both to allow a full economic appraisal of the colliery's coal reserves and potential and to prevent widespread ecological damage to wide parts of Fife? Will the Minister press the President of the Board of Trade and the licensed coal board, or its successor, to meet the cost of such pumping operations to allow a full examination of the economic and ecological issues?

Mr. Stewart: That is primarily a matter for the river purification board. I understand that the board has written to British Coal asking about its intentions in regard to continued pumping at Frances and, indeed, at Michael colliery.

Highlands and Islands

13. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give his assessment of the prospects for economic growth in the highlands and islands in 1995-96.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As a result of the Government's economic policies, the prospects for continuing growth towards long-term prosperity in the highlands and islands look very encouraging.

Mr. Macdonald: Does the Minister understand the disbelief and dismay in the highlands at the fact that, although the European Community has designated the highlands an objective 1 area—recognising that it is one of the poorest and most disadvantaged areas in the Community—the Government are imposing a spending freeze on local authorities, forcing them to cut their spending plans and basic services and to propose steep increases in council tax? How can it be right for the European Union to give to the highlands with one hand while the Scottish Office takes with the other?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Grant-aided expenditure for the Western Isles in 1995-96 is £44.6 million, a 3 per cent. increase over the year before. Highlands and Islands Enterprise is being funded to the extent of £77 million. There are many exciting projects in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, not least of which is the extension to Callanish Pharamceuticals, which the hon. Gentleman knows well. I am aware that Western Isles wants a number of objective 1 projects to be included.

Geographical targeting will apply to four programme priorities across a number of sub-areas of the highlands and islands. That will be achieved by determining a minimum level of resources to be allocated to each sub-area over the six years of the programme. There has been some good news for the hon. Gentleman's constituency about ferry services between Harris and North Uist. The hon. Gentleman is aware of that, and we shall not forget his interest in the matter.

Sir Russell Johnston: Will the Minister be so kind as to explain how the cancellation of motor-rail services in Scotland, which carry 20,000 cars a year, many of them from abroad, and the reduction in sleeper services, in particular the cancellation of the service to Fort William, are beneficial to the economic growth of the highlands?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman asks a relevant question. I attended a meeting yesterday between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the chairman and chief executive of British Rail. Those services are important for tourism and concern was expressed. British Rail is now continuing to examine options for Carlisle and Fort William sleepers. Options for motor-rail are still being examined. We shall remain in close touch with those who are involved in making the decisions, and I shall bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's interest in increasing tourism in his constituency.

Entertainment Clubs

14. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider introducing legislation to license entertainment clubs in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: The Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976 requires an entertainment licence to be obtained from the local licensing board where alcohol is to be sold for consumption in a place of public entertainment during the permitted hours. In other circumstances, controls may be exercised under section 41 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, which enables local authorities to require places of public entertainment in their areas to be licensed.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to the Minister for that helpful answer. Does he agree that there is a serious gap in the law in that the Hangar 13 club is allowed to operate in spite of the fact that there have been a number of prosecutions for drug dealing at the club? Secondly, on a cross-party basis, Kyle and Carrick district council has voted to withdraw the liquor licence. Thirdly, there is now

a fatal accident inquiry into three tragic deaths at that venue. Is not it a mockery of the law that the club is allowed to operate as if nothing had happened?

Mr. Stewart: Of course, I entirely accept the hon. Gentleman's concern about Hangar 13. On, I think, 22 November last year, Kyle and Carrick licensing board resolved to suspend the licence on the grounds that the use of the premises caused undue public nuisance or a threat to public order or safety. We are considering whether it would be helpful and practicable to promote model conditions in licences for raves. We shall consult local authority licensing boards and police interests on that.

Gaelic

15. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to increase the teaching and use of Gaelic.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Government financial support for the Gaelic language has risen from £60,000 in 1979 to £11.1 million in the current year. Census figures, however, indicate that the number of people who could speak, read or write Gaelic fell from 80,000 in 1981, to 69,000 in 1991. Tha mi an duil ar planaichean air foghlam Gaidhlig fhoillseachadh a dh'aithghearr. As you may know, Madam Speaker, that means that I hope to announce our plans in Gaelic education shortly.

Mr. Flynn: The most moving moment of last year was when a psalm was sung in Gaelic in an Edinburgh church. Was not that moment shared by everyone in the British Isles? Does not the Minister agree that Gaelic and all the other Celtic languages are a great heritage and living treasure and are not the exclusive property of any one single area, political party or religion? They are the property of all of us who live in the British Isles. They are to be cherished, protected, spoken and sung.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I was indeed at the service for the late John Smith and the rendering of Gaelic was singularly impressive on that occasion. Gaelic is one of the special features of Scotland's cultural heritage and the whole country benefits directly or indirectly from the richness provided by an additional indigenous language. We have a good record in that, with the extension, we have doubled the size of the structure of the Gaelic college on Skye. The college is very much a centre of excellence, benefiting the Gaels in north-west Scotland.

Mr. McAvoy: The Minister should be aware of Strathclyde regional council's excellent record in encouraging Gaelic education by providing special classes and extra resources. Does he agree that the foolish and vindictive abolition of that council puts at risk the development of Gaelic as an alternative language in Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No, I do not agree with that. Borders regional council is one of the smallest in Scotland, yet it has high standards in teaching. We are considering carefully the inspector's report on the north-west highlands, where Gaelic is spoken, because it has identified a need to increase the number of Gaelic teachers. Problems exist in small schools in remote areas of the north-west highlands.

Housing Capital Expenditure

16. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the percentage change in net housing capital expenditure between 1994-95 and 1995-96.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Reflecting the growth in owner-occupation, planned net provision for housing revenue account and non-HRA capital expenditure, together with the Scottish Homes development programme, falls by 2.3 per cent. between this year and next. Gross provision is, however, a more realistic measure of the resources available to spend on housing, and on the same basis falls by only 1.0 per cent. Within that, total provision for local authority capital expenditure on its own stock, and the resources for the Scottish Homes development programme remain at broadly this year's levels.

Mr. Chisholm: Why, in a year of cuts, has the most savage blow once again fallen on the housing budget? Will the Minister admit that, if we go forward three years, the real terms cut, even in the gross housing budget, will be 17.5 per cent.? Does not he understand that the homeless cannot wait while money for new building is postponed? Does not he recognise that people living in inadequate housing in my constituency want a speeding up, rather than a slowing down of modernisation programmes and of other improvements?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Gross capital expenditure per house in the public sector is at its highest level and is projected to rise—it is £650 in the current year. Of course, £2.8 billion will be spent on housing in the next three years. Scottish Homes is expected to provide 2,500 units. It has provided impressive work in Muirhouse, which I recently visited and which is in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. It is bringing back into use many more rented houses, which will help the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Has my hon. Friend had the opportunity to compare the figures for Scotland with those for England and Wales? Will he comment on the very good settlements for Scotland? Especially as we are considering the possibilities of further devolved government in Scotland, would it be helpful to the House if all statistics for Scotland were related to England and Wales, so that we could find out whether Scotland is getting a good deal out of the Union?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is much higher public expenditure per head across the range of identifiable subjects—that is beyond dispute. Obviously, we must ensure that resources go where they are most needed. As 300,000 public sector houses in Scotland have been sold to sitting tenants, we cannot expect to spend the same funds as we would have if those 300,000 houses had remained in the public sector.

Emigration

17. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Scotsmen emigrated to England in the years 1975 to 1979.

Mr. Lang: Information is not available on migration to England alone. However, between mid-1975 and mid-1979, net migration from Scotland to the rest of the United Kingdom was approximately 5,000 persons

annually. From 1989 to 1994, there has been an average net migration to Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom of 8,000 per annum.

Mr. Evans: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply. Could he tell me whether, with this devolution nonsense and the break-up of the United Kingdom that that lot over there want, which will mean that the Scots will pay approximately twice as much direct taxation as the English, he is planning to rebuild Hadrian's wall? Is he prepared to introduce work permits for Scots who want to work in England when all this nonsense takes place? Is he planning to take on the sacked governor of Parkhurst to look after the wall so that that lot cannot get into England to take English jobs?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention in his customary way to the anomalies that would arise were we ever to be so unwise as to weaken Scotland's place in the Westminster Parliament by setting up in Edinburgh a separate Parliament with tax-raising powers. Just as emigration was high under Labour but has moved in the opposite direction under Conservative Governments, so, too, under a future Labour Government, there would be a mass exodus from Scotland.

Dr. Reid: Does not the question reveal the contempt in which the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) and his colleagues hold more than 50 per cent. of the population of Scotland in that it deals exclusively with the Scotsmen who emigrated during those years? Is not it a testimony to the foresight and perception of Scotsmen and women that, in the years before the Tory Government, the threat of such a Government forced so many thousands of them between 1975 and 1979 to leave the land that they love? Can we not now take heart from the prospect of a Labour Government which will allow many thousands of Scots throughout the United Kingdom to return happily to the land that was once their own?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is obviously wriggling but the fact is that under socialism people left Scotland in very large numbers; under Conservative Governments they have been coming back in very large numbers.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. I can hear only one point of order at a time. The hon. Lady was on her feet first.

Mrs. Mahon: You will be aware, Madam Speaker, that Friday 27 January is the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz. Have the Government said what the House is going to do to commemorate the holocaust, and who will represent them at the memorial service at Auschwitz in Poland on Friday?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. These camps were, of course, the scenes of mass extermination on a scale that the world had perhaps never known. The 50th anniversary of the liberation of the camps—especially that at Auschwitz—should concern us, as Britain was in the war against Nazism from the very beginning. In the circumstances, is it not inappropriate—I put it no more strongly than that—that the House is not being represented in any way?

I hope that I shall not be misunderstood if I say that, not only would we have liked the House to be represented, but that we hoped that you, Madam Speaker, would have been authorised—clearly, you could not do so without such authorisation—to represent us, so that people in Poland and the international community know that the House of Commons is concerned about what happened, and that we shall never forget the millions of people who were murdered for no reason other than their race, politics or some disability which, in the eyes of the Nazis, meant that they should be put to death.

Madam Speaker: I understand the sentiments, which, I am sure, are those of the entire House on this matter. The hon. Lady mentioned 27 January. I have not been informed by the Government that they intend to commemorate that date, but I remind the House that we have business questions tomorrow and that the matter could perhaps be put to the Leader of the House.

Mr. Hawkins: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wonder if you would give me your guidance? I think that it is correct to say that you have repeatedly made it clear that, in any Question Time, especially in Prime Minister's Question Time, interventions should always be in the form of questions.

I wonder, therefore, in the light of that confirmation, whether you would kindly look at column 136 of *Hansard* yesterday and the second intervention of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), which certainly was not a question but a statement? Would you be inclined to remind the right hon. Gentleman of his obligation, above every other Member of the House, to put questions and not to make statements?

Madam Speaker: Yes, I think it is incumbent on any hon. Member, whether Front Bencher or Back Bencher, not to make statements, but to put their questions to Ministers very briskly, so that as many hon. Members as possible may be called. I should also remind Members, especially Back-Bench Members, that, at Question Time, the Government are required to account for their policies, so questions must relate to ministerial responsibility and not go further afield. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised the earlier point with me.

Several hon. Members Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. I have dealt with that. I will not take any points of order further to it. There are other hon. Members wishing to raise points of order.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will recall that, on 13 July, the Government made a statement on their White Paper "The Civil Service: Continuity and Change", that the statement took 55 minutes, and that over 30 hon. Members took part. It now transpires that, in a written answer that is to be tabled tonight, the Government will slip out their reply to a Command Paper and to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee report.

This is a deliberate attempt to pre-empt the Scott committee and Nolan committee reports. Therefore, would you make representations to the people involved, to see that a statement is made in the House, that the Paper is delayed until then, and that the statement is not made in Opposition time?

Madam Speaker: The House knows my views on those matters. I have stated them clearly and frequently. Important Government decisions must, of course, be communicated first to this House. I feel very strongly about that, and wish to see it carried out. Whether that is done by oral statement or by written answer is for the Minister to decide, and I have no authority over that decision.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you seen, in your official capacity, the distressing account of the death of Mr. Keith Abel, who was described by his wife as a valiant servant of the health service and who spent many years of his life saving the lives of others? He had to wait five hours, during which he was dying of a brain haemorrhage, while efforts were made to find a hospital. Five long hours went by, and no hospital could be found to deal with him. Have you had a request for a statement about that incident and the distressing state of our national health service?

Madam Speaker: I received no intimation from the Government that a statement was to be made on that matter today.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I know that we have had Scottish questions, but I wonder whether the Government have requested that one of their Ministers could make a statement on their new policy, and whether they have informed you about their declaration last night on television regarding the new laws on Sunday opening hours, especially in view of the fact that we know that the Tories have been hunting for money and that the

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

brewers are very happy about the proposals? I should like to know why no statement has been made, because I want to ask the Ministers concerned how much the brewers have promised the Tory party for this change of policy that has not been announced in this House.

Madam Speaker: That is barely a point of order for me. The hon. Gentleman may try to use the Order Paper to put those questions to Ministers. He was really asking whether the Government are making a statement on that matter today. The answer, as far as I am concerned, is no.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I hope this does not relate to earlier points of order; there was a glint in the hon. Gentleman's eye as if it did.

Mr. Foulkes: It is an absolutely and completely different point of order, Madam Speaker. You may recall that, two weeks ago, you gave a very helpful answer to a point of order that I raised indicating that all questions must relate to responsibilities of Ministers, so that Conservative Members could not ask questions about the Labour party and Labour policy. Does that mean that I would be precluded from asking whether the costs of the legal action against *The Guardian* by the director-general of the Tory party will be paid for out of Tory party funds or out of Government funds?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must not try to use the Chair of this House to put questions of that nature. He is ingenious enough, and has been here long enough, to know his way around the Order Paper and to know how to raise issues. I guessed correctly—he had a twinkle in his eye before he started.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you received any representations from the Government making their position clear concerning the reports that, shortly after leaving Government service, many senior civil servants from the Ministry of Defence, and many people who have held very senior positions in Her Majesty's armed services, receive directorships and arrive on the boards of defence companies managing large orders for the Government? Have you received any representations on that subject, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: The answer is no.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Is it your intention, Madam Speaker, to continue the practice of calling Conservative Members more than once during Scottish questions?

Madam Speaker: Yes, but not on every occasion; that must be left to my discretion. I believe that the hon. Gentleman has raised that matter today because he rose several times at Question Time but I could not call him—I saw the look of frustration on his face. I say to him and to other Scottish Members that I keep a list of Scottish Members who have not been called very often during Scottish Question Time. The hon. Gentleman is not on my list, because I know that he has been called quite frequently; that is probably one reason why he was not called today. I keep the list here with me at every Scottish Question Time, and try to deal as fairly as possible with all Scottish Members, whatever party they may come from.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I hope that that will not give rise to other points of order.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): This is another point of order on Scottish Question Time, Madam Speaker. Did you take into account the fact that today we had extra time for Scottish questions because of the changes in the procedure of the House? I feel sure that that was welcome to all Scottish Members.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman gives me an opportunity to say that, at Scottish Question Time, we do not make the progress that I would like to see. We have made a little more progress today because of the extra few minutes, but I hope that we shall try harder next time.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): May one hope, Madam Speaker, that Scottish Opposition Members will remember that they are members of the United Kingdom, as are our much admired Members from Northern Ireland and from Wales?

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): Oh—thanks for that information.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman) always has something to say that is welcome in the House. We shall now move on to the ten-minute rule Bill.

Pensions (Divorce)

3.42 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the law so as to provide for the equitable division of pensions in the event of divorce.

I introduced this Bill at the end of the previous parliamentary year, on 1 November, but because that happened at the end of the Session, it fell and it was not even possible to publish it. I hope to make better progress this year. I do not wish to restate all the provisions of the Bill, as they were contained in my speech of 1 November and can be read in *Hansard*, but I shall restate its main purpose and principles.

The Bill seeks a fairer distribution of assets, especially pension assets, in the event of divorce. The current system is unfair, because at present most pension fund rights are personal to the individual in the fund. On divorce, husbands often walk away with all the pension assets, while wives get nothing. One has a prosperous future; the other faces hardship.

In England and Wales, the decision whether to include pension rights in an overall settlement is entirely at the discretion of the court. More often than not, the court ignores those pension assets, either because they are not brought to its attention or because it comes up against the obstacle in the current law that it cannot overrule pension fund trustees and divide an individual's pension assets.

That is not the case in Scotland, Germany, Canada and elsewhere. In those countries, all assets, including pension assets, are considered as comprising the matrimonial assets, and divided equitably. That is what my Bill seeks for England and Wales.

The court would have the power to reallocate occupational and personal pension rights between the divorcing parties. It could arrange for a transfer payment from the pension fund member's account to the account for the benefit of the divorced spouse. She would then have a pension in her own right.

On "Women's Hour" last month, there was a statement from the Minister's office about that matter. It repeated the assertion that there is no clear evidence of the problem, that more research is needed, and that a survey had been commissioned to report at the end of 1995. That sums up the Government position.

I disagree—there is plenty of evidence. Two major reports have said that there is a strong case for a change in the law—that of the Pensions Management Institute in May 1993 and the Goode report in September 1993. The National Association of Pension Funds has added its weight in favour of a revision of the law.

The organisation Fair Shares says that it has counseled many more than 1,000 women in that situation, many of whom are desperate and forced to depend on the state against their will. Fifty-two per cent. of the organisation's members have no pension rights, in spite of having been married for a long time. Others, who receive the family house in a divorce trade-off, also receive the outstanding mortgage, and find themselves trapped on income support, with the permanent threat of losing that house.

"Women's Hour" gave some examples. One was of a 72-year-old disabled woman, who was married for more than 40 years. Her ex-husband receives a £25,000-a-year pension. He pays her £4,000 a year, but she is deeply anxious that, when he dies, her maintenance will end and she will be left destitute. Another woman described that general denial of pension rights as a "double betrayal"—first by her partner, then by the law.

There is plenty of evidence in my mail of the problem; I have received many letters about the subject. Mrs. M of Devon wrote:

"I knew my husband for 50 years and we were married for 45 years . . . During the"

divorce proceedings, his company

"would not divulge his pension rights."

He paid up at first, but soon after, he remarried and the money was stopped.

Mrs. K of Bedfordshire was married for 32 years and, similarly, her husband stopped paying maintenance. She writes:

"I have no savings whatsoever. Just what does one do? Fall back on the State?"

Mrs. P of Essex was married for 20 years. She says:

"My husband has informed me he intends to leave me . . . to buy a bigger boat and live on that by himself. I asked about his pension and whether he"

would give

"me half . . . He said there is no way he will pay me any of his pension. This pension will amount to tens of thousands of pounds . . . plus a sizeable monthly income. Indirectly I feel I have been paying towards that pension but legally have no rights or access to it whatsoever. His financial future is assured. Mine holds nothing but question marks and fright".

Mrs. W of Essex said:

"I divorced my husband after 31 years of domestic violence, mental cruelty and also living with a husband who was a pervert."

It is the same story—she then had no rights to his pension.

Mrs. M of the Isle of Wight, married for 43 years, with five children, went to court to obtain her pension rights and found herself denied legal aid. When she applied, she was refused, on the grounds that

"your prospects of deriving any benefit from defending the"

divorce

"petition are too slight to justify the issue of a certificate."

Her husband, incidentally, with a larger pension, obtained his legal aid for the proceedings.

After 27 years of marriage, Mrs. L of Truro lost her pension rights under the existing law. She states:

"Through no fault of my own I now face a future of emotional and financial insecurity . . . In Scotland and in several other countries the courts have the power to divide a pension on divorce, and recent reports have urged the Government to alter the law in England and Wales to grant women their fair share of the pension to which they have contributed in kind. My experience shows that the courts cannot be relied upon to use the powers embodied in the Matrimonial Act to protect women in my situation. There is no substitute for an index-linked pension".

There is plenty of evidence, and it is crystal clear—the Government must know that.

The Government's survey, which is to report at the end of 1995, merely kicks the matter into touch for another decade. The Pensions Bill is before Parliament this year. If the change is not made now, there will not be another Bill and another opportunity for many years. I understand that an amendment to the Bill is to be tabled in the House of Lords and that it will be supported by peers from all parties. In the interests of fairness, I urge the Government to accept such an amendment and such a change.

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

In my last few seconds, and as it is Burns night, I thought that I would quote a bit of Burns, like the true cockney I am, and tell the Government not to be a

"Wee, sleekit, cow'rin', tim'rous beastie,"

and accept the legislation, so that

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot,"

it can be a case of

"O, gie the lass her fairin', lad".

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Malcolm Chisholm, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Ms Jean Corston, Mr. Neil Gerrard, Ms Mildred Gordon, Mr. Bernie Grant, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Ms Clare Short and Mrs. Audrey Wise.

PENSIONS (DIVORCE)

Mr. Harry Cohen accordingly presented a Bill to amend the law so as to provide for the equitable division of pensions in the event of divorce: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 February, and to be printed. [Bill 38.]

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

(Clauses Nos. 2, 5, 8, 15, 52, 64 and 91, Schedules Nos. 1, 4, 11 and 14, and any new Clauses first appearing on the Order Paper not later than 19th January and designed to continue the statutory effect of any of the Ways and Means Resolutions of the House of 13th December)

Considered in Committee [Progress, 23rd January].

[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair*]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Sir George Young): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. I wonder if it would be for the convenience of the Committee if we were to take clause 64, schedule 14 and the associated amendments together?

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): Is it the wish of the Committee that we take the clause, schedule and amendments together? It seems that it is, and the Chair is happy to assist in that.

Clause 64

APPROVAL OF COMPANIES AS TRUSTS

3.52 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): I beg to move amendment No. 15, in clause 64, page 57, line 44, at end insert—

'(1A) No approvals shall be given under this section after 6th April 1997.'.

The Chairman: With this we shall take schedule 14 and amendment No. 11.

Mr. Smith: Our difference with the Government is not on the importance of investment, especially for smaller and higher risk companies. We have argued long and hard that the Government should do more. A form of venture capital trust properly put together could have a role in that. Our strong concern is that the way in which venture capital trusts are designed in the Bill and the manner of their tax treatment will not provide the stimulus to the right sort of investment in an efficient way.

If the scheme goes ahead, the Government will find—as they did with the business expansion scheme—that they end up using taxpayers' money to subsidise many low risk investments backed by property, primarily for tax avoidance purposes. Given the business expansion scheme experience, we have to ask why the Government are bringing forward a venture capital trust scheme in this way—with no explicit exclusion of property companies and only limited exclusions of property-backed companies.

When I saw in yesterday's *Financial Times* that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was considering flogging off the Treasury, I thought that I saw a connection—perhaps venture capital trusts will be used to market the Treasury itself. I can see the glossy venture capital trust prospectus now: "Invest in a prestigious central location. Buildings rather tarnished by present occupants. Fake blood to be removed from office of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Real beer to be removed from the floor of the

Chancellor's office. Excellent potential in an exciting project to be under new dynamic management within two years".

The tax breaks in the scheme are huge. Compelling though the case for assisting in flogging off the Treasury may be, we have to ask how the cost can be justified. The Government estimate that venture capital trusts will cost the Exchequer almost £700 million over three years. The House is right to ask how the Government can justify huge tax breaks to facilitate investment, including some very safe investment. The answer is that they cannot.

As I will set out in my speech, there is every prospect of venture capital trusts as designed in the Bill and defined in the clause becoming a monumental tax avoidance device, stimulating the business of the tax planners more than that of the companies which the Government claim that they are trying to help.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and I am sorry to interrupt so early in his speech, but I should like to clarify his thinking for the convenience of the Committee. I fully understand his concern about the absence of an interest-in-land rule in the proposals before us, but apart from the opportunity for what might otherwise be safe investment, would the Opposition support the principle that some tax advantages—such as roll-over relief and the freedom from ultimate capital gains tax—should be afforded to encourage venture capital investment?

Mr. Smith: Later in my speech I shall propose some ways in which the Opposition believe that that concept could be applied more successfully. We have never argued that there is no case for fiscal incentives in investment. Indeed, we have advanced that case very vigorously in relation to much-needed investment in research and development. It is a question of weighing properly and realistically the balance between the cost to the Exchequer of the tax subsidies involved and the actual gain to the public through stimulating beneficial investment. Because of the nature of the tax breaks within the scheme and the property exclusion to which the hon. Gentleman referred, we do not think that the proposal gets the balance right.

We believe that the Government should at least concede that there are risks involved in embarking on this scheme. They should have learnt from the experience of the business expansion scheme. It is wise to propose a sunset provision in the legislation, as Opposition amendment No.15 does, so that Parliament can re-examine the operation of the scheme after two years. We can then assess whether the cost of the tax relief involved has been justified by the additional capital invested in genuinely high risk but potentially productive and profitable enterprises. It is important to invest capital in high risk ventures, but we want those ventures to have at least some probability of success; we do not want to squander taxpayers' money. Past schemes, such as that involving DeLorean, were not always a wise use of economic resources and taxpayers' money.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): The hon. Gentleman was implying that it would be sensible to form a judgment on a company's prospects after two years, when it has been involved in the risky enterprise that one assumes would be the frame for a venture capital trust. Realistically, does he think that two years is sufficient time for that judgment?

4 pm

Mr. Smith: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. Even if, after two years, it seemed sensible to allow the scheme to continue, further evaluation would still be needed. After two years, however, it would be clear whether the Government are right in their contention that the scheme will direct savings into high-risk, productive industrial enterprises, backing up entrepreneurs who are currently short of capital or whether, as we feel, it is likely to divert savings from other investments.

The terms in which the venture capital trust is structured are such that within the parameters of the scheme the influx of funds will gravitate towards the low risk investments which the limited exclusions facilitate. That judgment could be made after two years. We would then be able to assess the balance of costs and benefits and a proper evaluation could be made of what benefits there are, who gets them, and the considerable costs involved.

The Government must face the issue squarely. The tax breaks are enormous: it appears that either the Government have made a major blunder in the way in which the scheme has been designed, or they want to give money away.

Let us consider how the definitions in the clause will work in practice. Those putting money into the scheme will not pay tax on the dividends that they receive up to a limit of £100,000 invested per year, and they will not pay tax when they sell their shares in the venture capital trust. Indeed, it is worse than it first appears. It does not just mean that investors can get up to £100,000 back from the trust in any one year and pay no capital gains tax; it means that everything is free of tax, including the return on the £100,000 invested per year. If the £100,000 yields a £150,000 return, there would be no capital gains tax on the extra £50,000.

Investors can claim tax relief at 20 per cent. in any one year on up to £100,000, provided that the shares are held for five years. A 40 per cent. taxpayer can thus avoid tax of up to £20,000 by putting in the maximum £100,000. So long as an investor has income of £100,000 or more, as the increasing number of privatised utility profiteers do, they need invest only £80,000 after tax because the Inland Revenue will contribute the other £20,000.In total, if the shares purchased in the venture capital trust yield a 50 per cent. growth over five years, for the expenditure of £80,000 of post-tax income the investor will get £150,000 back with no tax to pay and no tax on the dividends received in the meantime.

Even that is not the end of it: investors can also use the venture capital trust to defer capital gains tax. A 40 per cent. taxpayer could sell assets—perhaps in shares or property—with a capital gain of £100,000, put that gain into a venture capital trust and thereby defer the capital gains tax of £40,000. The gain, at least in theory, would be liable to taxation when it was withdrawn from the trust, but there would be nothing to stop the investor reinvesting the money, perhaps in another venture capital trust, further to shelter it.

If the Government want to establish a scheme whereby they are not taxing income which goes into saving—and academics argue that it is an intelligent direction in which

[Mr. Smith]

to point the taxation system—they should do so in a way which enables everyone to take advantage of the provisions and not simply gear them towards venture capital trusts and other investment schemes which are particularly beneficial to a minority of very wealthy people.

Mr. Butterfill: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that the Government are trying to encourage investors away from existing investments that are safe but are not producing the results we want and towards risky entrepreneurial activities. The investor could defer that liability just as long by leaving the money where it is. Provided that he does not realise his existing assets, he can defer liability indefinitely. He is not being offered any real advantage, other than the incentive to move his money from something safe and unproductive to something less safe but, one hopes, more productive.

Mr. Smith: I answered that point earlier. Our fear is that the scheme will provide an opportunity to move investment from something safe and unproductive not to something high-risk and productive with tax advantages, but to something equally safe and unproductive offering a much higher rate of real return because of tax breaks. That cannot be right.

The scheme offers huge tax breaks when the money goes in, with relief from income and capital gains tax; breaks when the money is in the trust, when dividends are not taxed; and tax relief when the money comes out, with relief on capital gains. It is no wonder that Mr. John Speirs, director of BES Investments and a leading adviser on business expansion schemes, stated in *The Sunday Times* on 4 December 1994:

"I cannot see why anyone should pay capital gains tax again . . . If we had written it ourselves we could not have come up with a better Budget for the tax shelter industry."

He did not say "a better Budget for high-risk, productive small companies."

That damning indictment of the Government's scheme is anything but an isolated comment. The savings and investment press is full of more of the same. On Second Reading, I quoted from the excellent publication, *Small Company Investor*. Perhaps the Financial Secretary will say whether he has yet adopted my advice and taken out a Treasury subscription to that magazine, which gave a commendably informative guide to the real consequences of the Government's proposals. It published a feature headlined:

"Life is just a bowl of tax cherries. Will you need to pay capital gains tax again? Maybe not."

Another article in the same issue asks:

"What has our Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, been doing to turn our smaller company investment dreams into a reality? How could he get his budget so right"—

the Committee can tell that I am not quoting selectively—

"and yet so horribly wrong? No, not the VAT on fuel blunder, but the tax relief for smaller company investment. He did what was needed to pump up investment by making the reliefs huge—and then he took some of it away by dragging in property. Isn't that just what happened with BES? Our bet is that there will be an avalanche of lower-risk, property-backed schemes taking money away from entrepreneurial small companies."

That is precisely the opposite effect that the Government claim. It added:

"Think again Chancellor."

Such comments are not confined to the savings and investment press. A number of academics have reached similar conclusions. A report produced by the SME centre at Warwick university and published by the Government entitled "An Assessment of Firms Located On and Off Science Parks in the United Kingdom" stated:

"Other options which have been suggested for overcoming the financing problems which developing high technology businesses claim to experience include:

The establishment of venture capital funds which would focus exclusively on the high tech sectors. Such funds, however, have been established in the past without achieving significant success."

It continues:

"Additional tax support for business angels. The introduction of the Enterprise Investment Scheme could be seen as a satisfactory development in this light. However, other research casts doubt upon the use of taxation incentives in inducing desirable changes in this area."

In a study sponsored, I understand, by the Department of Trade and Industry and others and entitled "Understanding the Small Business Sector", the author, D.J. Storey, an acknowledged expert on these matters, said:

"The research evidence suggests that government has to look very carefully at proposals to use the taxation system to provide 'incentives' to modify the behaviour of individuals who own small businesses. Currently, it is unanimously recognised that small business owners have to invest more heavily in their own businesses rather, than being excluded from doing so, as was the case with the BES. For example, research evidence consistently shows that individuals who do not reinvest sufficiently in their own businesses run a much higher risk of business failure. However, the history of BES is one of desirable objectives of small firm policy being the focus of taxation exemption, for these only to be used as tax avoidance vehicles. Our recommendation would therefore be to avoid, wherever possible, the use of the taxation system to provide incentives in this area. Instead we feel that government would be best advised to use its powers of persuasion, possibly through collaboration with banks and accountants, to emphasise the investment message. The message that excessive withdrawals from the business are likely to lead to its failure has to be drilled home to small business owners, rather than emphasis being on the provision of tax breaks for the wealthy."

That gives a wider perspective of the context in which VCTs are being introduced and their likely effect on the small business sector. Unlike the Government, Labour believes that such comments should be taken seriously, and that a measured and careful approach must be taken to fiscal incentives of these types, although we acknowledge, as I have said, that a role can be argued for them.

Faced with the weight of comment and the quotations and analyses that I have cited, we believe that the Government must give some answers, rather than—as always—arrogantly expecting the public to accept that Ministers know best, especially when they patently did not know best about the business expansion scheme and other schemes which they subsequently had to return to the House to change.

It was revealing that, when the Financial Secretary replied to the debate on Second Reading on Tuesday last week he had no answer to the charge that the form of VCTs that the Government are proposing will be used disproportionately for tax avoidance and tax sheltering. I expect that when the Financial Secretary replies he will

claim that the clause takes care of tax avoidance dangers. I am arguing that it does nothing of the sort. I accept that the clause excludes dealing in land, goods, banking and other financial services, some leasing business and legal and accountancy services, but most crucially of all it does not exclude, as I understand it, property-backed schemes. Similarly, it does not exclude elderly people's accommodation.

There is ready scope for abuse of the scheme for tax avoidance purposes, which will not provide investment in the high-risk productive businesses and manufacturing businesses that the Government claim for it. That is why we tabled amendment No. 16, which would have put limits on the way that property could be used to back companies qualifying for VCT relief. A Liberal Democrat amendment which would have the same effect has been selected for debate today. It seeks to stop schemes mainly backed by property from benefiting from the extensive tax reliefs of venture capital trusts. Both amendments—the Labour amendment which was not selected and the Liberal Democrat one which was selected—introduce into VCTs the same property restrictions that the Government felt that they had to introduce into the business expansion scheme and the enterprise investment scheme.

Given all that happened, particularly with the business expansion scheme, it is ironic that the Government propose to remove the safeguards from the BES and EIS in the Bill and not to introduce them into VCTs. What possible argument can there be for not ensuring the safeguards that the Government had accepted? Could it be anything to do with the fact that the property restriction is so unpopular with the BES and EIS tax planning industry? It is difficult to find any other reason why those safeguards should not apply.

Opposition Members believe in learning from experience and acting with a knowledge of the way in which markets have behaved, rather than planning simply on the basis of the way in which we might like to suppose that they would behave. If two investments have the same or similar return, investors will naturally tend to invest in the lower risk option. Their advisers will advise them to do just that. Experience shows that the tax planning industry can demonstrate great ingenuity in trying to create relatively low risk investments, often backed by property. We believe that the Government could and should create better mechanisms for ensuring that tax relief ends up supporting the financing of enterprises which generate the greatest value for the UK economy and which most need extra investment capital.

4.15 pm

As drafted, the schemes would also lead to a very complex structure which could produce some rather bizarre results. For instance, if someone bought a narrow boat and operated it as a holiday business, he or she could qualify for VCT tax benefits, but if they leased the boat to another person, who also operated it as a holiday business, that person would not qualify for the VCT benefits. If that person operated the boat as a holiday business for part of the year and leased it to someone who operated it as a holiday business for the remainder of the year, that person would probably end up in the High Court to determine whether or not he or she qualified for VCT tax benefits.

We should think about those things while the proposed legislation is before the Committee so as to avoid the complexity and the never-ending growth in the volume of tax legislation. *[Laughter.]* The Chief Secretary and the Financial Secretary laugh, but they are responsible for the volume of tax legislation. Nothing is more onerous to the small businesses that they claim to be helping than the huge volume of legislation and red tape for which the Government have been responsible.

I have a suggestion as to how the scheme can be changed and improved. The Labour party believes in listening to the real arguments and considering the real nature of the market with which we are dealing. It would be well worth the Government looking at the 50 per cent. rule, which requires that a VCT must hold 50 per cent. of its qualifying assets in the ordinary shares of unquoted companies.

Let us not forget that that requires small companies to give up a good part of control and equity to raise the funds they need. That is something that small businesses view with a great deal of apprehension. The fact that it is required reflects something of an obsession with equity in this country which contrasts with the tendency to fund through debt which is more prevalent among our successful European competitors and in the far east. There is a strong case for relaxing the 50 per cent. requirement so as to allow companies preferring to issue, for example, fixed rate securities, to benefit from the VCT advantages.

Mr. Butterfill: When the hon. Gentleman refers to ordinary shares, does he mean only ordinary shares or would he include preferred shares? He will know that the structure of many of the schemes is that the lending institution will take the preferred shares, leaving the ordinary shares with the entrepreneurial management. That structure enables them to give a larger proportion of the ordinary shares to the management, thereby giving a greater incentive to management than would otherwise be the case.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman draws attention to an important distinction. It is a useful point, but I was making the case for shifting from the 50 per cent. requirement of equity, of holdings in shares of whatever form, to the case for enabling the company requiring the capital to take it in the form of fixed interest securities, which would not involve that surrender of control. It was the importance of control from the perspective of the firm receiving the savings and making the productive investment that was of concern to me.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that tax relief under the scheme should be extended from equity investment to fixed interest investment? Is that what he is saying? Surely that runs counter to what he was saying just now about risk. There is far less risk in investing in fixed interest debt, which takes priority over equity in a liquidation. Surely he is not suggesting that the risk should be reduced in that way.

Mr. Andrew Smith: I am saying that a comprehensive look at the scheme would lead to a number of the parameters which are operating being varied. The 50 per cent. requirement on shares is one of them. The case for reducing the tax breaks also bears examination. Rather than the definition that the Government are using, which is essentially that the scheme can be applied to anything

[Mr. Andrew Smith]

within certain broad terms and not on a list of exclusions, why not be more positive and say that the scheme will apply in the case of X, Y or Z or to those firms which satisfy the relevant criteria?

By taking a number of elements of reform to the package one could put together a form of venture capital trust which would more successfully achieve the Government's stated aim of ensuring that available savings went to the high risk companies which are investing particularly in manufacturing or undertaking research and development. The scheme as designed by the Government will not achieve those objectives.

Talking about venture capital trusts, the Financial Secretary said on Second Reading:

"The Labour party is ill advised to come out against them at this early stage."—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. 673.]

That seemed to imply that somehow we would be better advised to come out against them later when the hard earned money of middle and lower income taxpayers had been wasted in subsidies for tax avoidance by those with enough money to extract the maximum benefit from the trusts. The amendment gives us and the Government the chance to do just that.

If the Government will not look again at the schemes now, they should look again at them in two years as we suggest. They should look at them early in 1997, which may be just the time when the electorate is taking another—and final—look at the Government. If the Financial Secretary is so confident of his arguments, so confident of the public, economic and industrial benefits of the trusts as defined in the clause, he should have nothing to fear from such a mandatory review and should find it easy to accept the amendment. If he does not, we shall not only vote to try to make him do so and support the Liberal Democrat amendment to exclude property-backed schemes, a proposal that we also tabled, but we shall vote against this ill-judged vehicle for tax avoidance by voting against clause 64 in the Division Lobby.

Sir George Young: I hope that the Committee can be persuaded to resist the amendments.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) began by saying that he supported the principles of venture capital trusts, but by the end of his speech he had so qualified his support that little remained intact. At one point he challenged the whole philosophy of using the fiscal regime and tax incentives to create fresh investment in new businesses. He focused almost exclusively on the relationship between the potential investor and the venture capital trust; he did not spend quite so much time examining the potential impact on supply-side change, job creation and investment in new and expanding businesses.

The hon. Gentleman asked me whether I had read a particular publication. I am not conscious of having done so. I recall that the last time the hon. Gentleman read out a list of publications held by the Treasury, he came across one called "Baking Technology". That was a misprint: it should have been "Banking Technology". However, I understand the hon. Gentleman's surprise.

Mr. Andrew Smith: That does not stop the Treasury from cooking the books.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) made a pertinent and perceptive point. Having criticised VCTs for being too safe for the tax breaks, he floated a suggestion that would have made them even safer by allowing more of the money to be invested in fixed-interest securities.

Let me try to put the debate in a slightly broader context. When my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor introduced the idea of VCTs in his 1993 Budget, he said that the biggest contribution that any Chancellor could make to reducing unemployment in the medium term was to ensure that the conditions were in place for new businesses to become established and for small businesses to grow. In the past year, through the industrial finance initiative, we have been examining savings and the flow of funds through the economy into the business sector. That initiative identified the shortage of equity and other long-term finance as one of the problems facing small businesses today.

The CBI has conducted its own surveys in the past few years. Those surveys have shown that there are difficulties in the raising of funds, particularly in the range of up to £500,000. Dr. Steven Abbott, in association with the London business school, has shown that the United Kingdom economy has the capacity to produce 20,000 potential "star" start-ups, but only half that number are created, and nearly half of those rely on "funding gap" finance, mainly short-term overdrafts and loans. The VCT scheme is one of the Government's responses to a problem that has been generally recognised by serious commentators.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I do not think that anyone would deny that there is a shortage of capital, particularly in small and medium-sized businesses. When suggesting ways of dealing with that shortage, however, will the Financial Secretary bear in mind the failure of the business expansion and enterprise investment schemes, which use tax breaks for that very purpose?

Sir George Young: This scheme is more like an investment trust—it is quoted and pooled—than the business expansion scheme.

Having carried the hon. Member for Oxford, East with me so far, I hope that I can persuade him to stay with me for another paragraph or two. With respect to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson), the VCT scheme is not a tax scam for the wealthy, as he likes to portray it. He misunderstands the contribution that it can make to supply-side reform, the expansion of successful firms and the creation of jobs. Fiscal incentives may be needed if we are to capture those benefits. That is why I said, and I repeat it now, that the Labour party was ill advised to come out so firmly against VCTs as proposed by the Government.

There has been an encouraging response to our proposals. Already, many people say that they are seriously considering setting up venture capital trusts, and

as far as I am aware none are focusing on nursing homes, granny farms or any of the other schemes mentioned by Opposition Members.

The main details of the scheme have been widely publicised. Investors who buy quoted shares in a venture capital trust will be able to invest in a spread of unquoted companies. That shows that it is very different from the business enterprise scheme which, by and large, was not quoted and consisted of single product schemes. Investors will be exempt from tax on dividends from the venture capital trust and from capital gains tax when they dispose of shares in the venture capital trust.

4.30 pm

If investors subscribe for new ordinary shares in the VCT, they will in addition be entitled to income tax relief at 20 per cent. provided that the shares are held for at least five years. They will also be able to defer capital gains tax on a chargeable gain which arises from the disposal of any assets where that gain is reinvested in the venture capital trust by that same subscription. There is a limit for tax relief on subscriptions of £100,000 a year.

Venture capital trusts must be quoted on the stock exchange and will enjoy the same exemption from corporation tax on capital gains as investment trusts. At least 70 per cent. of the investments of venture capital trusts will have to be in unquoted trading companies with not more than 15 per cent. in any one company or group of companies. Venture capital trusts may count investments of up to £1 million in any one unquoted trading company in any one year towards the 70 per cent. unquoted trading company requirement, provided that the gross assets of each company do not exceed £10 million before each investment. I am afraid that that knocks out doing the Treasury building under the ingenious scheme that the hon. Member for Oxford, East floated at the beginning of his speech. He will find that the sums involved are substantially in excess of £10 million.

Each venture capital trust may put up to £1 million a year in each company. The trust would be well advised to keep its eyes on rather more than 70 per cent. because it must not fall below that percentage. To put it another way, the legislation gives the VCT a 30 per cent. leeway for when it buys and sells investments.

The VCT may invest in most types of unquoted trading company but as the hon. Member for Oxford, East said, certain activities are specifically excluded. They are: dealing in land, commodities and other financial products; dealing in goods otherwise than in wholesale or retail distribution; banking; insurance; money lending; hire purchase financing, and so on; the leasing of assets or receiving royalties or licence fees; and providing legal or accountancy services.

That considerably reduces the scope for the venture capital trust scheme to be used for low-risk investment. Unlike the business enterprise scheme, it does not apply to investment in private rented housing companies. The VCT legislation follows the enterprise investment scheme legislation in providing for the Treasury by order—subject, of course, to Parliament—to amend the meaning of qualifying trades and the figures of £1 million and £10 million. That should give a measure of flexibility in running the scheme.

The theme of the speech by the hon. Member for Oxford, East was that the scheme would become a major tax break for the few. The Chancellor anticipated such reactions in his Budget speech. Tax reliefs of this kind are designed to stimulate much-needed investment in business and enterprise and to create jobs rather than new tax loopholes. As I said on Second Reading, some firms have a high growth potential because they are able to benefit from innovations, but they are sometimes unable to get access to normal sources of finance through the stock market or the banks. That is because they have special characteristics which the financial system is unwilling or unable to accommodate, hence the funding gap which the industrial finance initiative has identified.

Mr. Andrew Smith: What evidence is there that the tax treatment of investment in those companies is the problem?

Sir George Young: The problem is the shortage of risk capital, of investors being unwilling to provide capital for such firms without some sort of fiscal incentive. Many serious commentators who have looked at that structural problem in the UK economy have been drawn to that conclusion.

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): Does the Minister accept that there is a considerable problem in the venture capital industry, particularly in relation to small and medium-sized enterprises? There is a funding gap, and one of the reasons for that, the venture capitalists tell us, is that it costs as much to service a loan for a major management buy-out or for a major privatisation as it does to service one for a small or medium firm. Nothing in the Bill gives any hint that that gap will be filled in any way.

Sir George Young: The whole purpose of the clause is to reduce the cost of risk equity capital for small businesses. We are making it easier for those businesses to access the capital that they need. That is the thrust of the measures before the Committee this afternoon.

The proposals in the Bill are the result of the painstaking consultation that has taken place in the past year. It is a balanced package and it has been warmly welcomed. The Association of Investment Trust Companies has said that the scheme has a good chance of success in encouraging equity investment in small, unquoted companies. Rothschilds has said that the measures will nurture business in the United Kingdom food sector. Others have said that the trusts are imaginative and bold, and that the measures will bring investment in private companies within the reach of more investors. The challenge now is to secure that potential.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The Financial Secretary has used one or two extracts from the comments of various commentators, who seem to commend the scheme because of its tax benefits. Given the calculations that are being done on the tax relief that is likely to arise from these measures, perhaps the Financial Secretary could say what sort of people on what sort of incomes will benefit from that tax relief. Will he give clear Treasury estimates of what sort of schemes will benefit, how much more investment will go into small manufacturing firms rather than into property schemes, and how many jobs will be created? Have those estimates been done or are we living in a vacuum?

Sir George Young: If the hon. Gentleman reads the publication that we put out on Budget day, he will find the best estimate that we can make of the take-up of the scheme. We have worked out roughly what the forgone

[Sir George Young]

tax relief will be. As I said, we have excluded a number of activities that we do not think are appropriate. At this stage, a number of merchant banks and investment trusts are putting together potential venture capital trusts. The information that I have read contains no evidence that they are going into the sort of low-risk, property-backed investments that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

I have noticed the investment mentioned by Rothschilds, which is interested in helping small firms in the food manufacturing and food processing business, which needs to access high technology and where a problem exists in raising capital. I hope that no one in the Committee will criticise firms benefiting from this sort of scheme.

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Financial Secretary has mentioned Rothschilds twice. In what form were Rothschilds' comments made to the Government? Did it make them as an adviser or as a consultant on the matter?

Sir George Young: Speaking from memory, Rothschilds put out a press release welcoming the scheme on Budget day and it was available for everyone to read.

Mr. Smith: Is that all?

Sir George Young: As far as I am concerned, that is all.

One of the amendments proposed by the hon. Member for Oxford, East would restrict the take-up to schemes that were taken up before, I think, April 1997. Because the Government are keen to ensure that good-quality investment arises from the venture capital trusts scheme, I do not think that that is a sensible way to proceed. Everyone agrees that it takes time to look this out and to encourage it. VCTs will often want to research the sort of investment that they wish to make before they get off the ground. Putting a time limit on the scheme, especially one as short as two years, will tend to hurry that process, which will not always have good results.

The second reason for objecting to the amendments is that they may have a perverse effect. More VCTs may seek approval in the first two years than would otherwise be the case, simply to meet the deadline. The purpose of the amendments may have been to save the Exchequer money, but they would not necessarily achieve that, and we could be left with a large number of potential VCTs lying dormant, without raising any new capital for the economy.

As with all enterprise investment scheme rules that the Government now believe it is reasonable to relax, the land rule was inherited from the business expansion scheme. It was introduced to prevent companies that held more than half their assets in land and buildings from using the scheme. The rule, however, became onerous to operate because it required regular valuation of assets. Even more worrying, it could prevent a trading company—for example, a manufacturing company—that owned its own premises from using the scheme. It surely is not right to preclude a company from using the VCT scheme merely because it owns its own premises. That would be a ludicrous proposition and that is why we are not supporting that exclusion.

The proposal is a serious response to a serious problem. Nothing I have heard so far in the debate has convinced me that the premise on which it is founded is otherwise than correct. Real potential exists in taking the concept forward. A real opportunity exists to open up lower-cost risk capital for small and promising new businesses. I very much hope that the Committee will reject the amendments and give the clause a Second Reading.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I wish to speak to amendment No. 11. I hope that, in spite of his opening remarks, the Minister will consider the amendment because it recycles the Government's own argument, and with legitimate force. He has not convinced me that circumstances have changed so dramatically that serious consideration of the amendment is not required. However, let me first put the debate and the amendment in context.

It is generally recognised that there needs to be a fundamental shift—perhaps even a cultural shift—in the way in which we finance small businesses and in the availability of finance to small businesses. To the extent that the Government's proposals for venture capital trusts are a contribution to that, I and my colleagues welcome them and, in principle, support them. The amendment is specifically a qualification; it in no way constitutes opposition to them. They could be useful and helpful although I stress that they are not the whole answer but a contribution towards the resolution, or at least a reduction, of the problem.

One problem is that of developing new incentives for business investment by means of tax breaks. Surely after 15 years in power, the Conservatives are able to recognise that tax breaks have their uses but, by definition, create the potential for abuses. One person's tax incentive is someone else's tax avoidance scheme. That is not a contentious statement; indeed, it is accepted as part of the business of tax avoidance. However, the right balance must be struck so that we do not create a system that is geared more to tax avoidance than to the creation of investment for small businesses.

Mr. Forman: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was a member of the Standing Committee that debated last year's Finance Bill. Had he been a member, he would have had the opportunity to take part in an important debate on the difference between tax avoidance and tax evasion. Will he place on record the fact that tax avoidance is a legitimate activity, whereas tax evasion is not?

Mr. Bruce: I have no problem with that proposition, but the fact that something is legal does not mean that it is efficient; nor does it mean that it is in the Exchequer's interest or that it will create the benefits that the tax breaks were created to achieve.

So that there is no doubt, I repeat that basically we welcome the proposals on venture capital trusts. I hope that they will succeed in helping more money to get to the small businesses that need it. I see no conflict of interest, but I am concerned to ensure that we get the balance right.

Before I examine that particular part of the amendment, it is worth asking the House to make a simple comparison between small business finance and the success of small businesses in the United Kingdom and those in, for example, the Republic of Germany. There are some fundamental differences that will not carry over, but there

is a growing recognition—perhaps because of the difficulties in the property market that we have experienced in recent years—that it is a matter of culture that we tend to regard investment in property as a higher priority than investment in business. That is one difference between the cultural attitude of the average Briton and that of the average German.

Before he buys a house or invests in property, the average German will choose to invest in a family business in which he can have a stake, either directly, if it is his family's business, or indirectly, if it is someone else's business, through which he can contribute to the wealth-creating process, the economy and, of course, his own prosperity. We have to find a way to make that cultural shift in this country.

Perhaps the one silver lining that might yet emerge from the otherwise disappointing state of the property market is that circumstances are forcing us to reassess whether it is right for us as individuals—let alone business people—to put so much of our savings into property rather than business. To the extent that the climate is changing, I accept that the scheme may make a contribution.

Mr. Butterfill: It has been said from the Opposition Benches that property is a low-risk investment. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that view would not be accepted by many of the people who now have negative equity on their homes? Experience over the past few years shows that property is a very high-risk investment. Nor would that view be accepted by the many property companies that have gone bust or have had to be rescued by all sorts of schemes. The state of the property market in the past few years has shown that there are just as many risks in property as there are in any other business. Under those circumstances, does the hon. Gentleman think that the scheme is likely to be abused?

Mr. Bruce: I accept the first half of the analysis. That is a fairly widespread, obvious observation of what has happened. I shall return to the hon. Gentleman's particular point when I address the detail of the amendment, because he made a fair comment, but first I shall finish the broader argument about schemes for encouraging investment in small businesses.

4.45 pm

Having looked a little more closely at other aspects of small business finance in the United Kingdom and in other countries, I saw that there was clearly a role for the banks in general. It is interesting that the Minister, quite without question, acknowledged that there is a venture capital gap. Most hon. Members who take part in debates on small businesses probably agree with that, but it is not always true that central bankers and joint stock bankers in this country agree. I have often heard the argument that there is absolutely no shortage of money, but there is a shortage of suitable enterprises. That, of course, is a matter of judgment and depends on what a banker decides is a good investment.

The banks have poured money into dubious ventures in South America, which they have had to write off, while denying many potential enterprises in this country the funding that they wanted. There is no doubt at all that too much business is also funded on short-term overdraft rather than on longer-term loan and equity. The structure is not always satisfactory, which makes businesses vulnerable.

The Government could explore a partnership between themselves and the banks to try to find ways in which small businesses could have access to finance through the banking system comparable with that available to larger companies. In my own experience of running a small business—I am told that it has not changed all that much over the years—I went along to my bank with a proposition, a business plan and an indication of my cash flow and my requirements, and the bank more or less said that it did not want to see my business plan. I was told that, depending on my equity, if I owned my own house and if I was prepared to put it on the line, I would be given the money. That was not the help that I needed. It was not the right attitude. It meant that I had to take a considerable risk.

However, what really irked me was that even though the bank was getting its security, I was told that, of course, as an untried small business, I had to pay cash in advance when ordering basic working capital equipment to run the business, as I could not get credit. I paid a premium rate of interest on the money that I had to borrow from the bank because I did not have a proven track record—despite the fact that the bank had total security over my home. It seemed double jeopardy for me and double security for the bank. Time and again, small business people say to me that they have to pay more interest to finance their wage bills than their customers, who do not pay them and who make them wait for payment. They say that they are being squeezed at both ends.

You may call me to order, Mr. Morris, but the point is relevant. The scheme is helpful, but it does not deal with the problem that I outlined. I hope that the Minister will recognise that we need to look more widely at ways in which to change the culture. However, I accept that the scheme contributes to that change.

I shall refer to the specifics of amendment No. 11 and the restrictions in it, and also address the point made by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill). It is true that the property market has been somewhat depressed, although it is variable. Indeed, in certain sectors of commercial properties, there are signs of an upturn. However, it is acknowledged—the Government clearly had to amend the business expansion scheme to take account of the fact—that property-based schemes, essentially, have been used as an abuse of the previous schemes. People were not investing in productive enterprise but were simply building up property portfolios—that is the cultural point that I am making.

The Government introduced the restriction, and I am sure that the Minister is aware that the wording of my amendment is taken entirely from their own legislation on business expansion schemes. I do not think that the Government have made their case; although in the short term the climate may not be encouraging, the property market problem could lead to abuse in the future, and that could turn a good scheme into something that to some extent falls into disrepute.

I respond to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West by saying that all that is required for there to be a potential abuse is an upturn in one sector of the property market, taking it significantly ahead of inflation—I hope that he is optimistic enough to see that that may happen in some places.

Far be it from me to give tips to those who plan such things in the City, but I represent an area that has not suffered the collapse in property prices that has happened elsewhere—we have experienced quite the reverse—and I can see that someone could easily be interested in offering a property-based portfolio in Aberdeen and the rest of north-east Scotland, where over the past few years there have been rent revaluations adding 200 and 300 per cent., and increases in both domestic and industrial property prices well ahead of inflation. People may say that we have also had a downturn, but it did not happen at the same time as the national downturn.

Circumstances can change. I do not wish to disparage the idea that people can invest in property, or to suggest that property is not a legitimate business. However, simply investing in the capital appreciation of bricks and mortar does not fundamentally add to the national wealth. I repeat my earlier analysis that that is part of the problem of the British culture—*[Interruption.]* If I buy a piece of property and it appreciates, nothing has been done to create new material resources, whereas if I buy a business making or selling things or providing services, something definite has been done to create national assets. Furthermore, as we have experienced over the past few years, what goes up can come down with one hell of a crash, especially if it was based on paper revaluations.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Gentleman explain how, if his amendment were accepted, he would overcome the problem of a manufacturer with a substantial asset—perhaps his own factory—that would take him above the limit? By what methods would the hon. Gentleman cater for that?

Secondly, how would the hon. Gentleman deal with the problem of the variations in valuations that appear from time to time, both because different valuers are used and because of rapid changes in the property market? Surely we now know that that market is far more volatile than we used to think. At the time of the BES abuses, we all thought that property values would go up for ever, but I do not think that many of us believe that any more.

Mr. Bruce: That is a fair point, but although the Government are relaxing the provisions now, they administered the scheme on their own terms in the past. The argument about valuations is important and valid, but the question is administrative and can be resolved. There could be a periodic revaluation by the normal methods—either by using the district valuer or by having two competing valuations. That would be perfectly reasonable.

The more specific arguments about valuations and about a manufacturer with a substantial property investment raise two points. First, if such a person owns a substantial amount of property, he also has the means to raise the finance himself. One therefore wonders whether he needs the attraction of venture capital trust funding. He has an asset against which he can borrow.

Mr. Butterfill *rose—*

Mr. Bruce: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman a couple of times.

The second point is that I am somewhat sceptical about the idea that many companies are geared so that the value of the property is more than 50 per cent. of the value of their total business. In my opinion, unless it is a property-based business—in which case it should be properly restricted—that business has got its gearing slightly wrong. However, that issue comes into play in some businesses, such as hotel businesses, and the potential restriction that the amendment proposes is relevant in those circumstances.

In effect, the Minister has said, "We did have that restriction but, perhaps because the property market is rather quiescent and because people have complained that it is slightly complicated, we have decided to relax it." However, the commentators—not only myself and not only the Liberal Democrats—say that the Government are making a fundamental miscalculation, which they may live to regret. That is my argument.

I think that the Government accept that the amendment is not a wrecking amendment, nor is it spiteful or irrelevant. It is pertinent, and its aim is to protect the virtue of the Government's scheme, to ensure that the scheme does not fall into disrepute because it becomes open to abuse of development simply as a tax shelter rather than what it is designed to be—a real contribution to opening up investment for small businesses.

Maurice Fitzpatrick, senior tax consultant of Chantrey Vellacott, commented:

"EIS share issues are potentially subject to the same kind of marketing abuse which existed for BES in the 1980s."

He said that investors would now be

"bombarded with schemes, only a proportion of which made sense".

He said that effectively they would be

"squandering their tax relief on manager or proprietor expenses".

The Government should be mindful of those worries.

Mr. Tim Smith: That was referring to the enterprise investment scheme, not venture capital trusts.

Mr. Bruce: I appreciate that, but the same problem will continue if the Government are so relaxed about it. We ask the Government not to spoil a good idea by being too relaxed about it and allowing it to become a marketing tool for tax shelters, rather than a genuine contribution to small business investment because, if that happens, the Government will need to modify it substantially later.

It is possible to spoil a good idea by being too lax about it. After all, the Government have said that they are anxious to maintain tight control of public expenditure and public finances.

If, as a result of miscalculation, the budget is exceeded because the take-up is greater than expected, because the opportunities are much greater, simply for tax shelter purposes, or if money is diverted away from genuinely productive investment, the danger is that people will say that the scheme is bad and did not deliver the goods, and we shall have to go back to the drawing board.

I repeat that I believe that the Government have the basis of a good scheme. We propose an amendment that will ensure that it continues to concentrate on the objectives that the Government have in mind, which we support and endorse.

I think that there is even uncertainty about the scheme on the Government Benches. The Government should take seriously the argument about tax loopholes. They have, understandably, poured scepticism on the argument of, for example, the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, that substantial amounts of money can be reclaimed by closing loopholes. They have retorted, also with some justification, that closing tax loopholes effectively places extra taxes on business.

However, the Government must recognise that, if they create a potential abuse that costs a significant amount, they give credence to the argument that there is more opportunity to close loopholes. In those circumstances, it is astonishing that, having recognised that they got it wrong with their previous schemes, the Government appear to be knocking that lesson aside casually and, as some commentators are saying, they are in danger of making a potentially costly mistake.

What alternatives exist? The Red Book calculates that the scheme will cost £150 million in 1995-96, which presumably is in lost tax revenue. That figure will be up to £290 million in 1996-97. Those are only estimates, because the figures are based on the presumed take-off. If our concerns are justified and the property market goes into some sort of unexpected pre-election or even post-election upturn—that seems unlikely at present—we are concerned that the figures could soar out of control.

The Government have a strategy to keep public finances under control. They want to cut taxes, but should they suddenly find that their figures are out by a factor of one or two, questions will inevitably be asked about how they managed to let rip the economy and how they lost control over it. The Government have not imposed cash limits or restrictions, other than the approvals that might provide some sort of control.

5 pm

The Government could find a substantial amount of money being used in that way. If that money was being used to achieve the cultural shift that I mentioned and for genuinely wealth-creating small business investment, I would say that it was well forfeited by the Exchequer. But if it was simply being used for schemes based on an upturn in the property market rather than for real wealth creation—schemes that were being promoted as tax shelters and havens—I would not regard that as good use of the money. The Government would be rightly criticised for failing to get a grip on public finance.

We are proposing a constructive and helpful amendment that is entirely in accord with the Government's realisation of what happened under their previous schemes. While I acknowledge that the Minister contends that the proposals are fundamentally different from previous ones, it is clear that they are not—not just to me, but to those who make a living in the City out of such packages. They believe that the Government may have made a mistake. The Government may find that the policy will be abused and the finances will go out of control. They may have to forfeit more tax revenue than they intended for less productive gain.

In those circumstances, I genuinely and sincerely commend the amendment to the House. It is constructive and designed not to undermine the positive and beneficial effect of the Government's proposals, but to ensure that they are targeted where they will be most beneficial—productive investment.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): The clause, and the amendments and schedule associated with it, involve the subject of the financing of small businesses, and all our speeches today will concentrate on that. We should remind ourselves of the importance in the economy of small businesses. There are about 5 million businesses in this country at present, 97 per cent. of which have fewer than 20 employees and 90 per cent. of which have fewer than 10 employees. None of us are in any doubt as to the significance to the economy of small businesses, which are growing in importance, as the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) acknowledged.

The down-sizing of large businesses, the stripping out of layers of management in a relatively ruthless fashion and the out-sourcing of all sorts of competencies that have traditionally been done inside large companies provide opportunities for small businesses and starting up small businesses. I am delighted that my hon. Friends, not only in the Treasury, but at the Department of Trade and Industry, have come up with a large number of schemes.

I do not think that the Opposition have questioned the size of the Government's effort, although they may have criticised the direction. I understand that in the Budget alone, the schemes combined add up to about £1.7 billion over the next three years—a substantial sum. That takes into account, not only the VAT thresholds, but the transitional relief for business rates and the venture capital trust scheme.

I have one concern. The measures fail in one crucial sector: start-ups. A surprisingly small number of the schemes we are discussing help people to start businesses as opposed to helping them to expand them. The balance between providing help to start a business and providing help to expand a business is wrong. More help is needed at that crucial stage.

In my experience of talking to venture capitalists I have found that they are not concerned to consider schemes that require less than £2 million—

Mr. Forman: Half a million.

Mr. Horam: My hon. Friend says that the figure is £500,000. But even if the minimum level of interest is £500,000, the same is still true. Venture capitalists say that it is simply not worth their while to put all their effort into such schemes, when the figures involved are often £50,000, £100,000, £150,000 or maybe £200,000 at maximum.

In *The Times* I read of a dentist who had created a new portable dentist's drill to carry out dentistry at home—God forbid that we should have dentistry at home as well as in the dentist's chair. He was searching for finance and was quoted in *The Times* as saying:

"The attitude in Britain was all wrong. It seemed as if we had to prove we were not defrauding anybody before we could start. Abroad we were welcomed with open arms."

That dentist has taken his business to Austria, where he is receiving £200,000 from the Austrian Government towards research and development prior to launching his new product. We have missed the opportunity—perhaps to our regret.

Although the measures are welcome—I fully concede that they are substantial—they do not tackle that problem. Many of the other schemes that are part of the Treasury's armoury—for example, the loan guarantee scheme—are also not helping. The hon. Member for Gordon mentioned banks and the role of banks within small companies. His comments about how banks approach the issue were correct. But the approach taken by the banks does not help start-ups, and banks are becoming less and less concerned with start-ups.

The welcome new schemes in the Budget do not provide a great deal of help for start-up businesses. In addition, the money that has previously been available for start-ups is not as great as it once was. I learnt with

[Mr. Horam]

consternation that one of the training and enterprise councils has recently had to cut out entirely all the money previously available for supporting enterprise. As a result of the new arrangements brought together in the single regeneration budget of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, all the money is now being spent on training. As a result of the new framework, one TEC will have no money next year to support enterprise schemes.

We need patient money—money that is willing to wait for a return for perhaps four, five or six years. Obviously, it is hoped that the return will be all the greater. In its excellent little pamphlet "Agenda for Enterprise", the Federation of Small Businesses states:

"in order to encourage enterprise we would welcome the provision of secure, stable, long-term finance, with preferential, fixed, low-interest loans for small businesses . . . A Government-funded 'soft loan' scheme should replace the plethora of Government enterprise schemes (Enterprise Allowance Scheme, Loan Guarantee Scheme etc)".

That is what small businesses want.

Mr. Forman: It is precisely because my hon. Friend is right about patient money that it is foolish of the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), who is not currently in his place, to suggest a fundamental review after two years. In many cases, much longer periods will be needed to form an intelligent assessment of the genuine risk capital prospects.

Mr. Horam: I agree. I do not think that we need any reviews. The balance of the schemes is broadly correct, but in the one sector that I have mentioned, more effort needs to be made. The effort required would not involve much money. I have written to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary and also to my noble Friend the Minister for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms at the Department of Trade and Industry with specific proposals on helping start-ups. The suggestions were made to me by a company called Alpha Europe Associates, which has considerable experience of the subject.

I suggested that a small fund with a mixture of Government and private sector money—perhaps not more than £100 million of Government money—topped up with £200 million of private sector money, managed by people with experience of starting up small businesses, would constitute the core of an effort to get quite a lot of small businesses off the ground. We are talking about only £10,000, £50,000 or £100,000; we could start a lot of small businesses with £100 million or £200 million.

I wrote to my right hon. Friend and, as usual, I received a well-written and sympathetic reply. However, he raised three objections to my proposals: first, they would cost money; secondly, they were bureaucratic; and, thirdly, they would distort competition—very traditional arguments from the Treasury.

First, my proposals need not cost a lot of money. We could do a great deal of good with a small amount of money. We could achieve good value for money by putting Government or private sector funds in a proper framework behind small business start ups. If we were slightly less generous with the venture capital trust proposals—which are costing £290 million—and allocated some of that money to a start-up scheme, I think it would prove a wiser use of public funds. My proposal could cost the Treasury nothing but a redistribution of the effort that it has already made.

Secondly, I do not think that my proposals are in the least bureaucratic. The machinery for assisting small business is already in place. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has developed the business link scheme throughout the country. That sort of machinery could be used to provide some small financial help together with the counselling and training already provided under the business link scheme. There would need to be only a small guiding core of people at the centre of Government helping the process along.

Thirdly, any scheme—the Government have a large number—can be construed as distorting competition. Surely one more scheme would not distort competition unduly. I do not take that argument very seriously.

Although I fully support the imaginative, large-scale and generous schemes which my hon. Friend has introduced in the Budget, I think that more attention must be paid to the problem of business start-ups. The competitive economic climate created by the Government in the last few years offers the opportunity to generate many more enterprises and reduce unemployment significantly.

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): I am delighted to be called to speak after the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) because I agree with a number of points in his speech. I wish to address my remarks to the area of business start-ups.

As the Financial Secretary said, it is important to look at the broader context of the purpose behind establishing venture capital trusts. The aim is to provide assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises but, regretfully, I believe that the Government have missed a valuable opportunity by going down this route.

There is a problem with the venture capital industry in this country. The hon. Member for Orpington referred to the reluctance to invest: it is difficult to raise money for projects of £2 million and less, particularly in the area of business start-ups. If the start-ups are high risk or high tech, the difficulties are even greater. The venture capital industry in this country is not adventurous; like our banks, it tends to be risk averse. If we are to promote the growth of small businesses we have to ensure easier access to finance.

I regret that the Government are concentrating on the tax-incentive side of releasing finance under venture capital trusts. I recognise, as does the hon. Gentleman, that we need to establish a fund to assist small businesses. However, I think that the Government must give a signal to the banking community that small business has an important and growing role in our economy. If people have to access finance for small business start-ups through a maze with a carnivorous plant at every corner we will not see the kind of growing, wealth-creating economy which allows everyone to benefit from the enterprise of a few.

The venture capital trusts as proposed by the Government are the son of the business expansion scheme. The Government have learned very little from the chaotic shambles that that scheme became when it was hijacked by those who used it to make a quick buck. We

must also consider the role of advisors. Advisors are often the ones to benefit most from Government schemes, not the businesses which receive money in the first instance.

Many people who start up in business are faced with a plethora of difficulties. The one-stop shop concept has not percolated through the economy to the extent that the Government anticipated and people are bemused by what they are expected to do in order to set up a business.

5.15 pm

As the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) pointed out, new business men and women confront difficulties every time they go to the bank. At the small or medium-sized enterprise level, property provides the collateral which enables people to raise money to start a business. At present, banks are willing to lend only if people are prepared to put everything on the line—not just their house, but preferably their granny also—as security for the loan.

The Government's venture capital trust proposals address only one side of the issue. I am particularly interested in the field of business angels. I see nothing in the Government's venture capital trust proposals that will create a meaningful environment within which they can thrive. I have seen good business angels and I have also seen very bad business angels—those who seize any opportunity to rip off people who are prepared to put their livelihoods and careers on the line in trying to establish a business.

We must harness all available savings into the investment process in order to expand the small to medium-sized enterprise sector of the economy. The business angel comes into his or her own when he or she has a commitment to the business that is being established. A concern that I had about the business expansion scheme—notwithstanding the fact that it was hijacked—that I also have about the Government's proposals for venture capital trusts, is that they build a remoteness into the relationship between the investor and the enterprise.

Businesses require long-term commitment. I agree with the hon. Member for Orpington's point that money is increasingly available to small and medium-sized enterprises in the short term, but at the first hint of trouble—for a start-up, it is usually about 18 months in—the money starts to dry up and people face a tremendous void which can lead to business failure and personal bankruptcy. The Government have not proposed anything to ease that situation.

I would like to see more imaginative thinking in providing finance to small and medium-sized enterprises—not least because, as a Scot, I recognise the difficulties within the Scottish economy. Throughout the 1980s, there was a disproportionately low number of business start-ups in Scotland. I have cited the figures in the Chamber before and I hope that hon. Members will not be bored if I repeat them. They are extremely dramatic. If Scotland had kept pace in job creation terms with the level of business start-up experienced in the south-east throughout the 1980s, we would have created 195,000 extra jobs. Even if we had imported the death rate of businesses throughout the recession, we would still have been ahead by 36,000 jobs.

There is a supplement in today's edition of *The Scotsman* which examines business start-ups. Every survey that has been undertaken by the newspaper and by Scottish Enterprise has found that 70 per cent. of small businesses say that the biggest obstacle they have encountered relates to raising start-up finance and finding the funds that they require after about 18 months. Starting a business is an extremely risky venture. As the hon. Member for Orpington said, many people start up businesses because they have been made redundant from bigger enterprises. They are not used to a small business environment, and it takes them time to adjust. The proposals in the Bill represent a missed opportunity to help create the environment which would allow small and medium-sized enterprises to become established and grow.

I am concerned about the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) about the property exclusions. There is always an attraction for money to go where the easy option is— towards property. That is what happened in various schemes in the past and it is extremely disappointing that the Government have not sought to recognise it and plug that loophole.

Referring to amendment No.15, it is important that we get some empirical evidence of how the schemes operate. Particularly throughout the 1980s, there were numerous schemes aimed at generating finance for small and medium-sized enterprises, but we in Britain have not yet got it right. We are still getting wrong the structures that we create. Too much emphasis has been placed on providing tax incentives for those with money. Perhaps some of those on vastly inflated salaries from newly-privatised utilities will consider putting some of their money into schemes that will help create small businesses. Quite frankly, We have missed the opportunity to do something meaningful for the small business community.

Two years is an inadequate time in which to assess the scheme. Here in the Chamber it may be an interesting debating point, but in two years a man or a woman seeking to set up in business can go from being prosperous and hopeful, with plenty of opportunities, to personal bankruptcy and the need to dig oneself out of a hole that one is in because of the inadequacies of the financial sector in Britain.

I was interested that the Financial Secretary referred to the role of Rothschild. Perhaps he has an inside track into the thoughts of Rothschild through Lord Wakeham who joined the firm yesterday.

He referred to the Association of Investment Trust Companies that initially welcomed the proposals from the venture capital trusts, but has since entered caveats into the operation of the trusts and wishes the Inland Revenue to take a closer look at how the trust companies can operate in the best interests of investors. I should like the Inland Revenue and the Treasury to examine them to make sure that they operate to the long-term benefit of the businesses that, hopefully, will be started.

I share the view of the hon. Member for Orpington; there is a need to take start-ups into account. I greatly regret the fact that the proposals in the Bill represent a massively missed opportunity and I have even more regret that, after more than a decade of looking at how we can fill the equity gap for small businesses, the Government have failed to grasp the nettle and address the problems that the businesses create and, in failing to do so, limit the potential for economic growth in Britain.

Mr. Forman: I shall try to be brief, because many of the most important points have already been made.

It is clear from the speeches of the hon. Members for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) that there is a great deal of common ground on both sides of the Committee, at least on the principle that we want to attract more risk investment into business start-ups and small and medium-sized businesses generally which, in certain circumstances, could have a really dramatic future. One thinks of the drugs sector and some of the high-tech firms that have grown up on science parks and so on.

Even in Britain, with all the criticisms levelled against our systems and our culture, we achieve some significant breakthroughs and that is a good thing. We need more of that, and the answers to be provided to encourage it do not consist simply of tax relief measures, although they play an important role and the idea of venture capital trusts is very helpful.

Clearly the banks have a much more important role to play than hitherto. I agree with the hon. Member for Monklands, East that business angels—an idea very much promoted by the Government—also have an important role to play. We want a country in which they are many more high-net-worth individuals who are prepared to take risks because they are attracted by them, and not necessarily with the benefit of tax relief. That would be the best outcome.

I am rather saddened by the way in which the Labour party—and to some extent the Liberals, too—seem still to be obsessed with a form of voodoo economics whereby, when examining any form of tax relief, they immediately look not so much at the potential benefit of the relief and the result for the supply side of the economy or the jobs, as at who is likely to put their money into it or be induced to do so, and whether it is fair.

All money, so long as it is legally earned, is welcome as investment, whether for business start-ups, small businesses or anything else. Britain needs more investment and more risk taking. We should not be so preoccupied with where the money comes from.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The hon. Gentleman's remark was a little cheap. Is he suggesting that, when the Government amended the business enterprise scheme because of the abuse of property, they were also behaving in a somewhat disgraceful manner?

Mr. Forman: Not at all. I was trying to speak in a friendly and ecumenical spirit, as the hon. Gentleman will learn if he listens on.

The evidence that the Chancellor's idea for venture capital trusts goes back to 1993 demonstrates that the Government have been keen to learn such lessons as have been appropriate from the experience of the business expansion scheme.

It has been said that this is not a business expansion scheme; it is a different approach, but the very fact that it is a different approach suggests that Ministers and officials have learned that there were shortcomings in the BES—that are now widely acknowledged—and they are not repeated in this approach.

Mr. Betts: Is it not true that exactly the same comments were made by Ministers when the business expansion scheme was introduced? They said that there were no problems, there would be no abuses and there was no need for proper monitoring. All the problems came to the fore many years later, and the Government had to take action, so it is not surprising that the Opposition should be suggesting that the scheme should be reviewed in two years to see whether abuses exist as they did with the business expansion scheme.

Mr. Forman: One of the main concerns that emerged from the business expansion scheme was the emphasis on investment in land and stationary property which did not generate development potential or much else in the way of extra activity.

The Opposition seem to have got their knives into property companies, but there are two issues that they have not considered. First, in answer to the hon. Member for Gordon, if someone were dealing only in the buying and selling of land, that would be excluded under the terms of the clause.

Secondly, Opposition Members frequently complain about the need for the Government to do something to boost the construction industry and all the professions related to it. We hear them talk about all the unemployed building workers, but whether a company is engaged in the building of new capital plant or the maintenance of buildings, it is creating jobs in the economy and it will have a real and virtuous effect on the economy, even if the venture capital trusts lead to new companies being created which essentially are involved in property development. I see nothing wrong with that; it creates jobs and economic activity that is recycled into the economy.

The Opposition seem to fail to recognise that riskier ventures—which are, by definition, the ventures that the Government are seeking to promote in the clause—can and do generate higher rewards for some investors prepared to take risks. The higher risk necessarily engenders the higher reward on those occasions when it works out. It seems perfectly proper to spend some £290 million of taxpayers' money on that very good cause.

I am not over-enamoured of tax relief as a general principle. If we were not starting from here, I would prefer a tax system that embodied the minimum tax expenditures and reliefs, lowest possible rates and broadest possible base—but that argument is for another day. As long as we deal in the currency of tax reliefs as a way of encouraging certain forms of activity that are not sufficiently buoyant at present, the scheme represents an effective, targeted and adequately circumscribed approach.

I am surprised that Opposition Members complain that the scheme is full of potential loopholes. It occupies four and a half pages of what is already a long Bill. If hon. Members take the trouble to read them closely, they will find all sorts of caveats and belts and braces, to ensure from the Revenue's point of view that the scheme does not lead to unintended abuse. If it does, we can all be sure that the Revenue will act promptly to close any loopholes in next year's Finance Bill.

I say, not in anger but in sorrow, that, despite all the pretensions of the Opposition parties to be new Liberals, new Labour, new this and new that, a lot of the old thinking was evident in the speeches of Opposition Members. I wish that they would modernise as fast as the small companies being backed by the clause are modernising themselves.

5.30 pm

Mr. Stevenson: This is another Government scheme that has tax perks at its base, and no Conservative Member has challenged that fact. There may be differences at the margin, and from previous, more fundamental schemes, but the proposal is dependent on tax relief for any chance of success. We have been that way before under this Government. However much Conservative Members protest the valid points made from this side of the House, they seem reluctant to address the fundamental issue.

I understand that the tax relief will be backdated to April 1994, presumably because the Chancellor announced the scheme in 1993. The proposal is based on several fragile assumptions. One is that presumably dynamic and go-getting venture capital trusts will be unable to survive unless they enjoy tax relief. That is a dubious proposition. If I were involved in such a trust, I would not be filled with confidence if the Government based their proposals on that assumption.

It is also assumed that the proposed legislation is watertight enough to give the Government some confidence that their proposals will eliminate abuse. Both assumptions raise important questions.

We would not be having this debate were it not for the fact that the financial sector has let down small and medium-sized businesses—if banks and financial institutions had not been racked with such chronic short-termism that they failed that sector. That factor has not been acknowledged in any speeches by Conservative Members.

Mr. Tim Smith: Ludicrous.

Mr. Stevenson: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to challenge my remark, I am willing to give way.

Mr. Smith: I thought that the one point on which there was a consensus in the Committee is that the equity gap in the UK was first recognised by the Bolton committee more than 30 years ago, and that we are trying to find a solution.

Mr. Stevenson: I am not sure that I am grateful for that intervention. I was making precisely the point that one must question the elements that created that equity gap. I argue strongly that the financial sector has played an important role in creating the investment gap from which small and medium-sized businesses in particular are suffering. Therefore, the Government's faith in the financial sector is touching.

Conservative Members said that the cost of the proposal will be £290 million. I accept that my arithmetic may be wrong, but from the Government's own publications it appears that the cost to the Exchequer over a three-year period is likely to be £680 million—and that figure should be on the record. It is dependent on venture capital trusts achieving their objectives over three years. They may or may not do so, and that will have a considerable effect on the cost to the Treasury. The figure will be high at the start, and may prove incorrect. The estimate is probably on the low side, because it ignores tax perks on capital gains and dividends.

Despite propaganda about the way that the financial sector has created investment, the scheme has the hallmarks of another expensive and unfounded experiment. My hon. Friends referred to reports that cast serious doubt on the value of tax breaks, including that produced by Warwick university and quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). Such reports cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. They were produced after careful research and consideration, and reached the conclusion that tax relief-based schemes do not deliver the goods.

Mr. Tim Smith: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that financial institutions have failed to fill the equity gap, and that he does not like tax relief as a way of dealing with the problem? How does he think the problem should be tackled, if not through the tax system?

Mr. Stevenson: I cannot remember saying that tax relief cannot be used in a positive way. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not listening carefully. I repeat that there is no real evidence to suggest that tax relief-based schemes have worked or will work. It does not matter how much Conservative Members try to manoeuvre or manipulate the argument, because there is evidence to justify our concerns.

When I intervened on the Financial Secretary earlier, I compared venture capital trusts with the business enterprise and enterprise investment schemes. He rightly said that one problem with the BES was that it was not spread widely enough, and that the Government are trying to avoid concentration in the new scheme. That may be true, but schemes based on tax relief do not deliver the goods.

The hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) presented a different scenario, but I am sure that he is aware, as we are, that his proposals would be anathema to the Government.

Expensive schemes are being put forward with no empirical evidence to justify them. The Government, with their head down, are sailing as if in the Mary Celeste. At the end of the day, they will be discovered with nothing on board. That is why we are concerned.

The Department of Trade and Industry part-sponsored a report entitled "Understanding the Small Business Sector". When considering the business expansion scheme, which I am prepared to argue is ill-fated, it stated that the objective of the scheme is that small and medium-size enterprises should focus on tax breaks as "tax avoidance vehicles". The terms "tax avoidance" or "tax abuse" can be used in whatever way we wish, but a report that was partly sponsored by the Government creates great doubt about schemes that are based on tax relief. Will the Government ever learn?

I turn to the amendments. It is—

Mr. Forman: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is about to speak to the amendments. Before he does so, will he tell us what approach he would favour? He has not done so yet, although he has told us what he does not favour.

Mr. Stevenson: There is a strong case for the Government to use whatever resources they may have available, but not in the way they propose, which is indirect and possibly extremely expensive. We should be looking to the Government to take direct measures to stimulate investment in an important sector of the economy. There is the distinction between the

[Mr. Stevenson]

Government's approach and the one that I would take. I would agree with some of the elements of the approach that would be adopted by the hon. Member for Orpington.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Stevenson: No. I think that I have given way enough. I would like to bring my remarks to an end.

We, the Opposition, are saying that there are sufficient doubts about the assumptions that the Government have made to justify support for the amendment. Unless the Financial Secretary can give reasonable assurances that the Government's proposals will not result in tax abuse—I think that everyone recognises that there is potential for that—and that the scheme has a reasonable chance of delivering investment in small and medium-sized businesses that has been so lacking and that we all want to see, it seems sensible to say that, in two years' time, we should be looking again at how the scheme has developed and whether there need to be any changes to make it effective.

Mr. Butterfill: I should preface my remarks by reminding the Committee that the Register of Members' Interests shows that I am an adviser to the British Venture Capital Association. I remind the Committee also that the association has warmly welcomed the proposals for venture capital trusts that we are discussing.

I know that the BVCA would be unhappy if VCTs were used in the way suggested by Opposition Members to create tax shelters or property-based schemes. That would not be attractive to its members to whom I have spoken. The BVCA would certainly not be happy if that were the outcome of our deliberations. At the same time, the BVCA recognises that there is an urgent need, as the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) said, to encourage more investment in venture capital and to make finance available to smaller companies. It believes that a scheme of the nature proposed by the Government is a worthwhile way of achieving that.

There is a difficulty that became apparent during the course of the research undertaken by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, of which I am a member. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), who unfortunately is no longer in his place, was a member at the time.

It became clear that there was a funding gap. Many of the large institutions did not feel able to invest directly in very small companies because the costs were, as they saw it, disproportionate. That is why the venture capital industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the United Kingdom, to try to bridge the gap.

In response to the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell), I do not think that it is risk-adverse. It makes mistakes, some of which have been well publicised, but on balance it achieves success. The industry has made a worthwhile contribution to the British economy in recent years.

Some venture capital companies are prepared to make low-level investments. For example, 3i will make investments down to £50,000 in individual companies. Many other companies will go down to £250,000, and sometimes to a lower level if they think that a company has an interesting future. Nevertheless, there is a shortage of available funds. Many other financial institutions are reluctant to help provide funds.

5.45 pm

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South criticised the banks. It should be recognised that, essentially, the banks borrow money short-term. They take our deposits, and they may have to repay them at short notice. For example, the hon. Gentleman may go to his bank tomorrow and take out everything he has in it, and so may other depositors. The banks are required by law to maintain liquidity levels that make it difficult for them to make long-term investments, and especially risky ones. Their role in life is to take in money in the relatively short term and lend it out in the relatively short term. That lending role is their prime function.

Major investment must surely be made by insurance companies, which have long-term commitments and long-term money coming in, and by the pension funds. There are difficulties for both in investing in risky ventures. They obviously have a fiduciary duty, especially in the case of pension funds, to their beneficiaries. They can invest only a limited amount of their portfolio, therefore, in high-risk investments.

There is a problem with the funding that is available for venture capital in the United Kingdom. The BVCA tells me that only a small proportion of the total sum that it has been investing in the past year or so has been provided by UK investors. A much greater proportion of its money has come, curiously enough, from overseas investors, especially American pension funds. In the United States, a recent provision encourages pension funds directly to invest in venture capital, in a way that does not happen here.

We may be taking a slightly different route. In the new legislation that we are proposing to introduce for pensions, we are rightly focusing on the need to maintain minimum solvency ratios to protect pensioners. The changes that we are making will make it even more difficult for pension funds to invest in the provision of equity—even equity for major companies—and still more difficult, because of the valuation and yield rules that we shall be introducing, to invest in venture capital. They may have to accept that no money will come in through dividends for the first couple of years, three years or even four years. They may even have to wait much longer than that.

There is fear in the venture capital industry about the very provisions that I support, as chairman of the all-party group on occupational pensions. I am passionately committed to the idea of adequate solvency for pension funds, but that in itself may in future make the provision of money for venture capital much more problematical. It is important, therefore, that we try to stimulate other forms of raising money. The provision of tax incentives is an important way to encourage that.

First, we must encourage the provision of money. Secondly, we must encourage our brightest and ablest managers, who may at present be in major companies, and perhaps in receipt of high salaries with a comfortable and secure existence, perhaps even with comfortable share option schemes, to abandon all that and start new enterprises, using their skills to create new wealth for the economy. To tempt those people out, to tempt the capital

out, we must provide an incentive. I believe that the incentives that we are providing through the trusts are important in that process.

Opposition Members criticised the fact that we propose rollover relief from capital gains for money invested in that type of activity. I would remind them, as I said earlier, that there is no need at the moment for people to pay CGT unless they particularly want to realise the investment in which their money is located. That location may be secure and unexciting, but as long as they keep it there indefinitely, they will not crystallise their CGT liability.

In my view, it is the minimum requirement if one says to them, "You will not crystallise your capital gain if you put your investment into a venture capital trust," because those people would be penalised if they moved their money from an existing investment into a VCT. Surely that is not what we want to encourage. I would go further and give them exemption from their existing CGT—if that were possible—because then we really would encourage people to move their money into something more dynamic and exciting.

Similarly, I believe that the other tax breaks that are incorporated into the proposals are important in motivating people to undertake what are really quite risky activities. The structure of the trust, too, is important, because in contrast to enterprise investment schemes, where one is investing in a single-company operation, we are encouraging a broader spread of risk. Although all the components of a VCT may be high-risk activities, by spreading the risk over a number of different activities, we minimise to some extent the problems that can arise from total failure of a single company. I applaud that.

The Labour party suggests that there should be a statutory requirement to review this in two years. Other hon. Members have pointed out that that is a short time horizon in which to assess the success of a new enterprise. As hon. Members who are involved in the venture capital industry will know, most companies are really only just getting off the ground at that stage.

In contrast to what the hon. Member for Monklands, East said, it certainly is not true that companies invest for the long term. 3i, for example, still has almost all the original investments that it made. It is not in there for a quick buck, and that applies to most of the other members of the British Venture Capital Association.

Mrs. Liddell: I can appreciate that the hon. Gentleman referred to 3i, but in doing so he emphasises one of the points that I sought to make: large venture capital organisations such as 3i will not go for the small to medium-sized enterprise that needs a small sum of money. The small to medium-sized enterprise is much more vulnerable to short-termism than the larger enterprise.

Mr. Butterfill: I am sorry that the hon. Lady was not in her place when I referred to her speech. She is quite wrong. 3i invests down to a level of £50,000 in individual companies, so it is the worst example that she could give. It goes down to a low level: it is precisely for that reason that I mentioned it. I am sorry that she did not hear my earlier remarks.

Mrs. Liddell: I referred to 3i with some feeling, because, in my previous occupation, which was interrupted by the parliamentary by-election that brought me to this place, one of my jobs was to try to get money from venture capital companies such as 3i, for start-ups that would have a turnover, within one to one and a half years, of £1 million to £1.5 million. Believe me, if I could have got money out of 3i, I would have been a much happier lady than I was when I entered the House.

Mr. Butterfill: I accept that the hon. Lady may find that not every proposal put before 3i or any of the other venture capital organisations is likely to find favour. It is always difficult. One must convince whomever one wants to invest in one's company that it will be a good investment, so I accept that many propositions are turned down.

But an awful lot are accepted, and if the hon. Lady reads 3i's annual report, or those of CinVen, Electra, Candover—or any of the other venture capital organisations—she will see the huge volume of companies that have been assisted. The point that I am making is that what we propose tonight will make that process much easier.

Let us return to the amendment. I do not think that a review in two years is an appropriate time horizon. Nor do I think that it is necessary, for reasons that I shall come to in a moment. I do not think that the proposals suggested by the hon. Member for Gordon are appropriate either, because there is no doubt—I have been advised quite specifically by venture capital organisations—that genuine business activities fell foul of the 50 per cent. rule and were precluded from obtaining funding on that basis. It is certainly no business of any of us tonight to wish to preclude genuine businesses from that support, simply on the basis of an arbitrary rule.

I accept that there is a genuine fear that VCTs might conceivably be used for some form of abuse of the tax system. They might conceivably be used for the same sort of abuse that we saw with the BES. I would be the last to wish that to happen, and the whole of the venture capital industry would be against it.

We have to look at a different climate today. In the 1980s, when BES schemes were popular, property prices, it seemed, were rising for ever, by huge margins every year. Property was the fashionable thing to be in. It was secure. One could not lose one's money. In fact, the longer one held it, the more it would be worth.

I do not think that anybody would pretend that we have the same scenario today. Property values have fallen substantially, whether it is residential property or major commercial property investments. Indeed, the developers of Canary Wharf, people in the City of London and throughout the nation lost huge amounts of money. I do not think that the risk of repeating the BES is very likely, given the present climate for property.

It is conceivable that, if we had a major revival of the property industry, some people might forget the chastening experience that they have had over the past three or four years and seek to go back into it again, but a provision in schedule 14 (12) of the Bill can deal with that. It provides that the Government can make regulations if it seems that they may be necessary as things arise in the future. I ask the Minister to give an undertaking that, if in future it appears that there is some abuse of the kind feared by Opposition Members, he will not hesitate to use those powers to put it right.

I go further. Between now and Report, when we shall have an opportunity to consider the clause again, although we shall have an opportunity to consider the principle of

[Mr. Butterfill]

it when we consider clause 60 of the Bill upstairs in Committee—I hope that I will be able to participate—if it becomes clear to the Treasury that all sorts of schemes are gathering place which are primarily asset-based schemes designed for tax avoidance, I hope that my hon. Friend will say that he will look again to see whether something more severe might be required. However, if it becomes necessary, I urge him not to consider the 50 per cent. rule, which caused so many problems in the past.

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, West): I begin by making some wider comments on finance for small businesses and drawing the attention of the Financial Secretary to the second report of the Bank of England on finance for small firms, which was issued recently. I do not know whether he has had an opportunity to read it. The Bank of England always talks in very coded terms about anything that it produces that might be mildly critical. Nevertheless, it has some interesting comments to make on finance for small firms.

In particular, it talks about relationships between small businesses and the banking community—the high street banks. It says:

"There is still considerable room to improve further both relationships and the level of service provided."

That is the strong feeling that I receive from businesses in Dudley, West. They still feel that high street banks offer little alternative. They still find that the banks are extremely risk averse and are not considering cash flow, despite instructions in many cases from head office to do so when deciding on bankable propositions. The banks still very much consider security.

6 pm

One reason for that is the performance management targets set by some of the banking industries. I do not know what might be done about that. Setting performance targets to reduce the number of company failures, and so on, creates significant problems. It also creates problems at Government level, particularly when attempts are made to encourage small businesses to be more open and share financial information with banks.

If banks know that a business is in trouble, they will immediately want to pull the plug on it, because they understand that the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise, as preferential creditors, are competing with each other to put banks into receivership because of their own performance targets.

Mr. Forman: In order to bring the hon. Gentleman's point up to date and to give a full picture, does he also agree that, in a recent speech, Pen Kent, the executive director of the Bank of England, to the parliamentary group for engineering development at the House of Commons, of which the hon. Gentleman probably has a copy, said that there is a continued shift away from overdrafts towards term loans in terms of banking support for small and medium sized businesses?

He went on:

"When we first got involved in this subject, overdrafts were typically around 60 per cent. of all bank lending to small and medium sized enterprises. Now over 60 per cent. is in the form of term loans."

Is not that a message of some reassurance to the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Pearson: Yes, it certainly is a message of reassurance. I welcome the growing awareness of the small business community of some of the deficiencies of bank overdrafts and some of the benefits of other financial mechanisms that are open to them—not just term loans, but debt factoring and invoice discounting.

One reason for the great movement away from overdrafts is that many small businesses have seen them as a bad bet, and invoice discounting and debt factoring have provided far more attractive deals. The progress of term loans is welcome, but they are still very much granted on the basis of security rather than the cash flow position of a business.

It is also interesting that the report on finance for small firms comments on business angels and the dangers of the fragmented approach to business angels that currently exist throughout the country. That fragmented approach is equally apparent across a range of financial mechanisms that are available to small firms in Britain. We simply do not have an adequate and coherent package of small business support measures.

As an economist and a previous employee of an economic development and venture capital company, I believe that the case for venture capital trusts rests principally on market failure. Companies that wish to grow are unable to gain access to appropriate forms of finance at acceptable rates. That is a clear example of market failure.

However, venture capital trusts do not address the principal problem of small businesses that wish to grow and require finance—the need for long-term patient capital. I fully endorse the comments made by the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) on that.

The venture capital trust legislation is complicated. I am slightly disappointed to see that it defines what is not allowed, leaving a number of grey areas, rather than positively defining what is allowed. As a result, the Opposition are concerned that it gives a licence to fertile City imaginations to devise tax avoidance schemes for the very rich which will do nothing to support growing businesses. I hope that that is not the case, and that the Chancellor will use what power he has to ensure that that is not the case.

The 70 per cent. rule on qualifying holdings in a company does not strike an adequate balance. I would be interested to hear from the Financial Secretary what restrictions, if any, are placed on the remaining 30 per cent. of the funds available to venture capital trusts. As I understand it, there is nothing in the legislation to prevent that money being invested in Pacific rim countries and other stock markets. I do not see why tax incentives should be provided to British taxpayers to allow a proportion of a venture capital trust's funds to be invested in the stock markets of other countries.

The three-year rule in reaching the 70 per cent. criterion creates the danger that money can be invested either in blue chip British companies or in ventures all over the world for a minimum of two years and that then there will be a final rush to meet the three-year criterion for investing in small unquoted businesses. I should like some assurance that that will not be allowed to happen.

The level of 70 per cent. for investing in small and medium sized companies is wrong. Venture capital trusts are likely to be set up with sufficient critical mass in terms of funding, so a level of 80 per cent. overall would be more appropriate.

I appreciate the need for flexibility when buying and selling companies, but with venture capital trusts of £50 million or £100 million that restriction does not apply. The tax incentives that are available mean that, although the shares in the venture capital trust will be tradeable, I would not expect that tradeability to be so significant as to mean that an 80 per cent. criterion would be acceptable.

With regard to the 50 per cent. limit on eligible shares, I appreciate the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) that that might influence deal structures and be insufficiently flexible. However, I assume that most venture capital trusts will probably invest pari passu with other institutions, which will provide other forms of finance, whether it be mezzanine finance, term loans or a range of other financial packages.

That brings me to a point that I want to discuss later in terms of eligibility. Schedule 14 sets out requirements with regard to a company's business and what is a qualifying trade. We have had a useful debate on property. There is a consensus on both sides of the House that no one wants to see VCTs used as primarily asset-backed property schemes.

I fully accept the arguments, and I know of a number of companies requiring development capital whose major assets would be their land and buildings. Therefore, I understand the reasoning behind what the Government are seeking to do. Nevertheless, I see no reason why what is regarded as an investee company should not be defined by its principal business activity, and primarily property-based companies excluded.

I welcome the provision for royalties and licence fees for research and development: I know of a number of organisations that hope to amass funds to invest in new technological inventions and early pre-market trading. I hope, however, that venture capital trusts will also be able to take equity stakes in some of those companies when they reach the trading stage.

The Bill imposes a maximum for qualifying investments in a relevant company. My experience in the venture capital industry suggests that a limit of £1 million in any one company in any one year is too high. There is currently strong competition among venture capitalists for any reasonable proposition requiring development capital of £500,000 or more, as the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) pointed out. Given that strong competition and the fact that the money is clearly available—there has been no instance of market failure—I see no compelling reason why tax incentives should be made available for investments above £500,000.

In view of the present structure of VCTs, I anticipate a desire to invest in million-pound projects, which may be part of wider deals. That is not the real purpose of VCTs, which I support: the provision of development finance for those who cannot secure it by any normal means.

I also feel that the gross asset level of £10 million is far too high. The chief executive of the 3i group suggested that it might be worth considering £2 million, and in view of that, £5 million or so strikes me as much more appropriate. I suspect that the scheme will gravitate towards the financing of more robust businesses that could be funded conventionally—that VCTs will piggy-back on top of larger deals.

There is also a strong indication that VCTs will be used to fund management buy-outs and buy-ins. I have no objection in principle to companies' changing their ownership and management structures in that way, but I feel that such a churning of assets is not the primary purpose of the Bill, which is intended to support businesses that will grow, employ more people and deal with some of the country's unemployment problems.

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Gentleman really think that VCTs will be used extensively to fund management buy-outs? It is fairly simple to finance them in existing circumstances. Complex rules will govern the use of VCTs; will not many of those planning management buy-outs decide that, given the complications, their use is not worth the hassle?

Mr. Pearson: Not at all. I believe that those who will run VCTs are exactly the people who are likely to provide institutional finance for management buy-outs. I think that they will say, "We will provide you with a £6 million package for your management buy-out, because the company can meet the £10 million criterion. VCT money will provide £1 million, and ordinary institutional venture capital will provide £5 million." I ask the Financial Secretary to impose an embargo on VCT funding of management buy-outs.

6.15 pm

I understand that the financial intermediaries and claims office of the Inland Revenue will be responsible for supervising it; the task would be greatly assisted, and financial probity assured, if regulations were introduced providing for an annual independent valuation of each VCT's unquoted portfolio.

The purpose of VCTs is laudable, but some of the detail is fundamentally flawed. As a result, the money that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree is necessary to support businesses is unlikely to be forthcoming. I expect the risk-reward ratio to prove unfavourably balanced in favour of reward in the long term. I think that VCTs will be used to fund management buy-outs at too high a level, providing deals involving £1 million VCT money as part of a syndicated deal with loan-funding institutions.

VCTs are only part of a piecemeal response to small business finance. A more coherent approach is required, and I welcome the comments in the Bank of England's second report about the need for a White Paper on the subject.

Mr. Tim Smith: The hon. Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) has considerable experience of the market, and he is entitled to ask whether the proposed tax relief is directed specifically towards what we all consider to be the area of market failure. That, I think, is the starting point for the debate: the area of market failure is the equity gap.

Although the equity gap has been identified by countless reports over the years, we have not yet found a satisfactory solution to it. Whether it makes sense to address it by means of the tax system is an interesting question. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), I am not always

[Mr. Tim Smith:]

enthusiastic about creating new tax breaks: on the whole I prefer a broad tax base and low tax rates. First, one man's tax break is another man's tax bill; secondly, there is no doubt that tax breaks affect economic behaviour, and may distort it. They may not achieve what Parliament hopes to achieve.

The fact is, however, that we have been living with the equity gap for many years. I consider that we are justified in introducing this new relief, as long as it is focused as the Committee wishes it to be. It should be focused on smaller investments. There is, I think, a consensus in the Committee that venture capitalists are normally able to provide amounts of £500,000 or more, and that therefore the level should generally be below that.

Why does it matter? It matters because, as some growing small businesses are unable to obtain the equity finance that they deserve, they must go to the bank—but the cost of bank finance makes it unsuitable for a rapidly growing business, and in certain circumstances may cripple it. It makes much more sense for at least the fixed as opposed to the working capital of a business to be financed by equity, although long-term bank debt is certainly a possibility. That is what the new relief is all about.

Obviously, one has to try to find a satisfactory balance that will provide a sufficiently attractive tax incentive to bring in investment that would not otherwise accrue. At the same time we must try to ensure that the scheme is not so attractive that all sorts of tax avoidance experts abuse it. In practice, it is difficult to strike such a balance.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) that in such circumstances it makes sense for the Government to provide in the schedule a provision to allow the Treasury to change by regulation the definition of a qualifying investment. That means that if there is evidence of the kind of abuse that some Opposition Members obviously fear, it can be dealt with quite quickly. The Revenue is quite capable of dealing speedily with such abuses. It can issue a press release which states that the law will change from the date of that release and, under the schedule, it can table regulations quite soon thereafter to put the matter beyond doubt.

That is important because we must avoid the marketing of venture capital trusts principally for tax reasons. Far too many people went into business expansion schemes for the wrong reasons and many of them got their fingers burned. They may have received tax relief, but that is not much use to people who lose all their money. Many of the schemes were not viable and lost a great deal of money. That is unsatisfactory for taxpayers and the Treasury, and it is certainly unsatisfactory for the economy because we are debating means to grow businesses. We are not debating any old small business but growth businesses. We are trying to identify businesses with real growth potential which can be encouraged by venture capital to grow and create jobs quite quickly.

Venture capitalists say that there are three requirements for a satisfactory investment. First, one obviously needs money. Secondly, satisfactory management is required and, thirdly, there must be a sensible business proposition. In practice, it is often difficult to find satisfactory management. Some business propositions are clearly much more attractive than others and, in practice, shortage of capital is not normally a problem. At the moment capital comes from the United States rather than from the United Kingdom because UK institutions feel that they have enough invested in venture capital.

Generally, there is no shortage of capital, but particularly there is a shortage of amounts of £500,000 and below, and that is the area on which the new scheme needs to be focused. It should be made clear that that is the scheme's object.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): My hon. Friend says that there is no shortage of venture capital, but surely there is a shortage of venture capital provided by private individuals. There has been far too much investment by institutions in high-risk areas and the individual who may also bring management skills to a company has not been given the opportunity to invest. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need an increase in the proportion of such venture capital rather than to have just institutional investment?

Mr. Smith: I entirely agree. People talk about capital gains tax, which has a very narrow base. My hon. Friend will know that many institutions pay no capital gains tax. It was quite possible to have a venture-capital backed company in which the only investor paying capital gains tax was the person who worked in it and managed it. Because all the other investors were tax exempt institutions they did not pay capital gains tax. That is indefensible, and it shows how unsatisfactory is the present capital gains tax regime. I agree with my hon. Friend that for people who take a considerable risk it is right that after a period of five years, during which they will have their money locked up, they should be able to take advantage of capital gains tax relief. That is an important aspect of the issue.

Another aspect which has perhaps not been sufficiently emphasised has been compared with the business expansion scheme. It is that under the business expansion scheme tax relief on the up-front investment was 40 per cent. The maximum relief in this instance will be 20 per cent. and that significant difference means that only half of the investment will be tax-deductible. That considerably changes the balance about which I spoke.

Mr. David Shaw: It has gone too far.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend thinks that it may have gone too far, but it changes the balance of advantage between the two aspects which I described. We need an attractive arrangement to bring in investors. My hon. Friend may feel that offering only 20 per cent. may make it difficult to persuade individuals to come in. However, offering 40 per cent. under the BES created the difficulty that people were able to say to prospective investors, "Look, you can simply eliminate your entire tax liability in relation to the amount which you invest in this company."

Relief of 20 per cent. is the right level at which to start and if it is found that it is insufficient to attract people we could have a look at increasing it. The fundamental difference between the two schemes will change the balance considerably.

The Liberal Democrat amendment seeks to eliminate property development. If I have understood it correctly—and the legislation is complex—property investment and

property dealing are already excluded. Therefore, it is property development that the amendment seeks to exclude. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) suggested that property development did not create any new economic wealth. It seems to me that if somebody builds a factory or a warehouse he adds to the total of the nation's assets. There is often considerable risk involved in that. The property may be pre-let but it will often be speculative. A large warehouse may be built and only afterwards will an effort be made to let it.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Perhaps I could clarify the matter. I did not say that property development per se was incapable of creating wealth but that the simple appreciation of property value was a paper transaction that did not create wealth. The Government introduced restrictions last time because it was non-productive.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West dealt satisfactorily with that point. Over the past few years the property market has been transformed, to the point where the idea that one can make a fast buck out of property has gone. I cannot believe that the hon. Gentleman is seriously advising his friends to invest in property. Perhaps he knows something that we do not, but I cannot see that.

The Government have inflation so effectively under control that we are in a new environment, but it is difficult to persuade people of that. For over 30 years we have had a culture of inflation and people are finding it difficult to become accustomed to the new environment. I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Gordon made that point earlier. People will not make money simply out of the appreciation of property or any other asset over the next few years. That is not a threat. However, if the hon. Gentleman turns out to be right there is provision in the Bill to deal with that at the moment at which the Treasury feels that action is appropriate.

The difficulty with the hon. Gentleman's proposition, which I think he said he had taken from the business expansion scheme, is that it precludes some genuine business propositions and commercial arrangements from being eligible under the scheme. It is again a question of balance but we should not accept the Liberal Democrat amendment and allow such schemes to be advanced.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) tried to encourage us to impose a time limit of two years. That is not necessary because it is open to us to reconsider the matter. We consider these matters when we are debating the Finance Bill each year. It will be some time before a venture capital trust is launched. There will have to be a stock market flotation to raise the capital and it will be some time before the cash can be invested because nobody will rush into that: the money will be invested only when satisfactory investments come along.

The period of two years in the amendment is totally unrealistic because the average time will be considerably less than that. Imposing a two-year limit would be premature. We need more time to review matters as they develop. If there is abuse in the meantime the provisions in the Bill will deal with it.

Mr. Betts: A consensus exists among hon. Members on both sides of the Committee that the short-termism of the financial markets and the so-called equity gap are a problem. There has not been much dissent from the fact that that issue must be dealt with, as we need to get more investment into our industry.

I was interested in the comments of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) on the pensions industry. I agree that that is one of the industries that should be looking long term. People have their investments in their pensions and that involves a long period. We should accept that the short-term requirement of investment managers in that industry—to show how high up the performance league table they can come each year—causes concern, and militates against the long-term approach that should be taken.

6.30 pm

Some of the Bill's requirements are being considered in another place. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that they are a cause for concern in relation to the investment side of the pensions equation. I hope that, at some stage, consideration will be given to the potential effects of the legislation. The issue may have been lost in the concerns that people rightly have about people receiving a proper pension when they retire.

All the issues are being considered separately. It is generally accepted that a problem exists in relation to the equity gap, short-termism and the lack of investment, especially in small companies, and it is recognised that small companies will be the vehicle for growth and jobs—a growth in employment is likely to come from that sector—but where is the overall strategy to which the various mechanisms, ideas and suggestions may relate? That worries me. Where is the Government's overall approach, which identifies, deals with and proposes a range of measures that can be taken to deal with this real and pressing problem in the next few years?

Earlier, in response to the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) drew attention to the fact that the proposal contains no specific assistance to companies that are just starting up. That omission should be dealt with. It would presumably be dealt with if the Government had an overall strategy that identifies the range of issues that need to be solved, and that produces a range of mechanisms and solutions to the problems. Many issues, such as that of start-ups, do not get a look in and are not properly dealt with because the Government approach the matter by producing one single mechanism and claim that it will address the equity gap problem.

Tax relief has been mentioned by a number of hon. Members. I do not think that Opposition Members are objecting to the principle of tax reliefs. However, it is our duty, as the Opposition, to raise the question of whether tax reliefs are effective. I agree to a great extent with some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), but we must be careful, when dealing with tax reliefs, that we do not introduce to the market distortions whose impact we cannot predict.

In the Committee that considered the Finance Bill last year, the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury said that a good case had to be made for tax reliefs to be introduced, and that one had to be clear about what their impact would be. All too often, it is believed that tax reliefs can be introduced and that no real cost is involved.

If, however, the Government pay money in the form of grants or subsidies, they must be much more careful because such public expenditure is taxpayers' money.

[Mr. Betts]

Effectively, tax reliefs are exactly that. They use the public's money. As the hon. Member for Beaconsfield said, tax reliefs are someone else's tax increase or someone else's service cut, if the Government choose not to raise extra tax to fund the relief that they are introducing. We must be careful to ensure that we know what impact tax reliefs will have.

The Opposition's concern is that the scheme before us may generate a lot of activity. The Government are forecasting the tax relief level that they will take into account in their public expenditure accounts. The Opposition ask how one can be sure that that tax relief will achieve for the British people a benefit that makes the tax relief worth while. We have a right to ask that question and to receive a detailed answer to it.

How can we be sure that the schemes that are introduced will not generate an increase in the productive capacity of the economy and an increase in jobs? The schemes might lead simply to property development that is aimed, not at producing more manufacturing capacity, but at taking advantage of the tax relief. How can we be sure that, if the schemes improve and increase our manufacturing base, that would not have happened without the tax relief?

My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) made the point that venture capital is available for some schemes at present, so we cannot be sure that venture capital that would have gone into schemes before the change will not simply go into the same schemes, but with the benefit of tax relief. Those questions must be dealt with. The Government must convince us if we are to acknowledge that the scheme is worth while.

On VCTs, the *Financial Times* said:

"The chancellor had barely sat down after last months's Budget before Rothschild Asset Management said it would set up a venture capital trust".

Two articles in the *Financial Times* used the words:

"The chancellor had barely sat down".

If Rothschild Asset Management said that it would set up a venture capital trust when the Chancellor had "barely sat down", either it knew something about the nature of the scheme before the Chancellor's Budget speech—I would not like to imply that that was the case—or the scheme was such an obvious benefit in terms of tax relief and an easy make that the company got in before it considered the nature of investments. That is our worry. Such companies are not sitting down and examining the nature of the investment and whether it is a good risk, because they know that there is easy money to be made.

We become a bit more worried when, within a matter of weeks, an organisation that apparently believes that it is going to do very well out of the Government's scheme appoints a senior member of the governing party to its board. Somehow, that does not fit comfortably and easily with the Government's comment that the proposal is all about real jobs for real people in manufacturing. It is certainly about one job for one high-profile member of the Conservative party in an asset management company. It caused concern that that organisation believed so quickly that benefits existed.

Mr. Forman: On real jobs and the equation always with manufacturing, does the hon. Gentleman realise that only 20 per cent. of all people employed are employed in the manufacturing sector? The difference is that they are producing a great deal more per man and per woman.

Mr. Betts: I accept that not all jobs are in the manufacturing sector and that many real jobs are in the service sector. I was questioning whether it was a real job when an ex-Minister was involved in activities in the House for the benefit of a certain organisation, and then got a job with that organisation. The term "real job" should not be applied to such a job.

Our concerns are reinforced by the fiasco of the business expansion scheme. We would be a lot more reassured if the Government, who introduced that much-derided scheme, had recognised the problems quickly and had done something about them quickly. Everyone else saw the problems with the BES. Everyone else could see that the money was going into property development. The Government, however, sat there for year after year, and Finance Bill debate after Finance Bill debate, and refused to act.

Therefore, we are naturally concerned when the same Government claim that their proposed new scheme will not be the same as the BES. They say that we will not have the same problems and that, if problems arise, they will act on them. What confidence can the Opposition have that the Government will be as good as their word, when we know from past experience about their reaction when property development was the name of the game, when the scheme was abused, and when no real risk existed because the scheme included guaranteed exits?

I accept that that particular loophole will be closed under the proposals, but property development is still a cause for concern. The property market may not be in a healthy state at the moment. It is interesting to hear Conservative Members talk about the impact of Government policies on that market but, unfortunately, it is not only they and some of their colleagues on the investment side but individual home owners who have suffered. Nevertheless, there is the possibility of a return to better days and the potential for the scheme to be abused.

The Government say that we should not worry because, as is too often the case, schedule 14(12) states:

"The Treasury may by order amend this Schedule for any or all of the following purposes"—

that is, the businesses and trades that qualify for the purposes of venture capital trusts. Conservative Members may draw comfort from the fact that the Treasury can change the rules to deal with any anomalies or abuses but we worry that the Treasury, run by the Conservatives, might change the rules to benefit even further their friends who might be seeking tax relief and a quick buck through such a scheme. If the scheme can be altered one way—loopholes can be tightened—it can equally be altered in the opposite way without reference to the House. Pure speculation in land assets could be allowed through modification by the Treasury without reference to, or the approval of, hon. Members.

I also seek reassurance from the Financial Secretary on a matter that is not made clear in the Bill. Although there are limits on the amount that can be invested in one particular company by a venture capital trust, and although there is a limit to the assets of a company that can be owned by a venture capital trust—a limit of 15 per cent., as I understand it—is there anything to prevent two

venture capital trusts, owned by the same organisation, acting in concert and between them owning 30 per cent. of a particular company' assets? Or can an organisation establish more than one venture capital trust and, in so doing, breach the rules set out in the Bill for one VCT? If there is no such restriction, it means that there is a loophole and someone will walk through it before too long. I would appreciate the Financial Secretary's comments.

We are suggesting a two-year limit not because we believe that the scheme will not work but because previous Government action in this sphere leads us to be cautious. We want to be assured that there will be a proper monitoring arrangement and that Ministers will not walk away and pretend that everything will be fine once the legislation is passed; they must ensure that we get proper reports and that the Government are held to account for the expenditure of public money. That is absolutely right and proper.

The Financial Secretary has already forecast the amount of tax relief that he believes will be given under the scheme. We have a right to be concerned and ask who will benefit. Surely some assessment has been made of the income levels of those who will benefit. I do not say that because we are against people on high incomes and for those on low incomes. We are rightly concerned to ensure that when tax relief is offered and when potential benefits are available, it is not only one section of the community that receives them. Will such benefits be available for smaller investors? What is the Government's view at this stage of who will receive tax relief from VCTs when they are established? The Government have a duty to give us some idea of the work that they have done. What are their plans?

The Government have listed the industries and trades that will not qualify for investment under the scheme but where do they anticipate that the money will be invested? What part of our economy's capacity will be enhanced? How many and what sort of jobs will be created? Ministers will probably shrug and say that they do not have such information, but why not? It should be available if public money is being spent. If the Government were putting forward a scheme for grants, they would be able to explain the expenditure involved and the number of jobs to be created.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman must appreciate the fact that we do not know how much money is being spent until we know how much money is forthcoming. The two things are interrelated, so how can the Government possibly know?

Mr. Betts: The Government are proposing to spend public money on a large scale. They would be highly critical of us were we to propose such expenditure without being able to explain how it was to be spent and what the consequences were going to be. We are asking for strict monitoring of the scheme, and the two-year period is included in the amendment to establish a definite limit on the time within which information must be made available, not so that the scheme can be stopped but so that it can be reviewed to ascertain how effectively it is working. I hope that the Financial Secretary will take our suggestion seriously.

We are not saying that we want to stop the scheme but we have suspicions and concerns. Let the Government reassure us that they have planned how the scheme will work and that there are to be proper reports and monitoring so that it can be amended in the event that it does not work as the Government claim that it will.

6.45 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): It is common ground among the parties that there is a need for investment in small firms. The question is whether the venture capital trust is the best way to achieve it.

In its second report on finance for small firms, the Bank of England referred to the fact that bank finance available to small firms fell 5.1 per cent. to £37.2 billion between December 1993 and June 1994. As has already been said, the equity gap is a failure of the free market and VCTs are an attempt by the Government to intervene in the market to deal with that failure. It is interesting that the way in which the Government choose to intervene is by creating circumstances in which the well-off will pay less tax. That is certainly how the media have identified the prime appeal of the VCT—a big tax avoidance scheme. It is legal, but is it in the public interest?

On 15 January, the *Observer* ran a story with the headline "Taxfree Trusts for the Adventurous Investor". Most of the article was about the advantages available to the person who became involved with a VCT. In December 1994, the magazine *Small Company Investor* asked:

"Will you need to pay capital gains tax again?"

"Maybe not" was the answer. Media focus appears to be on the tax benefits, but the issue of the equity gap remains. The venture capital trust is at least an attempt by the Government to deal with it.

We need to help small businesses and to get the capital to them to create jobs and prosperity. In its report, the Bank of England raised the issue of how to do that. Those involved often find that it is not viable for venture capitalists to invest relatively small sums of equity. Typical professional venture capital investments are certainly in excess of £250,000 and early-stage and start-up finance, for example, accounted for only £69 million, or 6 per cent. of the total invested by British Venture Capital Association members in 1993. Clearly, therefore, we need a way to channel investment.

In its first report on financing small businesses, the Bank of England dealt with the role of the so-called "business angels", venture capital providers who link up with particular enterprises, often contributing their expertise and adopting a hands-on approach. However, the problem identified by the Bank of England is that, although banks such as NatWest have launched two pilots for national business angel networks, the majority of existing business introduction services remain fragmented and unco-ordinated. There are numerous business introduction magazines and, of course, the training and enterprise councils in different parts of the country provide services that are often useful. But we need a comprehensive business angel network to reduce costs and to simplify the process of making deals.

That leads me to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts). The Government need to have a more comprehensive approach to the problem of small businesses, ensuring that the equity gap is bridged by not only looking at one solution to the problem but addressing issues such as the need for a business angel network. At the moment, the

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Government have not shown that they are adopting a much broader approach. In his winding-up speech, will the Financial Secretary say what the Government are proposing to do about the business angel network?

There is clearly a need for investment and the question is whether venture capital trusts are the way in which to encourage it. I accept that it is right in certain cases to give tax breaks to encourage investment, but it is important that it is done with caution to ensure that the Exchequer uses those subsidies to best effect because, as Conservative Members have said, one person's tax concession is another person's tax increase. The business expansion scheme has raised questions about the use of tax breaks and the Government should therefore be prepared to answer openly and clearly questions about the way in which this new venture of theirs will deal with the concerns raised.

How much will the VCT scheme really cost? The Government estimate that it will cost £150 million in 1995-96, £290 million in 1996-97 and £240 million in 1997-98—a total cost of about £680 million. Does that include relief on capital gains tax and income tax relief? If the figures do not include those two, what is the overall figure? What is the actual loss to the Exchequer?

When the Government lost the vote on VAT on fuel, the Chancellor was most definite in the argument that, even if relatively small sums of tax were involved, it was essential that the Government should be able to account for them and say how that money was to be raised—hence the 4 per cent. increase in beer prices and the various other tax increases.

I have always taken the view, as I know the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee has, that the loss from not imposing the VAT increase was probably within the margin of error of any Budget. After all, last year, the Chancellor must have had at least a margin of error of £4 billion because of the way in which the public sector borrowing requirement panned out. Given that the loss of revenue due to the VAT vote was much less, the Chancellor was well within the margin of error and need not have increased those taxes on beer and so on.

If the Chancellor felt that it was essential to come up with clear figures for the loss of revenue from extra VAT on fuel, surely he must provide clear figures of exactly how much money is being conceded in the VCT tax relief. Will the Financial Secretary also tell us what analysis the Government have done on the defects in the business expansion scheme? How can the faults that arose at various stages in that scheme, which required some remedy, be avoided in the VCT scheme? How will the Government ensure that?

Are such high tax concessions really necessary to get the venture capital trusts going? They are very large concessions and the Financial Secretary has not properly justified the size of them. Would not venture capital trusts be workable without such large tax concessions? That is a legitimate question that Labour Members should ask.

What calculations has the Treasury done on the possible diversion of capital that is currently invested in small businesses? If a person who is considering investing in a small business goes to his financial adviser to find out the best way in which to invest and says that he is thinking of becoming a business angel and getting involved in direct investment, what risk is there that the financial adviser will tell him that, from a tax point of view, it is best to get involved in venture capital trusts and to try to get the tax concessions available?

The business would presumably have to apply to the venture capital trust scheme to get the investment that it needed and, obviously, judgments would have to be made by the venture capital trust investors. They may decide to invest in less risky businesses than the business in which the potential business angel was thinking of investing. Therefore, will the Financial Secretary state the Treasury's calculation of the potential diversion of investment? Again, that is a legitimate question that needs to be answered.

Will the Financial Secretary set out exactly which trades will qualify? The Bill says which trades will not qualify by excluding particular types of businesses. Will he try to define to some extent his target qualifying companies? Will he also set out clearly his thinking on venture capital trusts and property-backed schemes? He appears not to want entirely property-backed schemes and I accept that. He referred to those schemes in his earlier speech, but he did not set out clearly the Treasury's exact attitude to schemes that involved property. A great deal more detail is required.

What about residential homes for the aged? Does the Financial Secretary intend to include them in the scheme or to exclude them? It was not clear from his earlier reply exactly what his view was. He said, as I remember, that he had not had notice of many people seeking to exploit the venture capital trusts with residential homes in mind. Is it his intention that the scheme would be available for such uses if people chose to use it for that purpose?

Does the Financial Secretary agree that the legislation is extremely complicated? While it appears that two investment trust groups, Murray Johnstone and Rothschild Investment Management, have said that they are interested in VCT, will not the complicated legislation deter investors from getting too involved in the scheme?

Why did the Government settle on restricting income tax relief to companies with initial growth assets of between £1 million and £10 million per annum? Why not extend the limits above and below those figures? There is greater availability of finance for the larger companies and we need to tackle the smaller-scale investment of around half a million pounds. Will the Government set out how they reached the conclusion that those two levels were appropriate, so that we may at least have some understanding of Government thinking?

The key issue for Labour Members is this: if the main focus of venture capital trusts becomes tax avoidance rather than investment, what will the Government do about it? Clearly, the media have identified venture capital trusts in that way so far. The Government must take into account why that has taken place. If it appears that VCTs will go the way of the business expansion scheme, how do the Government plan to deal with that?

I repeat that I agree that investment in small firms needs to be enhanced. The Government say in the Red Book that they intend to boost overall investment across the economy to 11 per cent. in the next year—a tremendous boost given that the current level is around 3 or 4 per cent. It is certainly nowhere near 11 per cent. That target of 11 per cent. has an awful lot of wishful thinking about it and a certain aura of unreality. Likewise, I suspect that

venture capital trusts embrace a combination of wishful thinking and a lack of reality about the market. That is why the amendment to limit venture capital trusts to two years initially gives us an important chance to review the scheme in future—an opportunity that the House ought to have.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): In preparing myself for this interesting debate—I have enjoyed the exchanges—I turned to the spiritual father of venture capital in this country, Lord Lawson, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer. In his memoirs, he says that by 1993 the business expansion scheme and other start-up schemes had been brought to an end, which could be justified because

"the UK had by then a venture capital industry equal to that of any in the world".

If that is the case and if, as the hon. Member for Carshalton (Mr. Forman) said, the Bank of England in the form of Mr. Pen Kent said yesterday that the banks are now far more co-operative, lending more generously and moving from overdrafts to loans, how come we need venture capital schemes? In the middle of what the Government say is a boom, with everything going unbelievably, wonderfully, incredibly well for the economy, how come we need the schemes?

7 pm

The term "tax break" has been used as often by Conservative Members as by Opposition Members in this debate on venture capital, so the queries raised by Opposition Members come into focus. If I may paraphrase Humbert Wolfe after Hilaire Belloc

"You shouldn't need to bribe or twist

The British venture capitalist

Just provide a tax break or two

And you will see what he can do".

There is a problem in my constituency, and the deputy chairman of the Conservative party, Mr. John Maples, who was heavily involved in the Wellington BES in the 1980s, is giving evidence in a court case involving a lot of people who lost their jobs. Mr. Maples advised Virginia Wade, Michael Parkinson and others to put their money into a scheme and it has now emerged that a great deal of money has been lost.

Conservative Members have said that venture capital initiatives often become adventure capital initiatives, and although it is hoped that real money may be made, a lot of money can be lost, too. The core lesson of the 1980s was that we need more supervision. What worries some Opposition Members is not the tax write-offs for the deputy chairman of the Conservative party or for rich sport and television personalities, but cases such as that in Rotherham, where 55 people lost their jobs and are now on the dole without any security at all.

If we have identified an equity gap—what the Macmillan committee as long ago as 1929 called the finance gap—it needs to be dealt with, but Opposition Members have genuine reservations about whether the venture capital proposals in the Bill will do that. I certainly want more investment in Rotherham, but I am in regular contact with Rotherham business men, with the economic partnership and with Business Link, and they all tell me that venture capitalists need to target the lower end of the market.

Apparently, venture capitalists have little interest in the kinds of small businesses that want to get going in Rotherham. They need a quicker turnround. There seems to be some contradiction in the debate, because although it seems that, even before the Chancellor sat down after his Budget speech, Rothschild was ready to put a venture capital trust into operation, Conservative Members who are experts and have declared their interest have said that such schemes take a year or two years to get going. The message from Rotherham is, please can that be done quickly and at a much lower cost?

In my constituency I have been told that the venture capital trusts do not have a customer-friendly feel to them. The rate of return that they expect—generally 30 per cent.—is very high, which illustrates the short-termism and the lack of what is known as patient or stakeholder capitalism, whether venture or otherwise, in the United Kingdom economy. Indeed, as has already been said, in 1992 as much as 60 per cent. of NatWest's lending, excluding personal mortgages, was for less than one year. That shows the impatience and the "wham, bam, get out" approach of so many lending institutions in this country. My constituents in Rotherham are affected by all that.

It is not only the review period that is missing—although if Mr. Maples is planning to put more money into the new schemes being set up, let us have a review so that he and other investors can be protected. We also need venture capitalists much closer to the base where British business has to be carried out.

It is interesting that all the Conservative Members who have spoken have lived within commuting distance of the City. I should like there to be some form of ring-fencing that would help to turn venture capital trusts towards the needs of the regions. Every other country has regional banks in some form. The United States, which was the source of venture capital trusts before they were put into effect in this country, has laws which do not allow banks to operate outside their own state. There is no all-American venture capital trust industry, but a Californian industry, an Oregon industry, one in Texas, one in Massachusetts, and so on. That is what we desperately lack—an orientation that will take the money outside the hothouse growth areas protected by the Government, notably in the south-east.

We could also consider the activities of the Prince of Wales's Youth Business Trust, which does wonderful work in Rotherham. The prince is responsible for 17,500 start-ups in Rotherham, at exactly that small business level, with perhaps one or two individuals trying to make a go of it. Those are people such as the managers leaving a company who were mentioned by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), and those who have lost their jobs and have the initiative and the get-up-and-go to start out on their own. On the whole I am a republican, but I find it strange that we have to turn to the royal family to get small businesses going in this country because the banks and the venture capitalists have let them down so disastrously.

Finally, we could consider introducing an export element into the equation. I am struck by what happened in Korea in the 1970s and 1980s when no company, whatever its size, got credit unless it could prove that

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

there was an export element in its business. I am not sure whether that would be possible, but perhaps we could think about it for a future Finance Bill.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): Every time I have spoken in the House in the past two weeks I have been asked to be brief. I hope that that is because I have been speaking towards the end of debates, and not for any other reason.

The Opposition have a record of real concern about investment in our economy, the lack of which is one of the main problems, if not the most important problem, in the economy now. We are therefore interested in any measures designed to increase investment, including investment in small businesses. However, we have at least four concerns about the proposal before us.

Our first concern is the sheer scale of tax reliefs available and the consequent loss of money to the Exchequer. We are told that that will be £680 million over the next three years, but that calculation assumed 27 per cent. tax relief, and it has already been asked whether that was an underestimate. The amount of tax relief available is astounding. Initially it can be up to 60 per cent.—that actually applies to £200,000, because although a person can invest no more than £100,000 in a venture capital trust the same person can also put £100,000 into an enterprise investment scheme. On Second Reading I quoted from "BESt Investment", which was full of exclamation marks because it could not believe how many tax reliefs and tax breaks there would be. It asked whether anybody would ever have to pay capital gains tax again.

Secondly, we worry about the type of investment into which the money will go. It has been said that much venture capital money goes into management buy-outs, and those do not appear to be excluded. However, an even more serious worry exists about property, which was mentioned by various hon. Members. An explanation was given by the Financial Secretary of the abolition of the interest in land rule, but we are still worried about the type of companies that will now be brought in—companies that will have a big interest in land and property. As other hon. Members said, there is no specific exclusion of property. Why is there not? People will be suspicious that that is what the money will be used for if a specific exclusion is not written in.

It is also a fact that only 70 per cent. of the money has to go into qualifying holdings, so 30 per cent. of the money can be invested in literally anything, whether in this country or abroad. That is surely unacceptable when there is massive tax relief.

The third worry is about the displacement effect. Will the money go into the new investments and come out of other investments? My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) quoted from a magazine *Small Company Investor*, which graphically illustrated how experts thought that money would go into property-related investments and come out of the small businesses which needed it.

The fourth worry is about whether investment will be targeted at the companies that need it. That was first mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson), who is an expert in those matters. He said that the companies that needed help were the ones that were starting up—the small companies. He asked why the £1 million limit and the £10 million limit were not reduced, because investment was not properly targeted.

I fear that that badly targeted device is all that appears to have emerged from the great review about which we heard last year of ways to channel savings into investment. The key problem remains of how small companies can obtain long-term finance—long-term loans. Other major investment issues are totally ignored by the Finance Bill.

I suppose that we should be grateful that we have got anything, because in the Budget, when he argued against capital allowances, the Chancellor said that he did not think that we should distort investment decisions. I am all in favour of distorting investment decisions when investment is not being made, but I am afraid that this measure is the only thing that is included in the Finance Bill. The rest of the Bill is a vacuum. We should have measures to encourage investment throughout the economy. The missing subject is dividends, which the previous Financial Secretary was considering until Lord Hanson told the Government that he was a socialist; then he stopped doing it.

I urge hon. Members to support our amendments tonight, because they provide that, if the measure goes through, at least we shall be able to review it in a couple of years' time and discover how it is working. We are also asking for specific exclusions of property, so that we do not create a second business expansion scheme.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm). The reason why we ask him to be brief is that we know that he can make his arguments extremely well briefly, which he does time and again—and I say that not only because he happens to be one of my next-door neighbours in an Edinburgh constituency.

The debate has been extremely useful. On few occasions that I have witnessed in the eight years I have been a Member has the House spent so much time discussing directly problems which affect so many of our constituents, and also a problem that is fundamental to the future development of the economy.

There is no difference between the two sides of the House on the principle of venture capital trusts. We all agree that it is desirable, and from time to time necessary, to use fiscal incentives to ensure that investments are made in the sectors where we need it.

The difference between us is threefold. First, we believe that the Government need to consider other sectors, which have been mentioned on both sides of the House. Secondly, we believe that there must be safeguards to ensure that, if one gives a tax incentive, one does not end up subsidising undesirable behaviour, such as the behaviour that occurred when the business expansion scheme was set up. In that respect, too, there was common ground on both sides of the House. The difference between the two sides is that those who support the Government do not appear to accept that there is a case for ensuring that there should be safeguards in relation to venture capital trusts.

I suppose that the third difference between us is that we believe that the Government have given fiscal incentives in undesirable ways, such as the business

expansion scheme, but the Government will not accept that the taxpayer's money has thereby been poured down the drain. I shall perhaps discuss that later.

7.15 pm

The Minister appeared reluctant to accept that there is no difference of principle between us, so we should perhaps not spend too much time trying to make differences where none exist. Perhaps British industry as a whole will welcome the fact that there is cross-party support for the principle of encouraging investment in what is known as the investment gap, which has been identified by almost every hon. Member who has contributed to the debate.

However, I took exception when the Minister said that because no one was focusing on granny farms, as he put it, that was all right. In support of his proposition, he cited the fact that Rothschild's supported the Government. What a surprise—Rothschild's supports the Government. I am sure that a bank such as Rothschild's, which has no fewer than 14 times been the recipient of public largesse, either as an adviser to the Government or as an underwriter of its flotation schemes, should say, "Well done the Government for coming up with that scheme."

Indeed, as my hon. Friends the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) and for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) said, if venture capitalists do take great care in assessing the risks and evaluating the projects before them, it is scarcely surprising that the Chancellor hardly sat down after his Budget statement before our old chums at Rothschild's announced that they were going to set up a venture capital trust. They could not have known what was in the Budget, could they? How on earth would they know what a surefire bet it was—unless, of course, they had the amazing foresight of the noble Lord Archer of Weston-super-Mare?How could Rothschild's say so confidently that it was going to set up a venture capital trust unless it had made an evaluation of the type of tax breaks available and knew that, no matter what the risk, no matter what venture it backed, it was guaranteed to obtain a suitable return?

I do not think that the Minister can rely on Rothschild's for support, therefore, and I believe that both he and Conservative Members generally, today of all days, would do well to be very quiet about Rothschild's and the Conservative party, for reasons that people outside and inside the House will understand.

The main subject to which successive hon. Members drew attention was the funding gap between quoted companies and small businesses, many of which are funded by family money or by bank overdraft. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) said, that is starting to change; nevertheless, there is obviously a funding gap and we welcome the fact that the Government are tackling it.

I want to take up an argument that the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) made about property. I think that we all accept that if inflation remains low—a big "if"—obviously property will not be the kind of bet that it was in the past 30 or 40 years. However, in my travels around the City of London I have been surprised how many people tell me that they are getting back into property again. We all remember the property collapses of the 1970s, the late 1980s and the early 1990s; yet people are getting back into property because it is regarded as a major asset in a portfolio.

I do not think that we can take it for granted that, simply because inflation is low at the moment, the bad examples that the BES scheme threw up when it was in force will not return. I think that the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) conceded as much in his contribution. Although he said that he believed that it was unlikely that property speculation would become a problem again, none of us can rely on that being the case for ever. That appears to be another reason to support the Opposition amendment, which says that we should review the scheme in a couple of years' time.

Several Conservative Members have said that two years is not long enough to evaluate the schemes, and I accept that. I am not asking for schemes to be considered after two years, but obviously in the two-year period we shall have a pretty good idea if we notice the bad old habits re-emerging. If, as we have suggested, and on the basis of the many articles that have been mentioned, people do regard the scheme as a honeypot for tax avoidance and if we notice bad habits returning, it is surely right to ensure that taxpayers' money is not used to subsidise wholly undesirable behaviour.

As Conservative Members never tire of telling us, it is not the Government's money, but the taxpayer's money. They should think long and hard about using taxpayers' money to subsidise behaviour that most Members on both sides of the House find objectionable. Granny farming is not an activity that should be encouraged in general, and it certainly should not be encouraged by subsidy.

It was interesting that the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) and my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) made similar arguments. I wondered whether the hon. Member for Orpington was having second, or perhaps third thoughts, and reverting to his original beliefs as he rightly drew attention to the fact that there is a problem with start-up finance, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East, who has considerable experience in that sector. The hon. Member for Orpington argued that it is sometimes difficult to obtain funding for projects of less than £2 million.

I have an annual debate with the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West on the subject of his various interests. Each year, he is a member of the Finance Committee. I would advise him not to make the British Venture Capital Association his only port of call as the authority that no business need go without funds. Of course, that association has a view, but it is not the only one. As has been said, there is a funding gap and the Government should tackle that problem.

Mr. Butterfill: I am sure that when he reads my speech carefully the hon. Gentleman will see that I did not make that association my only point of reference. I referred specifically to the report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry—of which I am a member—which looked into the matter in great depth.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman mentioned one or two other points, but he put considerable weight on that association. However, we shall return to the subject.

As usual, the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) made an informed and highly enjoyable speech—apart from the silly crocodile tears that he wept over whether we were new or old Labour or new or old Liberal. Closing tax loopholes is a matter of right or wrong, not new or old. Our concern is not to open a mammoth tax loophole without adequate safeguards.

[Mr. Darling]

I emphasise that we all agree that Government intervention may be necessary where there is market failure. We must surely all also agree, however, that if fiscal incentives are to be used it is essential for the Government to ensure that those incentives achieve their intended aim and are not abused. That was the point behind the campaign launched by Labour to close tax loopholes. We are not against high rewards for those who undertake high risks, but we are against high rewards for low risk.

I commend to the Minister the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West, who knows a thing or two about such matters. I also commend to him the suggestions made by others of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friends the Members for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien) and for Rotherham.

One or two hon. Members spoke about the tax avoidance industry. I wish that Conservative Members would pay more attention to that industry. Tax avoidance is wholly legitimate; we are all entitled to reduce our tax bills and are obliged to render unto Caesar only that which is due to Caesar. That does not mean that we should help the tax avoidance industry. Conservative Members sometimes seem to regard that industry like piracy: it demonstrates the entrepreneurial spirit and they cannot bring themselves to criticise it or get in its way.

Mr. Forman: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that it is the very complexity of many Finance Bills which creates the opportunities that many of us wish to eliminate?

Mr. Darling: Absolutely. Although it is not a declarable interest, I am happy to declare a sort of interest in that I am a member of the Institute for Fiscal Studies committee set up to examine the complexities of taxation. I cannot remember which Conservative Member represents that party on the committee.

Mr. Andrew Smith: My hon. Friend can sort out all the complexities.

Mr. Darling: My response to the sedentary intervention of my good colleague the shadow Chief Secretary is that I am not going to sort them all out myself: I shall report back to him so that he can sort it out in two years' time when he is sitting in the Treasury along with the Japanese tourists or whoever else happens to populate it then.

The need for investment in this country is crucial—no one has denied that—but I wish to return to the issue which appears to separate the two sides: the need for safeguards. Conservative Members and the Minister said that we should not pay too much attention to what happened with the business expansion scheme. I have a quotation on which the Minister might wish to reflect. It comes from an interesting speech that was made a couple of years ago. It states:

"Think back six years. The yuppie revolution was in full swing . . . But it was built on sand. The wheeler-dealer was the man of the moment. The best returns were to be found in trading financial assets. Demand for property seemed inexhaustible. Money inevitably flowed towards these apparently sure-fire winners. But the system"—

the business expansion scheme—

"was giving the wrong signals. Far from being sure-fire winners, many were, in fact, sure-fire losers. We can see them today marked by To Let boards outside brand-new buildings that will never make a return for the people who built them.

The absence of a proper return matters to the developer, but it also matters to the rest of us, because the resources that were attracted, like moths to a lamp-bulb, to the lure of easy money are resources that have been wasted."

No one in the Labour party said that. Conservative Members will remember who said it, because it was none other than the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he was Financial Secretary to the Treasury.

Conservative Members may wish to reflect on the fact that those words were said by a member of the Cabinet, and perhaps one of the most decent and informed people to be sidelined in the Cabinet reshuffle. Indeed, he may have been sidelined not only because he set up a committee to look into the long-term and short-term attitudes in the City, before Lord Hanson said that that had to stop, but because he was astute enough to say that resources that were attracted

"like moths to a lamp-bulb, to the lure of easy money"

have been wasted. The case is made for our amendment by a member of the Conservative Cabinet. Conservative Members can surely learn from the mistakes that they made quite recently—not long ago in their 16-year span—with the business expansion scheme.

We are anxious to ensure that investment and entrepreneurial spirit is encouraged and that where there is a gap in the market the Government use all their powers to fill it, but we cannot and will not support a device which is likely to give rise to yet another tax break. I suspect that the present Government are responsible for creating more tax breaks than any other Government in history. That is partly because some Conservatives are, by inclination, attracted to such breaks and partly because some of them have connections with people in the tax avoidance industry.

The public interest demands that if public money is to be spent there must be safeguards in the public interest to ensure that money is directed to those sectors which need investment and have a high risk. They could include high-tech sectors and the very sectors in which Britain has not, historically, been able to compete. It seems that hon. Members on both sides of the House have tonight recognised that gap and the fact that far more needs to be done.

With our amendment we are merely asking for an assurance that the Government will not create a huge tax break for people who do not deserve it. Conservative Members are right to say that people are entitled to take advantage of the tax system, but it should never be a function of the Government or of the House simply to nod something through while knowing full well that there is a substantial risk that it will create the mother of all tax breaks. It is for that reason that we tabled our amendment.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I wish to press the Minister on the subject of property. The issue has been debated, but I am not convinced that all aspects of it have been taken into account. We are trying to ensure that, at the start, the right signals are given to show that venture capital trusts are designed to divert money, by tax efficient means, into productive investment.

Despite the debate about the state of the property market and the intervention of one or two Conservative Members, I must repeat that the problem in the past has

been that investing simply in the management of existing properties on the basis of speculation about their value, while it may be a perfectly legitimate business and has, at times, been profitable, does not add to the sum total of real wealth. However, it can be the source of a great deal of attracted, diverted, tax-subsidised investment.

The property market is currently in a more complex state than it has been for some time. One cannot say that the property market is globally depressed, as some sectors are performing reasonably well. There is no doubt that a well-managed property portfolio has every prospect of attracting a return that is significantly better than the rate of inflation. That being so, clearly the added benefit of a tax incentive is likely to encourage the promotion of more such portfolios.

In recent years, I have been a very small investor in a unit trust-related property fund which, throughout the recession, has not only out-performed the property market but out-performed the general index, even in the depths of the property recession. It did so because it was astutely managed and well targeted. I do not criticise that, but I criticise the fact that such funds should be encouraged for purely tax-relief purposes.

An ironic, contradictory, but equally valid point is that a tax incentive might provide the reassurance to secure a property portfolio and give it extra underpinning. Having a tax investment built in might allow people to hedge their bets. On both counts, I think that the Government are in danger of opening up a very good scheme to speculative investment which will be unproductive and which could divert a great deal of money away from the Treasury and from the businesses which need it. For that reason, I believe that the Committee should accept the amendment, and I hope that the Government will rethink their position.

7.30 pm

Sir George Young: I agree with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling): it has been a good debate, with hon. Members starting from the common position that there is a problem which needs to be addressed. I shall deal with the major questions raised during the debate and I write to those hon. Members whose questions I do not reply to directly.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage who was, quite rightly, promoted from the Treasury to the Cabinet in the July reshuffle. His reference to my right hon. Friend being "sidelined" is one of the most preposterous things that I have heard in the Chamber for many years. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be "sidelined" in due course—if that is how he interprets it.

I agree with some of the things that the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said. There has been a cultural shift, but there has also been a change in the perception of property and property development in the past 10 years. That is one reason why investments are less likely to go into those sectors. I shall return to that matter in a moment.

On his point about the interest in the land issue, perhaps the hon. Gentleman should read the Revenue Law Committee memorandum written by the Law Society entitled "Revenue Law Reform". It states:

"Many bona fide trading companies, although not property-based, will not satisfy the requirement that the value of their interest in land does not exceed half the value of the company's assets as a whole. Further, although the test may initially be satisfied, it may inadvertently be breached subsequently during the relevant period. Although the effect will be to exclude asset-backed companies, the restrictions will extend more widely than this".

In other words, it says that the rule which the hon. Gentleman wants to apply could exclude a company manufacturing widgets which happens to own its own factory. That cannot be right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) identified the opportunities for small companies presented by the structural changes in the economy. He will be reassured to know that the enterprise investment scheme has already provided help for start-ups. Approximately 30 per cent. of schemes funded so far under the EIS have been start-ups, and they have raised an average of £80,000, which hits the target that my hon. Friend identified.

The hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) asked why there was nothing in the Bill to help business angels. That assistance was provided in the Finance Act 1994 which introduced the enterprise investment scheme designed specifically for business angels. The hon. Lady is quite right: there is a role for them, but I think that their role is focused more accurately on the EIS rather than on the venture capital trust scheme in this Finance Bill. More than 50 per cent. of the enterprise investment schemes reported to Inland Revenue have involved business angels.

I am afraid that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) is just unreconstructed. There is a risk of being committed in theory to the principle of VCTs but then undermining and qualifying that commitment to such an extent that one is left with very little.

My hon. Friends the Members for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) and for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) made informed speeches correctly identifying the gap in funding that the VCT meets. I shall respond to their anxiety—I think that it was the main anxiety to come through the debate—about what we shall do if the investment goes into schemes about which hon. Members have expressed reservations.

I can tell the Committee, and in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West, that we shall keep the VCT scheme under close review. If there is evidence of the scheme being used for tax avoidance purposes or if a disproportionate amount of funds is invested in low-risk activities we shall not hesitate to take action to prevent that occurring. We shall make immediate use of the power included in schedule 14 to add to the list of non-qualifying activities if the need arises. I hope that that also gives some comfort to the hon. Member for Gordon.

The hon. Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) asked a number of questions and I think it will be easier if I reply to him in writing as some of them were highly technical and the Committee would like to make progress.

There have been extensive consultations about the scheme. It is a worthwhile proposal which has been welcomed by those who will operate it. There is a real need for small businesses to access the funds and I think that the Committee should make progress and put the scheme into action.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 242, Noes 321.

Division No. 49] **[7.34 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Wiltshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Ms Tessa Jowell

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*

Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chidgey, David
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony (Wyre Forest)
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'byshire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Egger, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Killedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sth)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Derek Conway and Dr. Liam Fox.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question put, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—
The Committee divided: Ayes 319, Noes 242.

Division No. 50] **[7.47 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aitkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chidgey, David
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Riffkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter

Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Bowen Wells

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Macklnlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Ms Tessa Jowell.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Clause 64 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 14

Venture Capital Trusts: Meaning of "Qualifying Holdings"

Amendment proposed: No. 11, in schedule 14, page 257, line 32, at end insert—

'(6) The value of the interests in land held—

(a) by the relevant company or qualifying subsidiary of that company;

or

(b) (where lower) the adjusted value of the interests in land which were held by the relevant company or any qualifying subsidiary of that company immediately following the issue of the relevant holding

must not exceed half the value of the company's assets as a whole.

(7) The provisions of section 294(2) to 294(7) of the Taxes Act 1988 shall apply for the purposes of determining the value of the interests in land held by a relevant company or a qualifying subsidiary of that company. The provisions of section 295 of the Taxes Act 1988 shall apply for the purpose of sub-paragraph (6)(b) as they apply for the purposes of section 294(1)(b) of the Taxes Act 1988 to adjust the value of interest in land held immediately after the issue of a relevant holding.'.—*[Mr. Malcolm Bruce.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 263, Noes 298.

Division No. 51] **[8.03 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*

Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and Mr. Simon Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patrick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*

Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wiltshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and Dr. Liam Fox.

Question accordingly negatived.
Schedule 14 agreed to.

Clause 91

RETURNS AND SELF-ASSESSMENTS

8.15 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): I beg to move amendment No. 31, in page 107, line 2, at end add—

'(9) Her Majesty's Government shall, before 31st January 1996, present a report to Parliament on:

(a) the guidance and explanatory material made and to be made available to the public for the purpose of ensuring that returns and partnership statements under self-assessment reflect the taxable position after claims to relief and allowances and after taking into account tax suffered on, and tax credits with, the items in the return,

(b) the training provided and to be provided to Inland Revenue and other relevant staff on the provision of advice and support to taxpayers in the completion of their returns for the purpose of ensuring that returns and partnership statements under self-assessment reflect the taxable position after claims to relief and allowances and after taking into account tax suffered on, and tax credits with, the items in the return, and

(c) amendments made and to be made to the Taxpayer's Charter relating to ensuring that for the purpose of ensuring that returns and partnership statements under self-assessment reflect the taxable position after claims to relief and allowances and after taking into account tax suffered on, and tax credits with, the items in the return.'.

I know that the Chair examined the amendment carefully before selecting it and was not able to select the other amendments tabled in my name and those of my hon. Friends, because the clause was drawn up exceptionally tightly and carefully by parliamentary draftspeople who were anxious to ensure that we could not amend the text to any great extent.

The clause seeks to tighten up provisions that were made last year. I might say that anyone who is not an accountant would have great difficulty understanding what on earth it is about, but, as I am learning, most Finance Bills are written in that way. I certainly do not aspire to be an accountant, despite the fact that my local university seems to produce more accountants than anything else.

The clause tightens up the provisions and regulations around self-assessment. It is somewhat ironic that the proposed legislation is so impenetrable, as the clause is supposed to open up the system and simplify it so that the ordinary taxpayer will be able to fill in his or her return and assess liability. The official Opposition are happy to agree with the Government that the procedure should be simplified. The rules need to be written in such a way that proposed legislation does not become a tax avoidance charter.

I took the opportunity to read the deliberations of last year's Committee, because the clause builds on what was in last year's Finance Bill and, indeed, the Finance Bill before that. I was quite amused by them and know that the Committee will miss the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), who was always able to bring a light touch to those matters. I apologise to the Committee, but I know that I shall not have quite that lightness of touch. I was never as good at jokes as my hon. Friend, but nevertheless will plod my way through.

This is a radical provision. It is a radical approach to the taxation system and the assessment of liability. The House has already had the painful experience of legislation insufficiently scrutinised, over-bureaucratic and insensitively implemented. Such recent legislation has not always emanated from the Treasury. Examples were given in the previous debate when the business expansion scheme was mentioned.

Talk of legislation which is over-bureaucratic and insensitive and which has led the Government into all sorts of difficulties brings to mind the Child Support Agency. This measure is not in the same league because it does not set up a new department. However, we fear that its implementation will be bureaucratic and, instead of it simplifying matters and easing the way for the taxpayer, it will present the taxpayer with a difficult passage. The complexity and denseness of the clause must give rise to concern. Those who seek to move to self-assessment in the first instance will have many problems.

Most of the amendments tabled by the Opposition were not in order because, as I said, the clause has been crafted so carefully. They sought to push the Government into considering whether they had taken appropriate and cautious steps in arriving at this radical change in the manner of clarifying tax liability.

Since last year's Finance Bill, the taxpayers charter has been published. It says:

"You"—

the taxpayer—

"are entitled to expect the Inland Revenue . . .

To help you

To get your tax affairs right

To understand your rights and obligations

By providing clear leaflets and forms

By giving you information and assistance at our enquiry offices

By being courteous at all times".

The Inland Revenue's attitude towards the taxpayer must undergo a radical shift. Instead of its current probing, challenging approach, it will have to be helpful, supportive and encouraging. It will have to develop a relationship of trust and that will be critical in ensuring the success of the venture.

The taxpayer's attitude, too, must undergo a radical shift. The legislation applies to the 8 million people who currently fill in a tax form, not all taxpayers. It requires

from them co-operation and keenness. They should want and be able to find their way through the complex provisions.

Most people I know fill in their tax forms with some apprehension. They wonder where it will land them and whether they have got it right. Not everyone shares my father's approach to taxation. He tells me that he would tell his accountant that he did not want to avoid paying tax and that he wanted to pay all that he was liable to. It was clear from our previous debate that that is not the attitude of all taxpayers when it comes to filling in their tax forms. I suspect that my father's attitude has something to do with his Methodist upbringing. We are entering a regime where the relationship between the taxpayer and the tax inspector will have to change.

The Government made it clear last year that there would have to be a change in the number of tax inspectors. That goes without saying. There was some debate in Committee last year about what would happen to the approximately 3,000 tax inspectors who are expected to have to move. At that stage the Minister could not clarify whether they would be redeployed or whether the Government would take the opportunity to reduce costs by reducing the number of people employed.

We are anxious that the Government should consider the matter carefully. Given the changing relationship between taxpayers and tax inspectors, the Opposition contend that those tax inspectors should be redeployed within the Inland Revenue in order, specifically, to help, advise and support the taxpayer, particularly in the early stages of moving to self-assessment, with the change in the base year on which the tax form is to be completed.

We are not content that there has been sufficient retraining or opportunity for the relevant staff to be able to provide comprehensive advice and support to assist taxpayers in the completion of their tax returns. The Inland Revenue staff association is not content that sufficient effort has been put into the retraining of staff. It shares our anxieties that the scheme could falter because insufficient attention has been paid to matters of detail and the specific area of retraining for the tax officials to fulfil their new role. One of the major criticisms of the Child Support Agency was that the staff were not prepared for or effectively trained to face the new challenges presented by the legislation. It would be a travesty if, because of that, the Government faltered into a new way of assessing tax liability.

3.30 pm

Self-assessment will not be introduced for a couple of years. The year of its implementation is likely to be a general election year, and the offical Opposition are therefore particularly anxious to ensure that all the necessary steps are taken to prevent taxpayers from feeling that they have been led up the garden path, and from becoming, as it were, the equivalent of the CSA protesters. We do not want good self-employed small business people to be driven to such lengths. I hope that that is an exaggeration, but I also hope that the Government are learning some of the lessons of inappropriate and insufficient preparation for major changes. I hope that they are beginning to realise that we Members of Parliament must ensure that all the necessary preparations are made—and, as I have said, the role of Inland Revenue staff will be crucial in that regard.

So far, taxpayers have not been given any preparatory information and advice. Consultation papers have been issued this year, and Treasury press releases have suggested that changes in the Finance Bill would deal with the matter, but I am not satisfied—and nor are several outside bodies—that that is the case.

We tabled a number of probing amendments—which, because of the tight drafting of clause 91, were not in order—in an attempt to give taxpayers more leeway in the first year of self-assessment. We wanted not to encourage tax avoidance, but to minimise the problems: problems in the early stages of the implementation of the clause would undermine the principle of self-assessment and the Government's objectives, which we fully support.

When the consultation papers were issued, the Institute of Taxation wrote to the Treasury expressing a fear that the cost to employers would rise significantly. The institute felt that the Government had not taken sufficient account of that. I spoke to the institute this week, and it remains exceedingly sceptical, feeling that the Bill does not tackle the points that it raised during consultation.

Following the issue of the documents, the institute wrote—and it stands by that view:

"The Revenue must devote sufficient resources to educating employers and employees about the impending changes. They must also simplify the taxation of benefits and expenses and bring national insurance contributions into line with other taxes . . . Self assessment may benefit a very small minority of employed taxpayers but the most obvious result of the proposals will be a significant increase in compliance costs for employers.

This arises not only in providing the annual information that employees generally will need . . . but also because employers will find themselves supporting the Inland Revenue's efforts to make employees more tax aware. Increasing taxpayer awareness on this scale involves a change in culture and attitude that may well take a generation to achieve. In the meantime the employer is inevitably likely to bear the brunt of employee difficulties and indeed we believe that self assessment for employees cannot be made to work by the Inland Revenue without the active co-operation of very many employers."

If that is the case, we have a long way to go before the Government's aims are achieved. Over the past two years they have consistently reiterated their anxiety to remove burdens from employers, but the Institute of Taxation foresees an additional burden.

As I have said, we welcome the principles of self-assessment and simplification of the tax system, but no one who reads this year's Finance Bill will be convinced that the system is indeed being simplified. Indeed—as we shall point out later in Committee—in some ways it is being made more complex. We must be confident that legislation passed by the House will be implemented in a way that achieves the House's aims, but the Opposition remain unconvinced that the Government are serious enough about that.

We want to be sure that the taxpayers charter takes account of these important changes in the assessment of tax liability. I am cynical enough never to expect the Government to accept an amendment in full, but I am always open to persuasion, and I hope that they will accept at least the spirit of this one. We want to ensure that the House can implement the self-assessment proposals with confidence: that is the only way in which we can be certain that the changes work in the interests of taxpayers and, indeed, the taxation system as a whole.

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): As my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong)

[Mr. Alan Milburn]

said, the introduction of self-assessment is a radical shake up in the tax system. The Opposition do not argue against the principle of self-assessment but we are concerned about its implementation. On the plus side it is fairly clear that it will mean less bureaucracy, less paperwork and fewer Revenue overheads. But it will be a culture shock for taxpayers. For the first time the onus will be on them to supply the correct information and submit a return within the required time. Obviously, automatic penalties will be imposed on those who fail to get their tax return in on time.

I hope that a new impetus will be given to tackling some of the problems that have become evident in recent years. I mention in particular the alarming statistic that at the moment about 2.5 million taxpayers file their tax returns late. That has a cost to the Exchequer and to the taxpayer. Has the Treasury assessed the impact of those appalling late filing figures? How many people does the Minister expect to file on time and how many does he expect to file late? What assessment has the Treasury made of the financial implications of those figures? Has the Minister assessed the cash-flow implications for the Exchequer? At the end of the day that means the taxpayer because, as Conservative Members continually remind us, it is the taxpayer who foots the bill.

I hope that the Treasury has paid close attention to the Public Accounts Committee report. Our fourth report entitled, "Inland Revenue: Getting Tax Right First Time and Dealing with More Complex Postal Queries" raised a number of concerns about current practice and raised some doubts about the implementation of the self-assessment system. If the onus is placed on the taxpayer and Parliament is broadly in agreement with that principle, the onus is on Parliament and especially on Ministers to make taxpayers fully aware of their self-assessment responsibilities.

What thought has been given to the sort of public education programme that will be necessary not just for taxpayers but for employers and Inland Revenue staff? My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West spoke about the need to ensure that adequate training mechanisms are in place not when the system is introduced but before its introduction, so that teething problems are minimised.

The next issue that I wish to raise was highlighted in paragraph 18 of the PAC report:

> "The success of self-assessment will depend in part on the use of forms that taxpayers can readily understand. The Department accepted that such forms are a critical piece of documentation for the new system."

I understand that some preliminary forms have been trialed, but I also understand that the Plain English Society has not yet been consulted about the wording of the forms. That might seem trivial but according to rumour the Treasury has in mind forms that run not to one or two pages but to 17 pages. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to dispel that rumour because if I were a small self-employed business man dealing with the plethora of problems that such business men have to deal with the last thing that I would want to face would be more red tape, bureaucracy and paperwork by way of 17-page forms from the Inland Revenue.

The most important point about implementation is contained in the PAC report. It noted the complexity of tax legislation and the problems that that causes for taxpayers and Inland Revenue staff. The Committee recommended that the Treasury should continue to take every opportunity to simplify the tax system.

8.45 pm

As my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West said, the Finance Bill contains 348 pages. Whatever else it has going for it, it certainly does not simplify the tax system. Some complicated rules will need to be made clear to all taxpayers. What does the Minister have in mind for simplifying the tax system? Unless the system is made straightforward and clear, self-assessment will not be a boon for individual taxpayers and certainly not for Inland Revenue staff.

However, it will be a boon for the private accountancy industry. There will be privatisation of the tax system because taxpayers and small businesses which rely upon the Inland Revenue properly to assess their affairs will have to turn to private accountancy firms and pay for the privilege.

That brings me to the important matter of what is to happen to the 3,000 Inland Revenue staff who could be displaced as a result of self-assessment. Self-assessment is a threat to those staff but it is also an opportunity because it will provide a chance to redeploy staff so that back room officers will be transferred to the front line and district officers will be turned into more public-friendly people. Advice shops could be opened in district offices. Has the Treasury any plans on that?

As I understand it, self-assessment will give Inland Revenue staff an opportunity to monitor taxpayers' returns. How many of those self-assessment forms will simply be nodded through and how many will not be properly assessed or queried? We need an assurance that a thorough-going monitoring process will apply to as many return forms as possible. If implementation goes wrong, self-assessment will turn into a tax avoidance industry. The last thing that Ministers want to do is to give the green light to tax avoidance, especially when we hear from the Inland Revenue that the current system means that annually £100 million worth of tax is not properly collected from taxpayers.

Some concerns exist therefore. I hope that the Minister will be able to deal with them in his reply to the debate. We had a debate on self-assessment in the Committee that considered the Finance Bill last year, and this Finance Bill takes the issue a stage further. Hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that it is a positive step forward. We all agree about the need to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, but dangers exist in the process of implementation. My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West has pointed out some of those dangers. I hope that I have as well. I would be grateful if the Minister would deal with the concerns that have been expressed.

Sir George Young: I very much welcome this opportunity to reassure the House that the Government take self-assessment reform seriously. We have taken and are taking on board the words of caution that have been voiced in the debate. I hope that, in the few minutes that I propose to take to deal with these issues, I shall be able to reassure hon. Members on the specific points that they have raised.

Like the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) I am not an accountant. Like her, I experienced a culture shock when confronted with the legislative text in the Finance Bill. Like her, I am climbing a fairly steep learning curve. She asked if the Government were taking appropriate cautious steps to introduce the measure. She is right so to do. Self-assessment is a major change to the personal tax system. We are introducing it after an extensive period of consultation, both public and with representatives of business and the professions, and it has already been debated at some length in the House.

The hon. Lady outlined qualities that Inland Revenue staff will need if this is to be a success. I am confident that they have those qualities already and that they will apply them to the challenge that lies ahead.

The Government are committed to the new system, which has been widely welcomed. I was pleased that, in the debate, the principle of self-assessment has been broadly accepted. When we debated the matter in 1994, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) graciously acknowledged that broad agreement existed on the issues, and that they were not controversial.

A few days ago, I happened to meet Inland Revenue staff from Darlington when they were in London. They were finalists in a competition organised by the Revenue to promote details of schemes worked up by staff which especially emphasised customer service. The hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) can be proud, therefore, of the Revenue staff in his constituency in that they reached the final of the competition.

Both he and the hon. Member for Durham, North-West complained about the length of the legislation. If one wants to simplify the tax system, one may have to legislate. Some of the reforms in the Bill simplify the system. Personal incidental expenses are an example. The length of the Bill, therefore, does not necessarily mean that the legislation is becoming more complicated. I hope that it contains proposals that simplify the system.

The main legislation for self-assessment was passed in the Finance Act 1994 with all-party support. Some of the changes have already come into effect, or will do so soon. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage made clear last year, some of the more detailed clauses would need longer to complete and would be introduced this year. He also committed the Government to making changes where, on further examination and consultation, it was felt sensible to do so. That remains the case.

The Bill contains a considerable number of clauses that have as their origin the desirability of making changes to make self-assessment easier—something that was advocated by both Labour Members who have spoken. The Government have, wherever possible, taken the opportunity to simplify the underlying rules at the same time. For example, the Bill contains measures that will introduce substantial simplifications for the taxation of income from property, and the beneficiaries of the estates of deceased persons. In developing measures for self-assessment, I am determined that they should be as straightforward as possible.

It is perhaps worth reminding the Committee about the main features of self-assessment. It is a clearer, more streamlined system for taxpayers. Self-assessment will also simplify matters for the Revenue. It will free up resources. In response to the hon. Member for Darlington, some of those will be devoted to improving customer service, as well as the Revenue's compliance work.

The introduction last year of the current-year basis for businesses has paved the way for taxing all income and gains in one sum and with common dates. It will no longer be necessary for the Revenue to make estimates of an individual's tax liability as a matter of course, leading to the familiar but costly rigmarole of sorting out, often over a long period, how much tax should be paid. Instead, taxpayers will be able to put all their income, gains, deductions and allowances for one year on the one tax return, and send it to the Revenue within a clear and realistic timetable.

The hon. Member for Darlington asked about the timetable. The returns will have to be in 10 months after the end of the tax year, as against the current position—in theory, the limit is 30 days. Ten months is a generous time, particularly if one compares it with the time that is allowed in other European countries.

Taxpayers will have the opportunity to work out their own tax if they wish, but, as I made clear on Second Reading, they do not need to do so. The Revenue will do it for them if that is what they choose.

Hon. Members will know that self-assessment will apply directly only to people who receive tax returns. They number 9 million people and are the self-employed and others with relatively complicated tax affairs, such as directors and higher-paid employees. Pay-as-you-earn will continue to operate as now for all employees, of whom four out of five, some 20 million people, do not receive returns and will notice little change. I say to the hon. Member for Durham, North-West that of course the Government will learn from experience as they introduce the new reform.

It is important that such a fundamental change should be made only after careful thought and extensive consultation. We have recognised that throughout and, to allow more time, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) decided, when announcing the go-ahead in 1993, to put back the start date by one year. The emphasis now must be on doing all that we can to make the new system work well from the start.

To help achieve that, the Revenue has already begun an extensive programme of research and education. It is preparing a publicity campaign to start later this year. It is consulting widely on the design of the tax return, which the hon. Member for Darlington mentioned, as well as on many other aspects of self-assessment. It will test its plans for the new system in a live trial—a pilot, if you like, Madam Deputy Speaker—starting this April. That will involve some 5,000 volunteers and their advisers and employers. It will be based at the Revenue's "model office" in Leicester.

That is not a theoretical exercise. It is real Revenue staff dealing with real taxpayers. The trial and the lessons that are learned from it will help the Revenue to ensure that the introduction of self-assessment goes as smoothly as possible. In response to both Labour Members who have spoken, the Revenue has also started an extensive training programme for its own staff to ensure that they are properly prepared for the new system.

[Sir George Young]

The key aim of self-assessment is to reduce the overall costs of running the tax system. A more straightforward system will deliver that, and will provide significant savings for the self-employed by sweeping away all the complexity of the old rules. That will allow businesses to concentrate their energies where they really belong—on creating wealth.

As with any new system, people in business and others who receive returns and their advisers will need to learn new rules. I recognise that there will be some initial costs for those affected. Some employees will need more information than they do now about benefits in kind and expenses payments, so that they can complete a tax return if they receive one. That will also mean more work for some employers—those who do not provide that information to their employees, but who will need to do so.

We have tried to keep business costs to the absolute minimum by consulting as widely as possible on the best way forward, listening carefully to what people had to say. We are continuing with those consultations. Indeed, members of the self-assessment consultative committee were good enough to come to a meeting at the Treasury just before Christmas, so that I could hear their views at first hand. A substantial programme of publicity and education for taxpayers is planned and is under way. Particular emphasis will be given to raising awareness and to tax advisers understanding the changes through mailings and presentations.

Some deregulatory savings will arise from self-assessment. Both the cost and savings are documented in detail in the comprehensive compliance cost assessment that we published on Budget day. Notwithstanding such costs, the overall impact on business is expected to be positive and to produce continuing savings of between £125 million and £250 million per year in business costs. The main beneficiaries of that will be the self-employed. I can tell the hon. Member for Darlington that the aim of self-assessment is to help people to get their tax right first time. This will involve making them aware of their responsibilities through the programme of education and publicity that I mentioned.

9 pm

The design of the tax return and the guidance notes will also have an important role. We are consulting taxpayers, professional advisers and Revenue staff and we are also undertaking research to help design a return that is as easy to understand and as simple to complete as possible. The response to the consultation has been excellent, with strong interest from not only agents but the public. Indeed, more than 1,000 people volunteered to try out the new return for themselves—it says something for the popularity of the new scheme when people are volunteering to fill in a new return that they are not obliged to fill in. Consultation on the new tax return will continue throughout 1995.

The consultations centre on the traditional paper tax return but self-assessment is a system for the future and clause 136 includes the measures necessary to enable taxpayers to file their returns electronically. However, our plans do not stop at electronic lodgement. Many taxpayers already have personal computers at home and, in the future, even more will have computer skills. Filling in a tax return, especially under self-assessment, is an activity which, I believe, lends itself naturally to the use of a personal computer—it can do the calculations and it can access the right help screen. I have, therefore, encouraged the Inland Revenue to consider urgently the possibility of producing a version of the return on computer disk, but it need not be something that the Revenue itself produces—it is a natural candidate for private sector involvement or partnership. Either way, I regard it as an exciting development and the right way forward.

Finally, whether people decide to use a paper return, a computer disk or electronic lodgement, self-assessment will be a big change and people are likely to need help of one kind or another from the Revenue. That brings me to a point made by the hon. Members for Darlington and for Durham, North-West. The Revenue will be embarking on an ambitious and comprehensive customer service programme to inform and assist taxpayers so that they can understand the new system and comply with their obligations.

The Revenue is currently conducting research into taxpayers' needs and consulting extensively on all aspects of its programme. The results of that work will help it develop the most effective and efficient service using, for example, carefully targeted written guidance on the telephone and face to face through the network of tax inquiry centres. The Revenue now has nearly 400 such inquiry centres and I have been impressed by the high standards of service that they provide. Hon. Members may have raised other issues but I shall write to them, if I may.

We shall, of course, continue to keep the House informed of developments as we move towards full implementation of self-assessment. We expect to introduce further self-assessment legislation, the third and—I hope—final tranche being in next year's Finance Bill. That will provide ample opportunity for further parliamentary discussion on the progress of self-assessment and other clauses which will be dealt with in Standing Committee.

Against that background, I hope that I have given the hon. Member for Durham, North-West sufficient assurance to persuade her not to press the amendment to a Division.

Ms Armstrong: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 91 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

To report progress and ask leave to sit again.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Committee report progress: to sit again tomorrow.

CHILDREN (SCOTLAND) BILL

Ordered,

That, in relation to the Children (Scotland) Bill, Standing Order No. 91 (Special Standing Committees) shall have effect with the following alterations:

(a) in line 6, leave out 'four morning sittings' and insert 'two morning and two afternoon sittings'; and

(b) in line 18, leave out 'three morning sittings' and insert 'one morning and two afternoon sittings'.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Queen Elizabeth II Hospital (Welwyn Hatfield)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

9.4 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): As the House knows, "Queen Elizabeth II" stands for the greatest living monarch and the world's loveliest cruise ship, but only the people of Welwyn Hatfield know that Queen Elizabeth II is also one of the country's finest hospitals. It dispenses more love and care to my constituents than probably any other hospital in the United Kingdom does to its patients. That is why it is named after a great lady and a great ship.

I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue of the Queen Elizabeth II hospital in Welwyn Hatfield. The QE2 is an efficient, successful and vibrant hospital. Since receiving trust status in 1991, in-patient and day case operations have increased by 28 per cent.; the average waiting time has dropped from seven months in 1989-90 to just three months in 1993-94, which is well below the national average; and, since 1991, the QE2 has introduced a number of new developments and schemes.

They were: first, the Danesbury home for the accommodation of physically handicapped people; secondly, a day surgery unit; thirdly, a magnetic resonance imaging unit which saves unnecessary journeys to central London; fourthly, new ultrasound equipment to enable the women of Welwyn Hatfield to produce bigger bouncing babies; fifthly, new computer systems to take care of patients' medical records; sixthly, delivery suite recovery rooms for the bigger bouncing babies; seventhly, the construction on level 8 of Cuffley ward for general surgery, thus freeing other facilities for medical emergencies; eighthly, the conversion of level 6 Bramfield ward for medically dependent patients; ninthly, the construction of a stroke rehabilitation unit at Queen Victoria memorial hospital to help the victims of heart attacks; tenthly, the construction of a children's out-patients facility helping mums and dads stay together; eleventhly, the construction of a post-natal mother and baby unit called Thumbswood ward; twelfthly, the installation of security closed circuit television to prevent baby snatching; thirteenthly, an assessment unit for the accident and emergency department; fourteenthly, a new orthopaedic unit to get my constituents up and running as soon as possible; and, fifteenthly, a host of minor works, repairs, improvements and new equipment. Since 1991, total expenditure has amounted to £13 million. That is £175 for every one of my constituents.

May I take this opportunity to thank all my parliamentary colleagues in Hertfordshire for their support over a long period on this issue? I would especially like to thank my hon. Friends the Members for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) and for Stevenage (Mr. Wood). Since my hon. Friends the Members for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) and for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) came into the House, they have given me equally strong support. I thank them for all the effort that has gone into this hospital.

I am very proud of our national health service. It has developed and flourished under successive Conservative Governments, who have invested additional funds in real terms in the service each and every year since 1979. Indeed, that commitment has resulted in an even greater proportion of gross national product being directed towards health; from 4.7 per cent. in 1979—the legacy left for us by the Labour party—to 6.1 per cent. currently.

The Secretary of State has already announced a further large injection of funds for the forthcoming year. For the year 1993-94, a massive £37,000 million has been invested to provide a comprehensive and efficient health service, which is still the envy of the world and which is available to every man, woman and child in Britain, irrespective of age, race, colour or creed.

Why is it the envy of the world? Why do health professionals visits from Europe and America to find out how we provide such good value for money in health care? The answer is simple—because of the health service reforms introduced by this Government in 1991. As a result of those reforms, the country now benefits from more health facilities and ever-increasing quality. But that cannot be taken for granted—nor would it continue under a Labour Government. Let us, to set the background, take the lot opposite for a trip down memory lane and remind them exactly what happened under the last Labour Government.

First, in 1977-78, the health budget was cut by 3 per cent. in real terms. Secondly, the capital spending was cut by one third in real terms; the largest ever cut inflicted on the NHS capital programme in the entire history of the national health service. Aneurin Bevan, eat your heart out. Thirdly, between 1974 and 1979, in real terms, nurses' pay fell by 21 per cent., doctors' pay by 16 per cent. and surgeons' pay by 25 per cent.

Fourthly, in 1978-79, the NHS went on strike, led by the Confederation of Health Service Employees and the National Union of Public Employees. Telephonists were on strike and clinical staff were manning public call boxes to get calls into the hospital. Clean linen was not allowed through picket lines. Foul linen was destroyed, because the unions would not let it out of the hospital. Meals were provided by volunteers and cleaning of the hospitals was virtually non-existent. Drugs and medicines were not allowed in. Cancer parents were refused treatment and left on the pavements. Hospitals were brought to their knees and the QE2, under Labour, was shut down.

During the winter of discontent, Barbara Castle, the former Labour Secretary of State for Health and Social Services, described her attack on pay beds as an "essential political sweetener" for the trade unions. Let no one forget that the Labour party has 156 Members who are sponsored by unions, including the whole of their Front-Bench team. As we all know, balding Bambi is sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union.

We will not be fooled by their £500 suits or their £60 hairdos. They are still committed to tossing political sweeteners to unions and, in return, the unions toss financial sweeteners to the Labour party. As the leader of the TGWU said last year, "No say, no pay." One has to ask oneself what sort of health service we would have under the direction of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who cannot even remember where he parked his car.

Labour's political interference in the Government's health reforms could be identified back in 1990, when the poisoned dwarf, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who at the time was the Labour spokesman for health, threatened NHS managers working on implementing the Government's health reforms. In a

[Mr. David Evans]

blatant threat, the hon. Member for Livingston told them to go slow on the Government's health reforms, because they would all be reversed by the next Labour Government.

The *Health Service Journal* condemned the outrageous interference of the hon. Member for Livingston when it stated:

"The threat was barely veiled: Everyone judged to have appeared too enthusiastic about the White Paper need not expect to have their contract renewed by a Labour Health Secretary."

The journal went on to describe the hon. Gentleman's actions as

"outrageous interference in NHS management and flagrant intimidation of NHS managers."

So much for democracy.

Now let us consider what has been achieved by the Government, and the implications of that for the QE2. Between 1979 and 1992 the number of nurses and midwives increased by nearly 25,000, and the number of medical and dental staff by nearly 10,000. Nurses' pay has risen by not less than 53 per cent., and doctors' pay by 35 per cent, since 1979.

Since the reforms were introduced in 1991, the number of patients treated in hospital has increased by 5 per cent. a year, compared with an increase of 2.4 per cent. a year between 1979 and 1991. The rate of increase during the latter part of the 1970s—the last period of Labour so-called Government—was a paltry 1 per cent. Of course, under Labour the number of shop stewards in the health service increased even faster than the number of top-class doctors leaving the country. Denis Healey made the pips squeak all right, and under Barbara Castle they were left squeaking.

The number of patients treated in hospitals has increased from 7 million in 1991-92 to 8 million in 1993-94—a truly remarkable achievement. Waiting times have fallen, as have the numbers waiting. Half of all patients are seen immediately and 30 per cent. of the rest are seen within 2 weeks; 75 per cent. of patients are seen within three months, and 98 per cent. within the year.

The reforms have changed the system from a provider-led to a purchaser-led service. Under Conservative leadership, there has been a substantial programme of hospital modernisation and building. More than 800 hospital building schemes, each worth more than £1 million, have been completed since 1980, and almost another 300 are in the pipeline.

The purchaser now calls the tune, identifying need and responding to the requirements of the local population, setting contracts to ensure that hospitals and community units know what services and how many services will be required of them, so that they can plan their delivery with optimum staff numbers and the right number of beds.

Gone is the boom-bust mentality that characterised the provision of care before the reforms—hospitals working flat out with all their beds open for the first two thirds of each year, and then coping with bed closures because the money had run out, resulting in the indiscriminate cancellation of urgent as well as routine operations. Yes, I am proud to be associated with a Government who have had the vision and courage to introduce such fundamental changes, and who have ensured that care has improved so much. Until the reforms, most hospital calendars ran for only nine months of the year.

However, there is a problem. That success depends on the highest quality of purchasing if services are to be provided in the best possible way. My constituency has suffered because purchasers published an ill-conceived, badly researched and poorly written document. It is called "Where do we want to be?"—God knows, but not where they suggest. That so-called strategic discussion document was released because the purchasers wanted to tell the public that all their services had to be reviewed and that the number of accident and emergency departments in Hertfordshire might be reduced from four to two.

The proposal, which was based on badly researched data, has caused enormous anger and resulted in great anxiety for the population of Hertfordshire, not least our proud independent senior citizens, who want to be loved and cared for as they reach old age, not to have some upstart terrify them with an awful ill-conceived document.

Why has there been so much trouble? First, because we love our hospital and, secondly, because that document implied, although it did not state it, that our local hospital, the Queen Elizabeth II hospital of Welwyn Garden City, was the prime candidate for reduction of accident and emergency services and for subsequent complete closure.

Such a proposal, albeit for discussion, is a disgrace, because our hospital has provided a model for demonstrating the success of the reforms. During the 1980s, it was not successful. Morale was low. There were financial difficulties. Delays for treatment were considerable.

In those days, we were starved of cash, not by the Government, but by Sir William Doughty. I have to tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that he did not receive his knighthood for a contribution to the health service—that would be too much of a joke. In his role as chairman of North West Thames regional health authority, he enabled the more favoured inner-London parts of the region to be overfunded. For every £1 spent on health care for someone in Brent, only 75p was spent on care for someone living in Welwyn Hatfield.

Back in 1989, the North West Thames regional health authority used a formula designed by Mr. Doughty for allocating the money provided by Government, which resulted in 11 districts being overfunded and two underfunded. East Hertfordshire was underfunded by £400,000.

It was unacceptable to watch the budget for East Hertfordshire district continually cut to subsidise financial disasters such as the construction of the Chelsea and Westminster hospital, which, let me tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, was originally estimated to cost £70 million. It did not cost £70 million; it did not cost £80 million; it did not cost £90 million, or £100 million, or £110 million, or £120 million, or £130 million, or £140 million, or £150 million, or £160 million, or £170 million, or £180 million, or £190 million, or £200 million, or £210 million, or £220 million, or £230 million. It cost £245 million.

Every capital project in our region was suspended for five years to accommodate Sir William Doughty and his bloody silly hospital.

Mr. Vivian Bendall (Ilford, North) *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman feels strongly, but I do deprecate some of his language, and I would ask him to moderate it.

Mr. Bendall: So my hon. Friend would agree with me that inner London has been doing very well at the expense not only of his area but also of peripheral London?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend makes his own argument very well. It is a disturbing fact, and we are seriously worried about it.

However, when East Hertfordshire obtained trust status, it changed entirely. It became an acknowledged success, recognised as such by my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) when he visited my constituency in his capacity as the Minister of State for Health. Waiting times have declined. Contracts for services were all met and the trust has finished its financial years either in balance or in surplus.

During the 1980s, I used to hear lots of complaints about the way that services were provided.

Now, the population is proud of its hospital and the high quality of care that it provides. Its accident and emergency department, which was threatened by the purchasing agency, is the biggest in the county of Hertfordshire. It is the most central, the newest and the only department that already meets the patients charter standards for out-patients.

According to the purchaser's own publication, it is the cheapest department per patient in Hertfordshire. It is the only accident and emergency unit where patient numbers are increasing. It is forecast that, within five years, it will be one third larger than the next largest department in the county. It has the lowest management costs in the region. It serves a catchment population of 500,000 people, all of whom live within 20 minutes travelling time, which means that it is pivotal as an emergency hospital service in the county of Hertfordshire.

The residents of east Hertfordshire have lost access over the past 10 years to accident and emergency services at the Hertfordshire and Essex hospital, Hertford county hospital and St. Albans city hospital. Part of the argument to support the closures of those units was the existence of the accident and emergency unit at the Queen Elizabeth II hospital which has, as a result, grown from one of the smallest units, to overtake all others and become the biggest unit. It will treat more than 50,000 new patients this year.

Why should that success story be overshadowed by threats of closure? The reason is simple—bureaucrats. A few managers in the purchasing authority decide that a hospital can be closed. Despite such phenomenal success, all the principles that I have espoused will be sluiced away with the bedpans. Purchaser dogma cannot overrule popularity, people, patients and success. Surely, the thrust of the Government reforms is that successful hospitals and accident and emergency units attract more patients and so receive more funding. Funding follows the patients—at least, that was the idea until the paper-cushioned bureaucrats stuck their biro in.

Jenny Griffiths, the chief executive of the Hertfordshire health agency, who has a closet socialist background, followed her own little principles. She believes—as all socialists believe—that the funding should follow the white elephants and cause mayhem within a Conservative success story. As always, the Labour party, nationally and locally, has tried to make the matter a political one. Its claim that there is not enough money in the Queen Elizabeth II hospital is clearly a blatant lie, and shows a total lack of knowledge of trust status. In any case, the issue is about how a local purchaser behaves. The Hertfordshire health agency is for the benefit of patients and their families.

If the issue is to be party political, so be it. Let me tell the world that the Conservative party and the Government have ensured that the Queen Elizabeth II hospital has flourished. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and the bureaucrats between her and the point of patient care need to know and understand that the hospital belongs to the people. We, the people of Welwyn Hatfield, will not allow anyone who seeks promotion by trying to be too clever by half at the expense of patients who are my constituents.

I will be vigilant, aggressive, abrasive, determined and committed to the well-being of my constituents, the hospital management, doctors, consultants, nurses, ancillary staff and the hospital itself. If anyone in the House or outside it regards that as a threat, I can tell them right now that it is—"David Evans is watching you. Hands off our hospital". Can the Minister say here and now that there are no plans to close any accident and emergency departments in Hertfordshire, particularly the accident and emergency department at the Queen Elizabeth hospital?

9.30 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) has done the House a service in bringing this important matter before us tonight. My constituents in north Hertfordshire use two hospitals. In the south and the west, they use the QE2 and they consider it to be as good a hospital as my hon. Friend has explained to the House. To the north and the east of my constituency, my constituents use the Lister hospital in Stevenage.

I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Mr. Wood) is in his place on the Treasury Bench. My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield said that his hospital provides excellent services and has improved its facilities in recent years, and so too has the Lister hospital, the other main hospital that my constituents use.

The hospital has a new renal unit, an improved cancer facility and improved screening facilities. There is a new entrance at the hospital and new car parking facilities. A brand new outreach clinic at Baldock costing £500,000 opened last year. The other satellite hospitals that look to the Lister—such as the Hitchin hospital and the Royston hospital—also provide excellent facilities, including local physiotherapy services.

The people of Hertfordshire and the county health service have embraced the Government's reforms. We were the first county with a major tranche of general practitioner fundholders—we led the way. We adopted trust hospitals at an early stage because we believed in them. We said that the Government's reforms would reduce waiting lists—and, by goodness, they have.

[Mr. Oliver Heald]

It is against that background that the disgraceful and insensitive consultation document, published in October last year, proved such a shock to everyone in Hertfordshire. It was an opaque document; people could not understand it. It seemed to suggest that accident and emergency departments at the QE2 and Lister hospitals, which are needed and valued by my constituents, might be closed. It suggested that, because of the number of admissions that would be lost to our hospitals, one of them might have to close.

The community health council was shocked. The district councils—all 10 of them—wrote to the health agency saying that it could not happen. My constituents have written to me and to the regional and national health authorities making that point clear.

When I wrote before Christmas to Sir William Staveley, the chair of the regional health authority, asking for an assurance that the accident and emergency service at Lister and services across Hertfordshire would not be interfered with or diminished, he replied that he would not prejudge the consultation. Since that time, meetings have been held in all the main towns.

Mr. Bendall: Is my hon. Friend aware that the same regional health authority controls my area in Ilford, North and Sir William Staveley is giving the same answers to our questions? I am as deeply concerned about my area as my hon. Friend is about his—and I know a lot about his area because I was a parliamentary candidate there twice in 1974.

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend makes his point about his part of the world with his usual force.

In my constituency, the narrow country roads between the major trunk roads mean that transport between towns is difficult. Some of my constituents in the south-western villages might have to travel all the way to the Lister hospital instead of the QE2. The fear that long extra travel times would be needed if one of the accident and emergency services was closed has caused great anxiety.

It is wrong that such a document, which was not even a formal consultation document—it was described as a discussion document, among other things—should be produced. The purchasing authority should have made its intentions absolutely clear and been transparent in its actions.

I hope that the assurance for which my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield asked regarding the QE2 and all accident and emergency departments in Hertfordshire will be given today by my hon. Friend the Minister, as only that will set at rest the minds of my constituents and all those in the surrounding area who are concerned. I know that other Hertfordshire Members would share that view.

9.35 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) on the debate and on the powerful speech that he made. It was followed by another powerful speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald). My hon. Friends have amply demonstrated our commitment to the national health service in Hertfordshire and I endorse unreservedly all that they said about the progress that has been made in the health service in Hertfordshire in the past 15 years.

Let me add one footnote to the long list of achievements outlined by my hon. Friends. It is a great pleasure for me that, earlier this month, a brand new community hospital in Potters Bar replaced a building which had stood since the 1930s and which was clearly no longer in the best repair. The new community hospital is a brand new structure. It has excellent facilities offering many new services to my constituents, and the community of Potters Bar is justly proud of it.

Just a little way from Potters Bar, a major redevelopment of Barnet general hospital, long awaited and badly needed, is now being undertaken. I pay tribute to the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman), who is in his place, who long advocated the redevelopment of the hospital. We are pleased that that redevelopment is now taking place.

Let me make the following point about the wider context of the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. There is no wider context. The debate is very clear. It is about the future of the QE2 hospital in Welwyn and I should be grateful if the hon. Member addressed that matter.

Mr. Clappison: I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was a mistaken way of putting it. The future of Welwyn hospital is tied in with the future of local health services as patients move from one hospital to another.

Clearly, the future of Welwyn hospital has a material impact on my constituents who receive care in other hospitals. The concerns that my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield expressed about the discussion document to which he referred echoed much wider concerns in Hertfordshire. He also spoke for many other people when he referred to the research in that document.

Although I agree with planning health care, those who seek to plan health care must do so on the basis of the best possible research and the fullest consultation, taking into account all views from the public and planning on a long-term basis. I have serious concerns and reservations about whether the document meets those criteria.

In the longer-term context, it is not so long ago that I raised in an Adjournment debate the centralisation of hospital services from St. Albans to Hemel Hempstead. That has been followed by further proposals in the document, while modernisation and major redevelopment is taking place in Hemel Hempstead hospital. I mention that because it shows the importance of planning change in the long term, which is clearly relevant to Welwyn hospital.

I invite my hon. Friend the Minister to note widely felt concerns about the future of Welwyn hospital, the discussion document, planning, and the pace and acceptability of change.

9.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) is a hard act to follow, so I shall not detain the House. I appreciate the grave importance of the issue that he raised and the strong

feelings that it arouses. That is evidenced by the presence in the Chamber and speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), who is well known for her expertise in health matters, for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald), for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), and for Stevenage (Mr. Wood).

There is no doubt that the QE2 is an excellent hospital. I would have enumerated all its virtues but cannot match the eloquence and ferocity with which they were described by my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield. It can be taken as read that we all agree that the QE2 is an exceptional hospital and serves well the people of Welwyn Hatfield and of surrounding constituencies. It could not have a more powerful champion of its interests than my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield.

When we discuss the future, it must be said that hospital care is changing fast. I refer, for example, to greater use of day care. All kinds of services now provided in hospitals may in future be provided in doctors' surgeries, smaller units or even at home. That is making an enormous difference to the need for larger hospitals and the present number of acute beds. That fast-changing position means that at some time in future, the standard district hospital that we all know and love may not be the paradigm of acute care. Things are changing that fast.

Accident and emergency services are also developing fast. The role of paramedics in ambulance services is a powerful factor for change. Many lives are saved by the attendance of paramedics at serious accidents and emergencies and by the use of high-tech facilities in accident and emergency centres. We are starting to see the role played by what are known in America as trauma centres. The experimental centre at Stoke means that five or six district hospitals may be bypassed in the event of a serious accident and a patient taken straight to the trauma centre at a hospital providing 24-hour accident and emergency consultant cover.

Apart from full-scale trauma centres, we are seeing the emergence of the need for larger, high-tech accident and emergency centres. They must be accompanied by a full range of acute facilities. We are already witnessing the better outcomes and results of larger accident and emergency centres.

Against that fast-changing background, Hertfordshire health agency produced its discussion document, "Towards a Healthier Hertfordshire", to which my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield and other hon. Friends referred.

I would dissociate myself from one or two details in the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield, especially about some current and past servants of the health service. I agree that these are matters that excite powerful emotions and that it is wrong unnecessarily to alarm people about the future of their hospital services.

Having said that, I believe that there may well have to be change not only in Hertfordshire but throughout the country—we are seeing it already in London for reasons that my hon. Friend described so eloquently, and it is long overdue. I can give my hon. Friend the assurances that the Hertfordshire health agency recognises that much work continues to need to be done, that it needs to seek the co-operation and agreement of local trusts in changes that may take place, and that there are currently no plans for changes to accident and emergency provision in the east of Hertfordshire.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 26 January 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords](By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered upon Thursday 2 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Rural White Paper

1. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to learn about the view of organisations with rural interests as part of the rural White Paper exercise.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. William Waldegrave): My Department and that of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment wrote to a wide range of organisations in November inviting them to submit their views. Officials are also conducting meetings with a wide range of organisations, which will include a series of regional seminars involving Ministers from both Departments. The first of these will take place next month.

Mr. Tredinnick: Has my right hon. Friend heard views expressed similar to those expressed to me by farmers in my constituency, to the effect that they are very much against the veal crate system but feel that the blame lies fairly and squarely with nations on the continent? What has he done to persuade those nations to abolish the veal crate system, which is damaging the image of British farmers?

Mr. Waldegrave: I attended the Agriculture Council meeting on Monday, where I put on the agenda the proposal that the review of the veal crate system—proposed for review in 1997—should be brought forward immediately. I am happy to say that I had widespread support for that in the Council, and the Commission will now bring forward the review.

If there had been a vote there and then in the Council, I believe that the veal crate system would have been abolished on the spot—not a single Council member spoke up for it. I am not so naive as to think that there will not now be a rearguard action from those who use the system, but we have started well. We must maintain the momentum to achieve this prize—the real prize of banning a practice that is unacceptable to farmers here and in many other parts of the European Union. It must be banned right across Europe.

Animal Welfare

2. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to improve the welfare of animals prior to slaughter.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are consulting on improved standards and are introducing on 1 April 1995 the national meat hygiene service, which will result in uniform standards and lower costs.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Despite what the Minister said a few moments ago about the veal crate system, was not an answer given in the European Parliament, after his meeting in Europe, to the effect that the review will not start until at least two years hence? By that time, at least 1 million more British calves—including calves from the right hon. Gentleman's farm—will have suffered under this appalling system.

Will the Minister tell me and the British people what justification there is for any exports of live animals for slaughter—quite apart from veal calves—given modern refrigeration techniques? Is it not the will of the British people completely to ban live exports for slaughter?

Mr. Waldegrave: Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman is misinformed. I know that a Labour Member of the European Parliament told him what he has just reported about the French Minister's remarks, but I have been in touch with the French Minister's cabinet—

Mr. Skinner: What does that mean?

Mr. Waldegrave: It means Cabinet in French.

I was assured that the French Minister, Mr. Puech, had been misquoted. That can only be right, as I was present at the Council meeting where he, as president, welcomed the fact that the Commission had said that it was bringing forward the review to this year and had already spoken to the relevant committee and asked for the review to begin.

Mr. Gale: Will my right hon. Friend continue his robust efforts to achieve a Europe-wide solution to the problems of veal crates and of the transportation of live animals for slaughter to prevent English exports from being replaced by a flood of imports from former Iron Curtain countries, with animals travelling longer distances under worse conditions? What steps does he intend to take to encourage the slaughter of animals in British abattoirs and the export of meat on the hook, not on the hoof?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. There is a bigger prize than securing the improvement that we secured by banning the use of veal creates in our own very small veal trade—securing a ban right across Europe. My hon. Friend is perfectly right to say that if we do not do so the animals will turn up from somewhere and these practices will continue. That surely is not what we want.

I will have more to say next week on my hon. Friend's second point, but he is perfectly right to say that we can take further steps to encourage trade on the hook and to develop a humane veal trade, including the British rose veal trade. We should not seek to demonise the idea of veal eating, because humane British-raised veal is good and it avoids the need or the demand for exports.

Mr. Tyler: May I press the Minister on the latter part of his answer? In the light of recent figures given to me by the Ministry showing that the number of abattoirs in

this country has halved in the past 15 years because so many small and local abattoirs have been forced out of business, what steps does the right hon. Gentleman have in mind to try to reduce livestock journeys within the United Kingdom? What steps does he propose to take to assist the industry to encourage home slaughter and home market development?

Mr. Waldegrave: We can take a range of steps, and I shall announce some more next week. Nowhere in the United Kingdom is there not a slaughterhouse within a satisfactory distance of farms in the neighbourhood. I know that there are problems in some areas of the south-west, but if one draws circles on the graph one finds that there is no need for excessive journey times to those slaughterhouses. There are further measures that we can take—support for marketing and so on—to develop a humane trade here and alternative uses for those calves.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: As the matter has recently been raised in the House, will my right hon. Friend put on record and clarify the position concerning the restarting of the live animal export trade in 1975?

Mr. Waldegrave: With your indulgence, Madam Speaker, I should like to correct one point. On 19 January, the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) accused me of misleading the House. He said:

"The House was thus misled by the allegation made by the right hon. Member for Bristol, West".—[*Official Report*, 19 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. 865.]—

that is me.

The hon. Gentleman said that I misled the House by accusing the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), a former Minister, of voting to restart live animal exports, which had been stopped in 1973. *[Interruption.]* That is what he said—read *Hansard.*

Three things are wrong with that. First, the hon. Gentleman did not—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The Minister should be given every opportunity to answer the question that he was asked, and he is now doing so.

Mr. Waldegrave: First, the hon. Gentleman did not do me the normal courtesy of warning me that he intended to raise the point and accuse me of misleading the House, but I shall let that pass. Secondly, I said no such thing. *Hansard* does not report me as saying anything about the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East, so he is wrong on that point. Thirdly, if I had said that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East had voted to restart the trade, I would have been right.

Fruit And Vegetables

3. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new initiatives he has to increase the proportion of home-grown fruit and vegetables consumed in the United Kingdom.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): My right hon. Friend and my ministerial colleagues and I take every opportunity to promote the virtues of home-grown fruit and vegetables.

Mr. Bayley: What possible justification can there be for Britain importing 17 out of every 20 items of fresh fruit and almost a quarter of the fresh vegetables that are on sale in shops? Does the Minister share my concern when he shops in any big supermarket and sees rack after rack of foreign produce? What is he doing in his discussions with the big food retailers to ensure that they boost sales of British fruit and vegetables?

Mr. Jack: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman asks that question. I held a meeting at the Ministry with all the major supermarket buyers to extol to them the virtues of buying British fruit, and I can confirm that, during the current Cox season, cheap imports from Holland were offered to supermarkets but they declined them. They are putting their money where their mouth is. The Ministry is spending at least £3 million on research into ways of extending seasons in the United Kingdom and to improve availability of home-grown produce. Our marketing development scheme and my horticultural project place a high priority on promoting our own excellent fruit and vegetables.

Mr. Lord: My hon. Friend will be aware that one of the most important home-grown vegetables is sugar beet, and the House will be aware that my hon. Friend is involved in negotiations in Europe on sugar beet quotas. I urge my hon. Friend to stand firm on behalf of all British sugar beet farmers to ensure that their quotas are not reduced.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend attended European Standing Committee A yesterday, where I hope he heard me make a robust defence of British sugar beet growers. The Government do not believe that their quotas should be reduced. Any quota reductions should be visited upon those who produce more than their domestic consumption. My right hon. Friend will robustly follow that line in the Agriculture Council.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister recognise that those who produce fruit and vegetables under glass in Britain gain nothing like the same assistance with and benefits from energy prices as their counterparts on the continent? Will he ensure that our producers get a fair crack of the whip and have a fair market for their products in Britain?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman, who represents Burnley, had better get down to the west Lancashire plain and ask growers about the innovative methods that they are employing not only to save energy but to secure it at lower prices. The old days when the Dutch had a gas subsidy are well and truly ended, and British growers are becoming adept at buying energy economically.

Environmentally Sensitive Farming

4. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his Department is doing to encourage environmentally sensitive farming.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): We are expanding the range of schemes to

encourage environmentally sensitive farming, and next year we plan to spend more than £100 million on such schemes in the United Kingdom.

Sir Irvine Patnick: As my hon. Friend is aware, Sheffield, Hallam and Peak park are interlinked. Will she confirm that rambling is to be encouraged but that the Labour party's policy of the right to roam will damage the countryside?

Mrs. Browning: I agree with my hon. Friend. He will be interested to know that, under the new countryside access scheme, which we introduced, 100 applications have been made and are being considered by the Agricultural Development Advisory Service. That will encourage the quiet use of the countryside through pursuits such as rambling and cycling on set-aside land. In the Peak parks and other such areas, we encourage responsibility among those who use and those who have stewardship of the countryside.

Mr. Hardy: Will the Minister ensure that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pays proper attention, as I believe the Department of the Environment may be doing, to the recent publication on biodiversity produced by the conservation bodies? For example, does she accept that nearly two thirds of the British skylark population has disappeared in the past 15 years or so and that such problems can be resolved only by the exercise of initiative by the Minister's Department and others?

Mrs. Browning: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman and I hope that he will support the habitat scheme, which is now in its first year and is particularly targeted at water fringe and marshlands. I hope that that will be the start of many other such schemes with a long-term option whereby they can be extended for up to 20 years. Certain species require such continuity to ensure that they and their habitats survive.

British Food Promotion

5. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has further to promote British food.

Mrs. Browning: We are working closely with food exporting firms and Food from Britain on a plan for vigorous promotion of British food and drink over the next three years.

Mrs. Knight: As part of the promotion of British food abroad, will my hon. Friend undertake to point out how much tastier Stilton from Hartington in Derbyshire is than, for example, a plastic covered Dutch Edam cheese, how much more nutritious a British sausage is than a watery frankfurter and how infinitely preferable it is to eat a British Cox apple than a continental Golden Delicious, which has the texture of cotton wool?

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend speaks with much justified pride about the speciality foods produced in her constituency. I am sure that we all recognise the contribution that speciality foods make not only to the taste and quality of United Kingdom food products, but to the export drive: Food from Britain is to spend £3 million on promoting such foods abroad.

Mr. Enright: Will the Minister consider setting aside a day on which to promote Yorkshire rhubarb?

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman has set me a challenge, but I can tell him that, as a former cookery teacher, I could certainly help to support those who may wish to demonstrate the preparation of crumble, *fruit compot* made with rhubarb and a range of other wonderful recipes that would restore a traditional British food to its rightful place.

Mr. Gill: Does my hon. Friend share my concern about the future availability of British fish? Does she not believe that the recently published report by Sir Crispin Tickell argues strongly for the abolition of the common fisheries policy?

Mrs. Browning: In last week's debate, both my right hon. Friend the Minister and my hon. Friend the Minister of State clearly explained that, although my right hon. Friend is establishing a committee to examine the future of the common fisheries policy, my hon. Friend's suggestion that its abolition would somehow help to promote fish stocks is quite wrong. It would, in fact, lead to a free-for-all: we should be faced with not 40 Spanish boats but 250.

I certainly believe in the promotion of fish. It contains healthy proteins, and I recommend it to hon. Members. I am told that it is good for the brain, and I particularly recommend it to my hon. Friend.

Animal Exports

6. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to end live animal exports from Britain.

12. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has for further regulating the export of calves for veal.

Mr. Waldegrave: At the meeting of the Agriculture Council on Monday, I succeeded in getting the Commission to bring forward a review of the directive that legalises veal crates from 1997 to this year. I was also delighted to hear the presidency say that the Council would return to the subject of improvements in the rules of live animal transportations in general at the next meeting. I hope the Council makes as good progress on the latter point as on the former.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Minister recognise that that simply is not good enough? The subject is being debated now because millions of people in this country and throughout Europe are appalled by the treatment of live animals during export, and want the practice to be stopped. Is it Government policy to stop the process by which live animals are exported in conditions of great cruelty and stress, and treated inhumanely?

Mr. Waldegrave: I will take the same position—a brave and sensible position—as was taken by the previous Labour Government. It would be mad to say that no animals could be exported from this country; what is necessary is to ensure that the animals that are exported are exported under tight welfare controls. If

animals could not be moved at all, some of those who are campaigning on the issue—although not the great mass of concerned people—would simply move to the next target, while farming in this country, Scotland and Wales would become impossible. A few miles of water do not mean that an animal cannot be moved safely if the proper standards are applied.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does the Minister agree with the Liberal spokesman on these matters, who viciously condemned the actions of protesters at British ports when all that they were doing was advocating what the majority of British people believe in?

Mr. Waldegrave: I believe that the Liberal spokesman described the welfare protesters as "naive, hysterical and counter-productive". There is a fringe attached to this movement, as to many other sensible movements, which ruins the cause by using violence and going much too far. It would be unwise of the House and of the Liberal spokesman not to recognise that there is widespread, genuine concern about this matter, but that should not mean, as has sometimes happened in the House in the past, that we over-react and completely ruin the conditions for farming in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. We must ensure proper welfare and proper enforcement. That is what we need.

Mr. Brooke: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in their latter stages, the previous Labour Government sought to impede debate on a private Member's Bill on live animal exports—a fact that I mention incidentally because of the indignation generated in the last Session about progress on private Member's Bills?

Mr. Waldegrave: Some such rows are fairly synthetic because I suspect that they depend on which side of the House one is on at the time. I do not think that this is a party issue, and it would be unwise for one party to claim that it has the monopoly of wisdom on it. Hon. Members on both sides of the House care about the issue. We must not be pushed by that genuine concern into such extreme measures that we make farming in Britain completely impossible.

Mr. Stephen: Further to the point made by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), is my right hon. Friend aware that, at the same time as the Liberal Democrat rural affairs spokesman was telling farmers that his party was not in favour of the ban on animal exports, Liberal Democrat councillors in my constituency were telling the townspeople that they were in favour of it?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. Mr. David Bellotti, who was briefly a Member of the House, took a very different line from the Liberal Democrat spokesman. That is the joy of being a Liberal: one can say anything one likes in any part of the country and it does not matter at all if all the others say something different.

Dr. Strang: May I return to the right hon. Gentleman's reference to the *Official Report* of 19 January and explain that my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) was referring to the hon. Member for Gloucestershire,. West (Mr. Marland), who intervened during Prime Minister's Questions? May I set the record straight by explaining that in 1973, on a Labour motion, which was opposed by the then Conservative Government, live animal exports were banned. I voted for that motion.

When the Labour Government took office, the O'Brien committee, which the Conservative party set up, recommended the resumption of the trade, which at that time was in live cattle and some pigs and was a very small trade. The committee recommended the resumption of the trade on the basis of increased safeguards. That was accepted not only by the Labour Government but by Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have never sought to attack the hon. Gentleman on this. He seems to have taken a perfectly sensible position throughout and it is generous of him to try to protect the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley). However, it would have been decent of his hon. Friend to apologise. He said:

"The House was thus misled by the allegation made by the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave)."—[*Official Report*, 19 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. 865.]

Mr. Morley: I did not say that.

Mr. Waldegrave: That is what *Hansard* records. We should be making a little progress if the hon. Gentleman said that *Hansard* had made up and printed a whole speech for no reason that is obvious to me.

Mr. Knapman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best scenario for calves is for them to be slaughtered in British abattoirs, thereby increasing employment prospects and adding value? The worst scenario would be an immediate and unilateral ban because that would reduce the price of small Holstein calves to nil and they would be knocked on the head straight after birth.

Mr. Waldegrave: I believe that my hon. Friend is right. To change a trade such as this, which has become established, will take some time. We must, first, secure a veal crate ban. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that we want to encourage the export of meat on the hook. That would create jobs and would be better in welfare terms. If we were to kill small calves on the farm immediately they were born, it would not be satisfactory in welfare terms, and would not be acceptable to the British public or to the great majority of British farmers.

Fruit And Vegetables

7. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to encourage the local marketing of fruit and vegetables.

Mr. Jack: The development, of local marketing of fresh fruit and vegetables is an objective of my horticulture project and of the marketing development scheme.

Mr. Hall: Is the Minister aware of the increased consumer interest in direct marketing, which brings the benefits of fresh produce, often organically produced, at competitive prices? There is also a better return for producers. Will the Government emulate the United States

Government by funding research into improving direct marketing and by promoting it among consumers and producers?

Mr. Jack: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised that interesting development, as it has a particular application to rundown city areas. When my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) was Minister responsible for food, he visited the American version of what the hon. Gentleman described—the so-called "green markets" in New York. As a result of that, a project is now being undertaken in Knowsley on Merseyside and approaches are being made through the city challenge mechanism—introduced by this Government—to promote the introduction of that interesting scheme.

Mr. Hawkins: My hon. Friend is well aware that in my constituency, as in his neighbouring one, horticulture is an important industry. Will he confirm that his Department will continue to support those who are trying to improve the marketing of excellent British horticultural products?

Mr. Jack: I thank my hon. Friend for his support for the work that we are doing. I commend to him and his growers the marketing development scheme. It has a £10 million budget over three years, it is the most flexible scheme that we have had and it is aimed at helping people in horticulture and in all branches of the food industry. It could be of benefit to the Blackpool area.

Mr. Martyn Jones: Is the Minister aware of the latest report by the Institute for Public Policy Research, which exposes the absurdity of supermarkets in Scotland selling milk from Dorset or ones in Evesham selling asparagus from Spain when there is a glut of the same product locally? If not, will he read that report and then provide maximum help for initiatives such as those mentioned already, which would benefit local producers, local consumers and the environment?

Mr. Jack: I am certainly aware of the line taken in that report. I hope that the hon. Gentleman listened to my remarks a few moments ago. We have had an extremely good response to the marketing development scheme, which is designed to do precisely what he has suggested—as is the £12 million that we have spent on horticulture research and development. In an earlier answer, I also referred specifically to extending the seasonal availability of British produce, on which we are spending a targeted amount of £3 million.

Animal Welfare

8. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new proposals he has to improve animal welfare.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have a very wide range of measures in place.

Mr. Flynn: Will the right hon. Gentleman congratulate the demonstrators at the three sites for their great courage and foresight? They are in advance of public opinion and have roused the Government's conscience. Had the Government listened to Compassion in World Farming 10 years ago, the changes could have been made in an orderly way, thus avoiding the problems of sudden change now faced by farmers.

Now that the right hon. Gentleman is claiming one prize, will he go for the triple crown and move on other fronts where sentient living creatures are treated as though they have no feelings and no nervous system? Will he respond to the campaigns on other animal abuse and stop hunting for sport and unnecessary experiments on animals?

Madam Speaker: Order. That is a total abuse of Question Time.

Mr. Waldegrave: Action was under way before I arrived at the Department. My right hon. Friend the current Secretary of State for Education was leading the way with a shift in the Government's position and a move to the vanguard of the campaign to improve transportation. That proves that action was genuinely under way.

I do not believe that anyone in the country is not now behind the movement to ban veal crates and to achieve higher standards. I am sorry to say, however—the vets are telling us this—that animals in lorries surrounded by the uproar of a demonstration suffer and often have to be put down there and then. Animal welfare is suffering from the methods being used.

I say to the demonstrators that they should go to Brussels. This may sound odd, but I was sorry to find that there were no demonstrators in Brussels on Monday. It would have been better to have support from the very powerful British non-governmental organisations to press for change where it is needed, which is in Brussels.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my right hon. Friend point out to many of those people that there is a considerable movement of animals between Scotland and the west country, and between Scotland and other parts of country, and that that movement has been undertaken sensibly for many years, with full protection for animals although those journeys are often much longer than those taken by animals exported across the channel?

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not believe that the occasional abuse that takes place in this country is the source of all the concern. We have reasonable rules, which are policed. The concern is not that one cannot move an animal humanely a reasonable distance—one can. The concern is to achieve better welfare standards in Europe. That must be done by changing European law. Otherwise, as I said earlier, the whole of British farming will come to a halt. If that happened, the same people who are campaigning and complaining now would be asking what we are doing to support British farming.

Mr. Morley: Does the Minister agree that one of the steps that could be taken to improve animal welfare would be to introduce a licensing scheme for animal hauliers and exporters? Does he think it acceptable that exporters such as Phoenix Aviation from Coventry should operate cargo planes without proper export permits, that Hall Farms of York should continue to export animals after being prosecuted for breaking journey time regulations, or that people like Richard Otley, who is exporting sheep through Brightlingsea, who has criminal convictions for animal cruelty, and who was arrested last week for deliberately provoking and abusing local people, deliberately flouted agreements with Brittany Ferries and is associated with people convicted for violence? Incidentally, he claims to

have been approached to be a Tory candidate and to have the ear of the Prime Minister. Does the Minister agree that such people bring the livestock industry into disrepute?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am slightly disappointed that the hon. Gentleman, who is a decent man, did not take the opportunity to apologise. Last week he said a range of things which turned out to be not quite right, so I should like to check all his allegations closely before I comment on them.

Abattoirs

9. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the European rules relating to abattoirs in England and Wales; with whom he or his subordinates last discussed these at the European Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: In the last few months of 1994, a number of discussions took place between the Commission and member states about the fresh meat directive. Organisations representing the industry were kept fully informed. Last month's Agriculture Council agreed, in principle, a number of amendments to the directive which will give small abattoirs more flexibility in their throughput.

Mr. Llwyd: I am sure that I speak for everyone when I say that it is highly desirable that animals should be slaughtered as near as possible to the point of production. With that in mind, may I urge the Minister to press for a further upward derogation of livestock units for smaller abattoirs at the next Agriculture Council?

Mrs. Browning: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that we have made considerable progress on behalf of small abattoirs. We shall obviously continue to consider how the new changes proceed. There are new abattoirs being built, as well as abattoirs that are having to close.

Sir Donald Thompson: Will my hon. Friend continue to encourage the building of the new abattoirs? Will she remind Opposition Members that if the codes of practice for the rearing and slaughter of animals were introduced across Europe there would be a great advance throughout?

Mrs. Browning: Yes, I can assure my hon. Friend on that: we all want high standards on an even playing field throughout the European Community.

Dairy Industry

10. **Ms Church:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to prevent job losses in the dairy industry.

14. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to prevent job losses in the dairy industry.

Mr. Jack: The Government are contributing to that objective through their programme to improve the competitiveness of British industry and the £3.5 million that the Ministry spends annually on research and development in dairying.

Ms Church: I do not know whether the Minister has milk delivered to his doorstep, or whether he pays his own milk bill. If he does, he will be aware of the rising price of milk delivered to the doorstep. Is he aware that Dairy Crest, which has a plant in my constituency, is having to close plants across the country as a direct result—this has been stated by the chief executive—of the Government's deregulation of the dairy industry? What do the Government have to say today about the number of jobs that have been lost in the dairy industry as a direct result of deregulation?

Mr. Jack: On the latter point, I remind the hon. Lady that the number of people employed in the dairying industry has been falling. In 1984 it was 89,500, and by 1991 it was 72,300, which shows that there has been a decline in the consumption of milk and cream products. As for the rise in the price of milk, my local dairyman has benefited to the tune of 1.5p per pint from a reduction in the levy that he paid because there is no milk marketing board to pay, so he is pleased with the changes. Finally, the industry was carrying a great deal of spare capacity; as a result of the removal of the milk marketing board, there is now better utilisation of existing capacity, to the long-term benefit of the industry.

Mr. O'Brien: The Minister must be aware that Milk Marque now has a monopoly of the milk industry, and that, since the abolition of the milk marketing board cheese prices have increased substantially and continue to rise well above the rate of inflation. Is he also aware that the spot market is controlled by Milk Marque, which is exporting cheap milk from mainland Britain to keep prices high? What is he doing to help dairy producers who have to meet high costs for their raw material and whose product is undercut by the abolition of the milk marketing board, thus causing job losses in the milk marketing industry?

Mr. Jack: I am disappointed that, in his enumeration of various problems, the hon. Gentleman did not also point out some of the positive aspects of the changes that were introduced. For instance, many cheese producers used to have an on-off supply under the old arrangement, but now they can have certainty of supply. The hon. Gentleman should check his facts more carefully before accusing Milk Marque of having a monopoly in the milk industry, as companies such as Northern Food Partnership, Nestlé and many other purchasers of milk would fundamentally disagree.

Mr. Colvin: Is my hon. Friend aware that last year British dairy farmers were penalised in comparison with their European competitors because of the way in which the butter fat in their milk was measured, which resulted in their being well above their quota? What is he doing to level the playing field?

Mr. Jack: I am glad that my hon. Friend raised that matter, which has also been raised by a number of my local farmers. Work is under way to examine some of the variable results that have been recorded. I stress that the tests which used to be carried out by the milk marketing board and the Agricultural Development Advisory Service are both approved by the Commission.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: Will my hon. Friend press the European Union to allow milk quotas to be traded across

national frontiers within the Community so that our efficient dairy farmers can obtain a higher quota and supply the milk that our processors need?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend, who speaks with the knowledge gained from a farming constituency, is absolutely right. We have one of the most developed markets for the movement of surplus quota, to the benefit of all our dairy farmers, and we are campaigning for a much more flexible approach to cross-Community transferability of quota. We shall continue to pursue that objective vigorously.

Dr. Strang: Will the Minister acknowledge that, as a direct result of deregulation, creameries have closed at Stranraer, Longridge and Whitland, as well as a number of small niche English cheese makers? How much capacity and how many jobs will be lost before the Government recognise the seriousness of the situation?

Mr. Jack: Sometimes the hon. Gentleman's synthetic rage overwhelms me. If he is truly concerned about the future of jobs in the dairy industry, perhaps he will join me in reviewing the claim for increased wages—above the rate of inflation—made by trade unions representing the dairy trade. They asked for two extra days holiday, a reduction in the working week, increases in weekend premiums and night rate allowances and—believe it or not—the setting up of a pan-European social partnership committee. Is that the way to safeguard jobs in the dairy industry?

11. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will next meet the President of the National Farmers Union to discuss the dairy sector.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend the Minister regularly meets representatives of all sides of the agriculture industry, including the president of the National Farmers Union, to discuss issues of importance to them.

Sir David Knox: Is my hon. Friend aware that farmers in my constituency—*[Interruption.]*—are concerned about reports of black market trading in milk? Will he give an assurance that vigourous action will be taken against anyone indulging in such practices?

Mr. Jack: The importance of my hon. Friend's question was clearly acknowledged by cheers from the Labour Benches. I can certainly assure him that the intervention board is taking seriously the information that has come to hand about black market trading in milk. The fraud line which has been established has already received more than 100 calls on the matter. The investigations are complex, but they are being carried out with vigour.

Mr. Clapham: Is the Minister aware that, under the Milk Marque regime, a farmer who leases his quota must have his documents approved by the intervention board before they can be passed on to the quota broker and that that is currently taking two months whereas under the milk marketing boards it used to be done in a week? As it is causing a great deal of hardship for farmers, will the Minister look into the matter and see what can be done to speed up the process?

Mr. Jack: I can do one better than that for the hon. Member. I have already been down to the intervention board to investigate the situation. It is true that there were delays towards the end of last year. The only remaining documents to be processed are those related to the extension for lease transfers that we gave to the end of the year. All other matters are now up to date, and a good level of service can be expected.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 26 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Spellar: Does the Prime Minister think that Cedric Brown of British Gas is worth his huge pay increase—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: I think that is a matter for the shareholders.

Sir Anthony Grant: Is my right hon. Friend aware that since his answer in this House on Tuesday, public bewilderment and, indeed, outrage over the fate of Private Clegg has increased? Will he give the House an assurance that he and his Ministers will do all in their power to bring this injustice to a speedy end?

The Prime Minister: I set out the position in the House on Tuesday and how that should be developed. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will have to consider any new evidence put to him and decide first whether that is sufficient to warrant a further reference to the Court of Appeal. In the meantime, the proper procedures—which I outlined at length on Tuesday and, with my hon. Friend's permission, will not repeat—have now begun.

Mr. Blair: What does it tell us about the Prime Minister's Government when his Secretary of State for Social Security says that Ministers should be paid more—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Conservative Members may agree with that, but precious few people in the country do. *[Interruption.]* There they are—the Tory yobboes. What does it tell us when the Secretary of State for Social Security says that Ministers should be paid more—

Mr. David Shaw: Your pay has doubled. What about barristers and wives' earnings?

Madam Speaker: Order. I have called the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) to order on many occasions before. I shall not be so lenient in future.

Mr. Blair: What does it tell us, when the Prime Minister's Secretary of State for Social Security says that Ministers should be paid more and that Back-Bench Members of Parliament should have more directorships and consultancies, while at the self-same time the same Social Security Minister is introducing a law that will savage mortgage protection for the unemployed?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is taking a very puritanical view, in view of the number of special interests that so many of his right hon. and hon. Friends have, including a number of his hon. Friends on

the Front Bench. As the right hon. Gentleman will know, there is a proper procedure for setting ministerial salaries and the salaries of Members of this House. It is based on a widely accepted formula, it has been approved by this House and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is entirely happy with that formula.

Mr. Blair: Is it sensible to cut mortgage protection when home owners are already facing rising interest rates and cuts in mortgage tax relief? Do the Prime Minister and his party not understand that we shall never build a strong and prosperous Britain by deliberately passing laws designed to make our people weak and insecure?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has obviously forgotten the policy commitments of his own party. For example, in view of what he has just said, he may have forgotten that on MIRAS—mortgage interest relief at source—one of the Labour party's own policy groups threatened to abolish the allowance entirely. The right hon. Gentleman clearly belongs to that species of politician which believes that the facts are for bending whenever convenient.

With regard to mortgages, the right hon. Gentleman should be aware that the drop in mortgages from their peak, as a result of our economic policies—*[Interruption.]* The drop in costs from their peak since interest rates have been falling is £140 a week. If the policies on borrowing and spending that the right hon. Gentleman has in mind were carried out, mortgages would go straight back up by £140 a week.

Mrs. Roe: Does my right hon. Friend welcome the fairer and more reasonable approach that we shall now receive from the Child Support Act 1991, the purpose of which was never in doubt, but the application of which caused very considerable concerns?

The Prime Minister: There has never been any doubt about the principle that parents should support their own children, provided that they are able to do so. That principle is accepted widely in this House and beyond. The changes that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has now put in place will enable the agency to work in the manner that we would all wish to see.

Q2. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 26 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. MacShane: The Prime Minister is well known as a fan of the Commonwealth and a supporter of India. He will therefore know Gandhi's dictum that there is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed. I have that written here; if I give it to the Prime Minister framed, will he put it on the wall in the boardroom of No. 10 Downing street?

The Prime Minister: I think that everyone who heard that intervention, and the millions who may have watched it on television, will form their own judgment of its value.

Q3. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 26 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Luff: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Worcester Royal Infirmary trust on the significant improvement in the health care that it is delivering in my constituency? That is a tribute to the health care reforms, to the resources that the Government are making available and to the dedication and professionalism of all the trust's staff. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way to continue those improvements is by the early construction of a new district general hospital, using the private finance initiative?

The Prime Minister: I am very pleased to hear from my hon. Friend about the excellent health services provided in Worcester. That is mirrored in many places across the country. Private finance certainly offers a cost-effective way of funding new hospitals and new developments. It is entirely right to explore that.

Mr. Radice: As there is not to be a statement to the House today, will the Prime Minister confirm that the White Paper on the civil service proposes a civil service code and an independent appeals system and that it keeps open the Government's mind about whether those should be backed by statute? Does he agree that the Government's adoption of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee's constitutional agenda is a vindication of the Select Committee system?

The Prime Minister: I think that there is very wide support for the Select Committee system across the House and beyond it. The White Paper will command the very broad respect and support of hon. Members across the House on the points that the hon. Gentleman mentioned and on several others.

Q4. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 26 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Colvin: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government are about to place orders for support helicopters for the Royal Air Force? As the two contenders—the Boeing Chinook and the Westland EH101—meet the specifications required by the Ministry of Defence, does he agree that a mixed fleet solution would best provide for the needs of our armed forces and also be best for British industry as it would improve the already good prospects for the sale of the Westland EH101 helicopter in overseas markets both in its civil version and in the many military versions that will become available?

The Prime Minister: Negotiations with the companies concerned in relation to support helicopters are still

continuing. I hope that we will be able to make a decision as soon as possible, but all the information upon which to base that decision is not yet available. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made clear in the past the potential advantages of a mixed fleet to meet the Army's requirements for support helicopters. Of course, that will be borne carefully in mind when we are in a position to make a final decision.

Q5. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 26 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: In so far as it is now over six months since *The Sunday Times* exposed the illegal activities of the so-called noble Lord Archer, Conservative peer—insider-dealing activities in Anglia shares—and in so far as it is quite clear that it is utterly impossible successfully to prosecute what we all know to be criminal activity, is there now going to be a review of the law in this area? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the last part of his question. He must not use that language and thus associate this House and all of us with what he has just said. I must ask him to withdraw it or rephrase it, please. *[Interruption.]* Order. Leave it to me. Will the hon. Gentleman please rephrase what he has just said?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: As against what?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has associated all of us in this House. I heard it very clearly myself. I ask the hon. Gentleman to rephrase. I heard the words very clearly. *[Interruption.]* Order. Let me give the hon. Gentleman a moment to reflect. I am sure that he will do as I ask.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I always defer to you, Madam Speaker, as you would know. I refer to what many believe to be criminal activity, but in my view it is unacceptable activity.

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to make those criticisms, I must now ask him to withdraw his remarks and to put them in an orderly substantive motion. I am asking him to rephrase what he has just said; otherwise I must ask him to leave this House for the remainder of this day's sitting.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I believe that it is criminal activity, and I will leave. I will leave the Chamber voluntarily.

Madam Speaker: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Butcher: Is my right hon. Friend prepared to widen the remit of the Nolan committee to examine sleaze in the media? Does he not find it unacceptable that three television executives, Mr. Greg Dyke, Mr. Barry Cox and Mr. Melvyn Bragg, should pretend to be objective in setting the agenda while they bankrolled the leadership campaign for the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)? As First Lord of the Treasury—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Sit down. I have just brought one hon. Gentleman to order and dealt with him. I intend to do the same in future with any Member who behaves in that way. There are perfectly respectable ways of putting questions in this House. I will give the hon. Gentleman an opportunity to do that; otherwise he must now sit down.

Mr. Butcher: I am grateful for your guidance, Madam Speaker, but there may be a distinction between what I am asserting and what the gentleman—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I will determine whether there is a distinction. The hon. Gentleman can put a substantive motion on the Order Paper if he is going to assert that. Will the hon. Gentleman re-think his question, or shall I call someone else?

Mr. Butcher: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the standards now being asserted as required of Members of this House on the sleaze question should also be applied to those in the media who may seek to influence events by means which should not be in their repertoire?

The Prime Minister: I think, Madam Speaker, that there would be a general wish for high standards in every aspect of public life, whether those concerned are elected or not.

Q6. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 26 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Olner: Is the Prime Minister aware of the strong public feelings in regard to the animal welfare movement, especially in connection with the live transportation of animals for slaughter? Will he talk to his colleagues about giving parliamentary time to my private Member's Bill, which seeks to make the practice unlawful? Does he agree that it is far better for our excellent British livestock to be exported on the hook than to endure the treacherous and hazardous journeys on the hoof to which they are currently subjected?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will recall that I made precisely the same point about the preference for export on the hook rather than on the hoof three or four Question Times ago. Beyond that, as he will know, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is making considerable progress, especially on veal crates in Europe. I am delighted to see that my right hon. Friend clearly has the hon. Gentleman's support.

Q7. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 26 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most important thing in local government is high standards of competence? Does he also agree that the gaff has been blown on the Labour party's activities in local government by the McKinstry memorandum?

The Prime Minister: That was certainly an enlightening document to read, and I hope that it will have wide circulation. When the hon. Member for Durham,

North (Mr. Radice) asked a question some time ago he said that if we wanted to know how Labour would look in government we should look at how it runs local councils.

Q8. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 26 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mullin: Will the Prime Minister join me in welcoming the conversion of many of his Conservative colleagues to an interest in miscarriages of justice? Will he also join me in hoping that that interest will extend to people who are not members of the Parachute Regiment, such as the three innocent people in the 18th year of their sentences for the Carl Bridgewater murder?

The Prime Minister: I do not propose to comment on the particular case; I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that it has been examined from time to time. On a more general point, I assure him that my hon. Friends are as concerned as he is to ensure that justice is faithfully and truthfully carried out.

Business of the House

3.32 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Will the Leader of the House please announce the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 30 JANUARY—Completion of consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill.

TUESDAY 31 JANUARY—Opposition Day (3rd allotted day). There will be a debate entitled "The threat to the existence of the NHS resulting from Government policies" on an Opposition motion.

Motion on the Police Grant Report (England and Wales).

WEDNESDAY 1 FEBRUARY—Until 2.30 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Motions on the English revenue support grant reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

THURSDAY 2 FEBRUARY—Until 7 o'clock, motions on the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) (General) Regulations and the Social Security (Incapacity Benefit) (Transitional) Regulations.

That will be followed by a debate on the allocation of the 1995-96 science budget on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 3 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet on Wednesday 1 February at 10.30 am to consider European Community documents as follows: Committee A, EC document No. 8958/94 relating to recording equipment in road transport; Committee B, EC document No. 4075/94, relating to agreement on social policy; EC document No. 6230/94, relating to the establishment of European committees for informing and consulting employees; and EC document No. 9069/94, relating to European social policy.

[Wednesday 1 February:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community documents: 8958/94, relating to recording equipment in road transport. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 48-xxvii (1993-94).

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community documents: (a) 4075/94, relating to agreement on social policy; (b) 6230/94, relating to informing and consulting employees (European Works Council); (c) 9069/94, relating to European social policy. Relevant European Legislation Committee reports: (a) HC 48-vii (1993-94) and HC48-xxvi (1993-94); (b) HC 48-xx (1993-94) and HC 48-xxvi (1993-94); (c) HC 48-xxvi (1993-94), HC 70-i (1994-95); and HC 70-iv (1994-95).

Floor of the House—English revenue support grant reports. The relevant reports are as follows:

Local Government Finance Report (England) 1995-96; Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1995-96; Special Grant Report (No. 12).]

In the following week, on Monday 6 February, I hope to set down for Second Reading the Agricultural Tenancies Bill [Lords], and I hope to take a number of orders on either Tuesday or Wednesday. On Thursday 9 February, I expect to provide for a debate on the White Paper on the future of the BBC on a motion for the Adjournment.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that information. Does he realise that there is concern that the House will be debating the English revenue support grant reports on Wednesday, but that the relevant documentation will not be available until Monday, leaving inadequate time for Members to be briefed as fully as they would wish?

Will the Leader of the House consider also an issue of greater concern? Will he look again at the business for Thursday and, in particular, the regulations on incapacity benefit? He will be aware that Ministers have acknowledged that those regulations are inadequate, and therefore defective, in that they do not cover how the new Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act will affect people who have mental health problems. Much concern has been expressed about a move towards enabling legislation generally, and it is difficult for the House to be put in the position of being asked to agree to regulations next Thursday when we know that the regulations will have to be amended and debated again at a later date.

When do the Government intend to find time for a debate on the civil service on the Floor of the House, not least because—as was pointed out during Prime Minister's questions—the Government have today published their response to the Select Committee report and the consultations on the White Paper by means of a written answer? The House would wish to know when there is likely to be a proper debate on that issue.

Finally, instead of the flawed regulations that are down for debate on Thursday, could we have a debate on the cuts in the budget of the Countryside Council for Wales? Those cuts are serious, and there is widespread concern that the Countryside Commission will not be able to meet its obligations under the biodiversity convention or the European habitat and species directive. The concern has now led to speculation that there are about to be elements of privatisation involved in the matter, which could include the privatisation of Snowdonia and the Brecon Beacons.

Mr. Newton: Taking those points in order, I shall certainly look into the point that the hon. Lady raised about the documentation in relation to the revenue support grant orders. I say that without making a commitment to make a change, but obviously if I can accelerate the arrival of the information in any way, I shall be glad to do so. I would not wish to encourage expectation that I could postpone the debate that is planned for Wednesday, but I shall be as helpful as I can in respect of the documentation.

The hon. Lady's second point related to the incapacity for work regulations. I understand that they have been discussed by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, but there are problems of the kind to which the hon. Lady alluded. I would not want to make a snap judgment on the action that I shall take, but—I hope that the hon. Lady accepts this as being in good faith—I shall certainly undertake to look into the matter and undertake further consultation through the usual channels should that seem appropriate.

[Mr. Newton]

I shall bear in mind the hon. Lady's request for a civil service debate. She went on to make a tendentious suggestion for what might take the place of the debate on the incapacity for work regulations should any action be taken in that respect. Even with all the good will that I have tried to put into my first three answers, I do not think that I could promise a debate on a matter which, in my view, she has overstated and, to some extent, mis-stated.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Will my right hon. Friend find time to allow the House to debate the rules and regulations governing the consultation procedures between airports and those who live around them? Is he aware that Manchester airport recently had a change in its standard instrument departure route, better known to my constituents as the flight path? That has meant that a number of people now have planes flying over their houses which have not done so in the past. It seems that, under the present consultation procedures, everybody was consulted apart from those who now have planes flying over their houses. Will my right hon. Friend find time to allow a debate on that matter?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that I can promise to find time to allow the matter to be debated, but I can promise to bring my hon. Friend's point, which was new to me, to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 494, which has now been signed by more than 100 hon. Members?

[*That this House notes that 29th January 1995 is the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp; joins in mourning the millions of victims of Nazism who died there and in other such death camps; sends its greetings to the survivors, their relatives and the world leaders who are gathering in Poland to commemorate the liberation; and joins with the Jewish people and all other sufferers from Nazism in its determination to ensure that the memory of the past will be a beacon to the future and that there will never be another Holocaust.*]

As tomorrow is the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, does not the right hon. Gentleman think that he should allow some time for the House to join in mourning the victims of Nazism who died there—people of all faiths—and to join world leaders, the leaders of Jewish communities and other survivors and sufferers who are gathered in Poland to commemorate that event, to show that we shall not forget the past and ensure that there is no future holocaust?

Mr. Newton: While I am not able to do exactly as the hon. and learned Gentleman suggests, I hope that the very fact that he raised that matter and enabled me to endorse the feelings that we all have at the time of this anniversary about the events uncovered at that time, will be a mark of the respect that hon. Members on both sides of the House would wish to pay to those who suffered in the camps. I think that the whole House will be pleased that Lord Jakobovits, the former Chief Rabbi, is representing the Queen at the official Polish ceremony and the later Jewish ceremony in respect of those events.

Sir Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): May we have an urgent debate in view of the article in *The Spectator* on 21 January entitled, "This won't wash", which is also known as the McKinstry report, so that the electorate may be made aware of what a Labour Government could, or would, be like?

Mr. Newton: Having read the article with increasing astonishment at the author, but increasing recognition of what was described, I am once more much tempted by a debate and shall certainly keep that thought in mind.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Does the Leader of the House accept that the changes to the Child Support Agency announced by the Secretary of State for Social Security on Monday were welcome, as far as they went? Does he also acknowledge that much uncertainty still exists about the consequences of those changes for families? When does he expect to introduce legislation to give effect to those amendments, and will he assure the House that, when he does so, we shall have an opportunity to consider the Child Support Act in its first principles?

Mr. Newton: There are two points. First, I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman when the Bill will be introduced, but we shall try to do so as rapidly as possible and work to that end is very much in train, as I well know. A number of illustrative examples of the workings of the proposed new arrangements, in comparison with existing arrangements, were published at the time of the White Paper. I hope that they will have been helpful to many families involved. On the latter part of the question, the scope of the debate will clearly be related to the scope of the Bill and, since I do not have that, I would be very unwise to give the hon. Gentleman any specific undertakings.

Sir Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): May I remind my right hon. Friend that this weekend marks not only the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, but the 1,000th day of the siege of Sarajevo, which shows that evil has not passed from this world? Will he take this opportunity to salute the courage and dignity of the citizens of Sarajevo? May I draw his attention to early-day motion 468, which marks that occasion?

[*That this House salutes the citizens of Sarajevo, as they mark 1,000 days of seige, for the courage and dignity with which they have withstood devastations and privations no civilised community should be called upon to bear; expresses its profound regret that none of the institutions of the international community have been able effectively to deter the aggression of those Bosnian Serbs who accept the leadership of Radovan Karadic; believes it is essential that such aggression should not be rewarded and that what the Mayor of Sarajevo has recently referred to as 'the exceptional and unique charms of multiculturalism', of which the city has been such a shining example, are not allowed to perish; and urges Her Majesty's Government to give whatever support it can to ensure that Sarajevo survives as an open and united city and capital of an independent nation.*]

May I also draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 450, which deals with the situation in Chechnya?

[*That this House, whilst recognising that Chechnya has for many years been part of the Russian Federation and that it is entirely acceptable for any legitimate government of a nation state to assert its authority over those who unilaterally seek to declare their independence, nevertheless believes that such action should never include the indiscriminate slaughter of a civilian population and the wanton destruction of their homes; considers that those who take such action should not expect their conduct to go unchallenged; accordingly denounces the action taken by Russian troops in Chechnya as being a gross violation of the standards of behaviour acceptable in a civilised society; contends that those who ordered such action have also violated the principles of the Helsinki agreements and forfeited the moral authority to be accepted as the sole arbiters of the fate of the Chechen people; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to refer recent events in Chechnya to the Security Council of the United Nations and to urge that a code of internationally acceptable conduct for resolving internal disputes within nations, which gives neither encouragement to rebellion nor approval to genocide, be agreed.*]

Do not those two events illustrate the need for an early debate on foreign affairs?

Mr. Newton: I join my hon. Friend in his comments about the people of Sarajevo and in his awareness of the situation in Chechnya. Once again, I am not in a position to promise a debate at this moment, but I shall, as ever, bear my hon. Friend's thoughts in mind.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On Wednesday's business at 2 o'clock, on the Libyan sanctions and Lockerbie, may I ask the Leader of the House a question of which I have given both his office and the private secretary to the Foreign Secretary notice? Before that debate, can the Government confirm or deny their view of the reports that emanate from the air intelligence unit of the department of the United States air force, to the effect that Ali Akbar Mostahemi, former Iranian Minister of the Interior at the time of the shooting down of the Vincennes and later ambassador to Damascus between 1982 and 1985, paid $10 million in gold and cash with the purpose of boxing—to use the American expression—Pan Am 103?

Mr. Newton: Not for the first time, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his question. As he will probably be aware, since I understand that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is answering two questions on this subject this afternoon; and as the hon. Gentleman—I am glad to say—has secured an Adjournment debate next Wednesday to which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary hopes personally to reply, the hon. Gentleman will understand why I do not think it appropriate to go into his question this afternoon.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Will my right hon. Friend consider early-day motion 329?

[*That this House welcomes the theme marking the 50th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, namely, We, the peoples, united for a better world; appreciates that this hope for a better world can be realised only if the successor generation is involved now; welcomes the Council for Education in World Citizenship's non-partisan work over more than 50 years supporting education for international understanding and responsibility among young people and their teachers; recognises that current proposals to phase out the funding for the Council for Education in World Citizenship would put at risk the continuation of the work of the Council for Education in World Citizenship; and calls on the Government to strengthen its support for the Council for Education in World Citizenship to enable the Council to increase its valuable work through schools and colleges.*]

The motion concerns the Council for Education in World Citizenship. Would it be possible to include that subject in a foreign affairs debate; or perhaps to obtain a statement from the Department for Education on whether it can find more funding so that our young people can be made aware of world issues such as Bosnia, the 50th anniversary of the discovery of the concentration camps and other such events, to show that the world is not always a benign place?

Mr. Newton: I cannot offer further funds for that excellent work, but I certainly hope that it will continue to be well supported. Were there to be a debate on foreign affairs, I would of course bear my hon. Friend's suggestion in mind.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): May we have a debate as soon as possible on employment conditions, so that we may discuss this week's figures, which reveal that workers in Britain work longer hours than their counterparts in any other country in the European Community? Uniquely in the Community, British working hours have been increasing over the past decade. The Government's policy is to have huge numbers of people unemployed at the same time as making those in jobs work ever longer hours. Does not that suggest a Government of unique economic incompetence?

Mr. Newton: That is one of the silliest questions I have heard for some time. I have not yet seen the report, but I understand that much of the increase in hours is due to increased overtime being worked. Those gaining from the overtime may not welcome the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question. If the statistics that he cites prove anything, they show why we have one of the most successful economies in Europe.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent debate on the spending policies of the Labour-Liberal-controlled Kent county council, which has brought the county to financial ruin and anarchy? Will he also take steps to point out to the Secretary of State for Education the fact that the Kent chief education officer is behaving more like a politician than a responsible public servant?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend's remarks seem to tie in remarkably well with the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) about the need for a debate on a recent article in *The Spectator*. Should it prove possible to stage such a debate, it is clear that my hon. Friend could make a fruitful contribution to it.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House give us a debate, or at least arrange for a statement from the relevant Minister, on the severe weather conditions of the past 24 hours in the north of England, particularly in West Yorkshire? Tragically, there have been about six deaths, and 5,000 people have been stranded on the M62. What action do the Government

[Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe]

intend to take to support the local authorities and other organisations that will need to spend money following those tragic events? There is sometimes a feeling in the north that, just because it is the north, it does not get the attention that it deserves.

Mr. Newton: On the last point—whether or not that is believed—I would resist any such suggestion. On the earlier part of the hon. Gentleman's question, every hon. Member, whether he is from the south, the north or any other part of the country, and on both sides of the House, would wish to express sympathy at the situation faced by so many people in the area to which he referred. I shall, of course, bring his request that the matter be considered to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate next week on early-day motion 403?

[*That this House, whilst appreciating the appeal of hormone replacement therapy to many women, strongly urges the Canadian Government not to enforce a humane code on the country's 485 pregnant mares' urine business farms which produce materials for use in HRT by cruel methods and then to eliminate these farms altogether in favour of the production of synthetically produced hormones, thus obviating unnecessary suffering by horses as well as meeting demands for this drug.*]

The motion draws the attention of the House to the brutal way in which hormone replacement therapy materials are obtained from mares in Canada—

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Where is Teresa?

Mr. Greenway: I know that HRT benefits some people—they think so, anyhow.

As HRT can be obtained more efficiently by synthesis, may we debate that early-day motion, with a view to seeking to influence the Canadian Government?

Mr. Newton: That, perhaps, is a subject that my hon. Friend might wish to bear in mind for the productive area of our new Wednesday morning debates. I do not think that I can provide time for a debate, but I welcome the fact that the Canadian Government have recently revised the code governing the treatment of those horses, and that all farms currently satisfy relevant guidelines. I very much hope that that is the case.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate or—at the very least—a statement on the rules of procedure governing the placing of advertisements by or on behalf of Ministers? I refer particularly to an advertisement in yesterday's edition of *The Guardian*, headed

"Ending discrimination against disabled people",

which is described as being issued on behalf of the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People. It was the day after the Disability Discrimination Bill received its Second Reading and before the House had formally submitted the Bill to scrutiny in Standing Committee for consideration or amendment. Surely the Government spend a small fortune as it is on news manipulation, news management and public relations. How can such expenditure possibly be justified?

Mr. Newton: I have not seen the advertisement and will bring the hon. Lady's comments to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Has my right hon. Friend any plans to allow time for a debate on possible changes to the quarantine regulations? Is he aware that the Select Committee on Agriculture produced a lengthy report with certain recommendations, and that yesterday my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food rejected those recommendations? In view of the fact that there is wide interest in the subject, is not it appropriate that the House should debate the recommendations rather than leave it at that?

Mr. Newton: I saw the Select Committee's response, and my right hon. Friend made it clear that he shared many of its concerns, especially its determination to maintain effective safeguards, for example, against rabies. I cannot immediately promise a debate, but will bear my hon. Friend's request in mind.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Leader of the House aware that, in the past few months, quite a number of contracts have been handed out by British Coal to various firms, under the privatisation of the coal industry? Will he arrange for a statement to be made by a Minister next week in view of the fact that there is a lot of consternation about the contract that has been handed out to Mr. R.J. Budge—a contract that was reduced by £100 million after the initial bid made? It is based on a very shaky financial base and many people are worried about whether that contract can be sustained in an industry that can be beset by geological difficulties, as well as anything else. Can a statement be made about the financial problem that might well arise in the coal industry because of that contract?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise a statement, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will examine the hon. Gentleman's remarks with care.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that quite a number of Conservative Members would appreciate an early debate on the civil service, particularly as we now learn that a written answer is to be published in *Hansard* later today, outlining some of the Government's response to the recent Select Committee report? As I served on that Select Committee and heard all the evidence, I wonder whether he is aware that some of us believe that there are strong grounds already for a fully fledged new civil service code with statutory backing. Will he consider that carefully before such a debate?

Mr. Newton: Having now had requests for a debate from both sides of the House, I shall consider them with even greater care.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): Will the Leader of the House find time in the near future for a debate on student financial support? Is he aware that Durham university in my constituency is regarded as one of the most affluent universities in Britain, yet many

students there face great difficulties, particularly mature students who had their grants stopped under the recent Budget announcement? Such a debate is important so that the House can express its feelings towards those students, many of whom are now troubled by the fact that they may not be able to continue their courses at the university. In addition, the prospect of financial difficulties may stop youngsters going into higher education.

Mr. Newton: I should preface my remarks by saying that, despite somewhat similar suggestions over quite a long period now, there has, nevertheless, continued to be a large increase in the numbers going into higher and further education, something that we all welcome. However, I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my right hon. Friend find time at an early date for one of the traditional annual single-service days in order to give right hon. and hon. Members an opportunity to debate the merits of locating the Army Chaplain school at Royal Air Force Amport house alongside the Naval Chaplain school, which is co-located with the Royal Air Force at Amport house, to their mutual advantage?

Mr. Newton: I note my hon. Friend's representations on a particular point that might be covered in such a debate. More generally, of course I shall be looking at an appropriate time for the debate that my hon. Friend has in mind, but I cannot make any precise predictions about the date at the moment.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): As we recall the horrors of the holocaust, will the Leader of the House provide Government time so that we can debate the menace of today's Nazis? Such a debate would enable us to draw the attention of the Attorney-General to the activities of organisations such as Combat 18 and the British National party, which are indivisible and are publishing stickers in West Yorkshire and elsewhere saying:

"National socialism lives on! Combat 18."

They are publishing a post office box number for the British National party on a sticker calling for "Rights for whites". That would enable the Attorney-General to instruct the police forces to take urgent action against those organisations and, at the very least, to close down box numbers that are being used to promote racial hatred throughout Britain.

Mr. Newton: I share the hon. Gentleman's distaste for the material that he has brought to our attention and the comments that he reports as having been made in it. But I take his question really to be a request that the Attorney-General should look at his suggestion and I shall ensure that that is done.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I read an article this morning in the *Daily Mail* concerning Alastair Campbell, the Labour party's media guru, in which it was said that he thought that the report from the independent schools unit, which inspected his children's school, was useful. I remember that the Opposition fought strenuously against the establishment of that organisation. Therefore, would it not be useful for us to have an early debate on education, so that we can discuss the sort of information which we are now giving to parents and which we shall give to parents in the future, and so that they can make proper judgments about the sort of education that their children are receiving?

Mr. Newton: It is increasingly clear that such a debate would be useful, if only to demonstrate that so many members of the Labour Front-Bench team and prominent persons connected with them find our education policies so useful.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Further to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), may we have an early statement by the Lord Advocate to the Scottish Grand Committee, bearing in mind the fact that hon. Members have had no opportunity to question any Lord Advocate during the entire 16 years of this Tory Government, and the pressing need for the present Lord Advocate to explain any Crown Office involvement in the scandalous cover-up of information relating to those responsible for the Lockerbie bombing?

Mr. Newton: As the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said, he has secured an Adjournment debate on the matter, which will take place on Wednesday. Perhaps the appropriate course is to wait and see what is said in that debate.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): In view of the extraordinary behaviour of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) this afternoon, I wonder whether—

Madam Speaker: Order. When an action has been taken in the House, it is totally forgotten and is water under the bridge. I do not want to hear it referred to again.

Mr. Sykes: I am grateful to you for explaining that, Madam Speaker. In that case, may we have a debate on parliamentary privilege so that we can discuss the fact that many Opposition Members who have legitimate business interests are frightened of registering them in the Register of Members' Interests because of the Labour party Gestapo? That suggests to me that there are many abuses of privilege, and that they are not all located on the Conservative Benches.

Mr. Newton: I hesitate to try to arrange such a debate now, not least because, as Chairman of the current Privileges Committee, I might find it somewhat difficult to take part in it. No doubt my hon. Friend's remarks will be noted by the Opposition Front Bench and other Opposition Members.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will the Leader of the House reconsider his decision relating to the regulations on incapacity for work, which are to be debated next week? The Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments examined the regulations and found that the information in them was correct; the information in amending measures may also be correct, but the Committee thinks it unhelpful to those who must read such regulations if a series of amendments is made and all the information cannot be read together.

Would it not be much better for the House, and certainly for the general public, if the material were replaced by a version containing all the necessary

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

information, rather than our having two versions, which—although correct in themselves—could well mislead the general public?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman referred to my "decision", but I believe that what I said to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor)—I suspect that she would agree—was that I undertook to consider the points that she raised. I shall also consider the hon. Gentleman's elaboration of those points.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Will my right hon. Friend confer with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, with a view to the Government's withdrawing the regulations governing the transition from invalidity to incapacity benefit and substituting a new set of regulations that would treat at least some of those who will lose as a result of the current plans more favourably? I refer particularly to those over the age of 55.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend has progressed from what might be called the technicalities and procedural difficulties on which the previous two questions focused, and asks me to undertake a revision of policy as well. That goes rather further than I am able to go.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): May we have a debate, or at least a statement, enabling the House to consider the parameters of discretion being exercised by the Secretary of State for the Environment in his dealings with audits of local authorities?

The Leader of the House will know that the Secretary of State has so far refused to order an extraordinary audit of Westminster city council, although such an audit was ordered for both Lambeth and Liverpool. The auditor in Westminster is now finding that the continuing allegations are banking up and need to be dealt with; but they cannot be dealt with without the necessary mechanism. That is destroying Westminster city council's ability to clean out the stables and get on with its business, and it is damaging the reputation of local government throughout the land.

Mr. Newton: I understand that the proceedings in the wake of last year's controversies involving Westminster are still continuing. I think that it would be appropriate for us to see how those proceedings turn out before taking the action suggested by the hon. Gentleman; but I shall of course ensure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment knows of his representations.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Could we have a debate next week on the central administration of local education authorities and the need for those administrations to reduce their spending in line with the money that grant-maintained schools take with them to local decision making? During that debate, we could raise the case of Kent, where parents have voted overwhelmingly for 88 schools to become grant-maintained. However, Kent county council, which is run by the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, has failed proportionately to reduce its spending on central administration. Despite a 2 per cent. increase in Government grant to Kent county council, that has led for the first time to school budgets being cut by 1 per cent.

Mr. Newton: If my hon. Friend is asking for a debate, it occurs to me that the points that he made, which link to those made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) appear, subject to your ruling, Madam Speaker, to be fairly directly relevant to Wednesday's debate.

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): I understand that the Government are at present compiling a short list of applications for the European Union urban fund, and that they plan to exclude from the list any city with objective 2 status. As that would have considerable implications for my constituency, which has the highest unemployment in the east midlands, and for the city of Nottingham, which has failed in its bid for single regeneration budget money, could we have a debate next week or at least at some time before the short list of applications is finalised?

Mr. Newton: I shall bring those points to the attention of my right hon. Friends who are responsible for those matters.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): May I again ask the Leader of the House for a debate on the takeover bid involving Northern Electric, in respect of the possible insider dealing that goes on at the moment, and on the Swiss banking company that is now buying shares in Yorkshire Electricity? There seems to be something really funny going on. Let us have a debate and have the matter out in the open.

Mr. Newton: We have another set of suggestions on which I plainly cannot comment, but which I am sure will be studied by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Could there be a statement next week about the escape of a prisoner, James Moore, from Everthorpe prison? I understand that his escape was noticed only when his wife rang up to ask for him. He was otherwise engaged: he was certainly not tied up.

Mr. Newton: I am left in some difficulty in finding a suitable answer to that. I do not think that I can match the hon. Gentleman's question and shall have to fall back on the fact that, as he well knows, there are a number of inquiries going on into recent events in various prisons.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Is it possible to have a debate or at least a statement on the revelations following the Channel 4 "Dispatches" programme last night about sewage discharges into our environment and especially into our seas? It was revealed that in certain samples viral content was 2,000 times higher than the present safety level. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the issue is urgent, particularly for coastal areas that depend not just on fishing for shellfish but on tourism? There is obviously a failure by the privatised water companies to tackle that serious problem.

Mr. Newton: I did not see the programme, but I suspect that, as on other occasions and not particularly with regard to the hon. Gentleman, the last part of his question is a gross over-simplification. Those problems have certainly not arisen since privatisation. Some of the problems that sometimes cause difficulty in the House

arise from high expenditure in seeking to tackle such problems. The hon. Gentleman certainly need not doubt the Government's determination to tackle them.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate on early-day motion 473, on the politics of gender?

[*That this House agrees with the Archdeacon of York that 'Political correctness is verbal fascism and when it is applied to matters religious it is as much destructive of the values and ideas of the faith as it is of the sensitivities of the believer'; regrets that feminists have never understood that 'Man' comes directly from the Latin 'manus', meaning hand, indicating that man is the only species that can manipulate or manufacture, and that Man means in effect an animal that can use its hands and has nothing whatsoever to do with the contemporary and contrived politics of gender.*]

Such a debate would give the House an opportunity to examine Opposition proposals for a devolved Scottish Parliament that would contain 50 per cent. women. We could also examine how that could be arranged and whether it is intended that it should also apply to the proposed English regional assemblies. Could my right hon. Friend consider timing the debate to coincide with commemorating the 20th anniversary of the election of a woman as leader of a political party in this country, so as to recognise that only the Conservative party has had a woman leader? In view of last year's events in the Labour party, it seems that this is the only party in which it is possible for a woman to rise to the top.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend welded together a number of interesting, ingenious and attractive suggestions for debate. Perhaps they might be linked with an earlier request for a debate arising from the article in *The Spectator*. Of course I shall bear that very much in mind.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Would it be possible for a statement to be made early next week on the way in which Ministers leave the Cabinet and, after a very short period, go into the private sector—often joining companies such as Rothschild, which was involved in a privatisation that was the responsibility of a Department of which the ex-Minister was head at the time?

Does not the right hon. Gentleman recognise that what has happened recently just reinforces the belief in the country about sleaze and how ex-Tory Ministers do very well when they leave Cabinet? A statement is absolutely necessary—indeed, many of us would like legislation to deal with that issue.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman makes the sort of point that I must simply accept has become familiar from him. He will not for a moment expect me to accept the thrust of what he said. The Government have set up a wide-ranging commission—Lord Nolan's committee—to which the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) gave evidence yesterday. I am content to leave that committee to examine those matters.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Leader of the House may recall that, in the recent debate on selection, I drew attention to the fact that the Government hold 321 of the 651 seats in the House, yet they command 10 of the 18 votes that we possess in the Council of Europe. Does the right hon. Gentleman continue to regard that as fair? What steps will he take to ensure that not only the British delegation but our colleagues from other countries recognise that Britain acts in a responsible manner in apportioning seats on that deputation and others?

Mr. Newton: When the hon. Gentleman raised the matter before, I told him that I would bring it to the attention of those responsible for making the relevant appointments. I shall check up on the position and get in touch with him.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): May I join my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) in urging my right hon. Friend to arrange a debate on education? The large amount of education legislation that we have taken through the House has always been vigorously opposed by the Opposition. I, for one, am glad to note that it is now part of Labour party policy. If we were to have a debate, perhaps Labour Members would go just that one step further and welcome grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Newton: I have already referred to that matter. I do not think I can add anything else, other than to say that with every point made, such a debate becomes an increasingly attractive prospect.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): There are currently two Bills before the House dealing with discrimination against disabled people. It is generally known that the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill will apply to 6.5 million people—one in every 10. May we have a statement on how wide the application of the Government's Bill will be, as we were not told that during its Second Reading? Will it apply to one in 10, one in 100, one in 1,000 or one in a million—if that person happens to be lucky?

Is not the advertisement referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) misleading in its claim that the Government's Bill applies to education, when almost no local education authority could operate such a measure? We should be told of the numbers of people in education to whom the Bill will apply. My Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill would apply to everyone in education.

Mr. Newton: The Government's Bill was debated extensively on Tuesday. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman spoke extensively in that debate. I see no reason to doubt that the proposals in the Bill, which cover a wide range of services and facilities for disabled people, will benefit large numbers of people. I have no doubt that my right hon. and hon. Friends who are responsible for the Bill, and who are sitting on the Front Bench at the moment, will have heard and heeded the hon. Gentleman's request.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will the Leader of the House have a word with the Foreign Secretary, to ask whether we could have an early statement on the serious situation that is arising in former Yugoslavia, as a result of the statement by the Croatian President Tudjman that he wishes the United Nations forces to leave Croatian territory by the end of March? Will not that cause a serious crisis, which, potentially, could lead to a conflagration between the Serbs and the Croats over Krajina? Is not that a serious problem? Will the

[Mr. Mike Gapes]

Government make it clear at the earliest opportunity that we are doing all we can to stop such a withdrawal of UN forces?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will no doubt have noted that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will be here to answer questions on Wednesday next, and that may give him an opportunity to raise those points.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Given the point of order that I raised on Tuesday after Prime Minister's questions, the subsequent letter to the Prime Minister seeking clarification of his remarks, and his comment this afternoon that he wants the highest standards in public life, will a statement be made to correct the misrepresentations about my children that were made in the House by the Prime Minister during Prime Minister's questions last Tuesday?

Mr. Newton: That is not a matter on which I can add anything, but, of course, I take note that the hon. Gentleman has raised it again.

Points of Order

4.15 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have informed the hon. Member concerned—the hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes)—about this point of order. During business questions, the hon. Gentleman made direct and serious allegations that Labour Members had financial interests that did not appear in the Register of Members' Interests. Will you invite the hon. Gentleman to withdraw those remarks? If he is not willing to withdraw them and to apologise to Labour Members, will you instruct him to report any evidence that he has to the Registrar of Members' Interests?

Madam Speaker: I tend to treat such remarks with the disdain that they richly deserve, but if the hon. Lady will leave the matter with me, I shall take up her point.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. During Agriculture questions, you will have heard the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food complain that I had not notified him when I raised a point of order with you last Thursday. I have listened on a number of occasions when you have made it clear to the House that, when hon. Members are referred to in debate or in points of order, they should be notified in advance. On that particular occasion, the hon. Member whom I referred to was the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland). I rang up that hon. Member and informed him that I would refer to him. I have written to the Editor of *Hansard* to point out that mistake, but I hope that you will accept my explanation to you.

Madam Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman. When hon. Members make speeches or comments in the House, it is incumbent upon them to go to the *Hansard* office afterwards just to check what they have said. Indeed, the Editor of *Hansard* normally invites hon. Members to do that. That should be an established practice so that any errors can be corrected. It is no good making complaints in exchanges across the Floor of the House unless hon. Members have been to the *Hansard* office to ensure that corrections have been made.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you reflect on the way in which you decide to call hon. Members during Agriculture questions? When we have Scottish questions, you often use your discretion and do not call one hon. Member on one side of the Chamber, then another on the other side. Sometimes in Agriculture questions, not enough Labour Members stand, and you then tend to move on. Bearing in mind the fact that sometimes Conservative Members are standing at those times, will you perhaps consider the way in which you call hon. Members in Agriculture questions, so that you might follow the precedent that you have already set in Scottish questions?

Madam Speaker: Of course, I shall consider what the hon. Gentleman has asked me to do, but I have total discretion, as I know that he appreciates. I must also take into account whether a question has been explored sufficiently. That is also uppermost in my mind, to ensure that we do not go on with one question simply because

hon. Members are keen, frustration is showing on their faces, and they think that they should be called to put a supplementary question. I must keep it in mind whether a question has been explored and debated sufficiently across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You were clearly twice placed in considerable difficulty during Prime Minister's questions. I think that that situation arose in part because of the difficulty that hon. Members have in asking specific questions of the Prime Minister due to his narrow responsibilities and the danger of his transferring questions. Nevertheless, I wonder whether you might invite the Procedure Committee, I presume, to consider ways in which hon. Members could successfully table questions of a closed nature to the Prime Minister and thus, we would hope, avoid some of the difficulties that arise from the numerous open questions. Would you reflect on that and perhaps ask the advice of the appropriate Committee, which could investigate ways to enable us to put more specific questions to him in the hope that we would receive more specific answers, which might also help the general order of the House?

Madam Speaker: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's sympathy for the difficulties that I sometimes have, but it is my understanding that the Procedure Committee is already considering the matter. However, I shall pursue it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wonder whether you are prepared to comment on the incident that occurred between you and my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). He referred to the view held by some people that Lord Archer was involved with criminal activities. In view of the fact that the Nolan committee has been set up to examine, among other things, the idea held by some people out there that some Members of Parliament are involved in such activities and taking money for various causes when they should not be doing so, why, when my hon. Friend refers to someone in another place, is he pulled up? He is merely voicing the views expressed by people outside about some Members of this House and some in another place. I do not know why people are so sensitive—the Nolan committee has been set up to examine those very views.

Madam Speaker: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. The House entrusted me with its Standing Orders and the precedents that I have to follow. I refer him, and the House for that matter, to page 379 of "Erskine May", which states:

> "Unless the discussion is based upon a substantive motion, drawn in proper terms . . . reflections must not be cast in debate upon the conduct of . . . Members of either House of Parliament".

I was entrusted to carry out the procedures, which is why I had to take the action that I took. I try to give hon. Members a bit of a cooling-off period and time to reflect, but the bottom line is that I have then to carry out the procedures entrusted to me by the House.

BILL PRESENTED

Welfare of Calves (Export)

Mr. Chris Mullin, supported by Mr. Alan Williams, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Sir Andrew Bowden, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Nigel Jones, Sir Richard Body, Mr. Eric Martlew, Mr. Robin Corbett, Mr. Harry Greenway and Mr. Austin Mitchell, presented a Bill to prohibit the export of calves where, after such export, they are to be kept in conditions which would be unlawful in Great Britain: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 10 February, and to be printed. [Bill 39.]

Opposition Day

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

[1ST PART]

Mortgage Interest Relief

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.22 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I beg to move,

That this House notes with concern the proposed withdrawal of help with mortgage interest payments during the first nine months on income support for any applicant obtaining a mortgage after 1st October 1995 and the reduction in such assistance for existing borrowers who in future are forced to apply for state help; and, recognising that these changes will result in a very significant additional cost for home owners, lead to repossessions which are already running at an unacceptably high level and further depress the housing market, calls on Her Majesty's Government to withdraw these proposals, which will cause real difficulties for both lenders and borrowers.

As its title makes clear, the motion deals with the support given to people drawing income support and with help with mortgage interest payments. It might seem a rather technical and obscure matter to do with the fine print. Indeed, it is ultimately likely to result in regulations that will be passed in a quiet corner of the Committee Corridor at the fag end of a parliamentary day. That should not happen, and we are determined that it will not, because the proposals raise significant issues.

Mortgage interest support is no small issue in itself. Of course, it has increased greatly in recent years, and that was one of the foundations on which the Secretary of State for Social Security made his case for change.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): The hon. Gentleman says that it has increased substantially. Would he care to inform the House that it has increased from £31 million to £1.1 billion?

Mr. Dewar: I regret having given way because I was about to deal with that very point. This time, the hon. Lady is correct. Mortgage interest support has risen from, as the hon. Lady says, £31 million in 1979 to just over £1 billion in current terms. It involves about 550,000 claimants. I will not give way to the hon. Lady again in case she stands up to say that it involves 548,000 people. I offer her that gratuitous fact, which she can dream about tonight.

The anger and the drive in the Department appears to be based on that rise in support. The increase has largely been in the latter part of the period and it is of course, as everyone in the House recognises, almost entirely the result of two factors. One reason is the recession—the Government are not in a very good position to complain about the management of the recession—and the second reason is the very large increase in owner-occupation.

The Secretary of State managed to sound as though he was complaining about the latter factor. In the Department of Social Security press release, which announced the change, he said:

"In recent years the pattern of owner occupation has changed out of all recognition",

as though that were something to deplore. In fact, the Government, quite rightly, have been encouraging people to buy their own homes when it makes sense for them and they are in a position to do so. I certainly make no complaint about the fact that there are more owner-occupiers. I take from it the logic that that increase will put greater pressure on the scheme that we are discussing.

My worry is that the changes being brought forward are likely to introduce an element of instability which will be quite serious to many people in the country. I do not want to insult the House by running over the proposals in any detail, but in the briefest possible way, I remind hon. Members that if a person takes out a new mortgage after 1 October 1995 and—unfortunately—has to apply for help, he will find that he is in a help-free zone for nine months.

Existing borrowers who have to apply in future for help with mortgage interest will get no help for two months and 50 per cent. for four months, compared with the present limitation of, simply, 16 weeks at 50 per cent. There is the comparatively minor matter, with which I have no objection, that the cap on mortgages is being reduced for this purpose from £125,000 to £100,000.

The impact of the changes will be considerable. Existing borrowers will find that if they were to move on to income support and apply for help, they would be losing through this disqualification the equivalent of two months' support, or for someone on an average mortgage, about £350. For new mortgages, the nine-month freeze would be worth about £1,250. Those amounts are not academic but substantial sums that will be sadly missed, especially by people who are in a marginal situation and who are struggling to maintain their position as home owners.

Problems will be created. To be fair—I make no bones about it—the Government have offered a solution. That solution is that the private insurance market will be able to cover the gap and offer the service. The thrust of that and the most significant difficulty with it is that if the scheme is as comprehensive as, I understand, the right hon. Gentleman wishes it to be, it will place a significant burden on almost every home owner in the country.

Insurance is a commercial business and, as the Government have conceded, it costs about £7 to cover every £100 of mortgage payments currently. Realistically, it looks like adding another £200 or £300 a year to the cost of maintaining one's house.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Dewar: Those figures will be little consolation to the hon. Lady who is shaking her head so decisively.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: No, I am sorry.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: May I—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It is no good referring to me and not giving way.

Mr. Dewar: I am not giving way to the hon. Lady.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Oh come on.

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Lady is turning a delightful colour of brick red, but even that will not tempt me to give way.

The changes will be—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman must give way.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dewar: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman giving way?

Mr. Dewar *indicated dissent.*

Madam Speaker: Then I and the hon. Gentleman must remain firm.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order. The hon. Gentleman should give way. He has referred to me.

Madam Speaker: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will give way a little later.

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Lady complains that I am drawing attention to her, but she is doing a very good job at drawing attention to herself. I suspect that it is doing her no good at all.

Anyway, at £7 per £100, I do not think that there is—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must not pursue the point. She knows our procedures very well. Perhaps if she leaves her point until a little later, the hon. Gentleman may give way then.

Mr. Dewar: I am very grateful to you, Madam Speaker.

Realistically, it looks like an extra £200 or £300 a year on the cost of home ownership. It will be little consolation to know that there is a small addition to that, which I mention only in passing, of the new 2.5 per cent. insurance tax which will apply to such premiums.

We must consider whether that burden will be shouldered cheerfully. The issue must be seen in context. Not only do home owners face the prospect of the additional insurance costs if they take the Secretary of State's advice, but, from April, their MIRAS—mortgage income relief at source—will be reduced to 15p. The Council of Mortgage Lenders, whose arithmetic is probably better than mine, reckons that someone with an average mortgage will see the cost of home ownership rise by just over 10 per cent.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): If the hon. Gentleman is criticising the reduction in mortgage interest relief at source introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, will he also criticise the Opposition housing spokesman, who proposes the abolition of mortgage interest relief, as I will happily demonstrate in my speech?

Mr. Dewar: In that case, it might have been useful if the Secretary of State had waited to make his point in his speech. If we are talking about MIRAS—as apparently we are—when the Secretary of State replies, will he explain what he thought of the manifesto promise that MIRAS would be maintained at present levels when it has now been reduced twice by the Government, and is now at 15 per cent? That does not seem to be a ground on which the Secretary of State should choose to do battle.

No doubt the defence will be that individuals can make their own choice and some will opt out from the additional burden. We must ask whether the proposal can be comprehensive. I will deal with that point reasonably briefly. Many groups of people are unlikely to be covered by the private insurance market. For the evidence for that, I rely on the briefing that was sent to hon. Members by the Association of British Insurers which, naturally, wants to sell insurance. That is the point of its activities. It will be extremely difficult to offer cover to many important groups.

For example, pensioners are not in the frame. Some categories, notably the retired, who are claiming income support because of a permanent shortfall—

Mr. Lilley: Lest the hon. Gentleman inadvertently misleads the House, may I state that the proposals do not apply to pensioners?

Mr. Dewar: I was about to come to that point. I read the documents that the Government issue and I want to obtain more information. The people to whom I have referred cannot be covered by insurance. Therefore, they must be covered by some form of exemption. The phrase used is that they will be "protected". However, it is clear from the Government amendment that pensioners on income support

"will continue to have their mortgage interest paid".

The Secretary of State has given this matter much thought—as was clear from the speed with which he approached the Dispatch Box—so perhaps he will explain on what basis that will be paid. Will it be paid at the standard rate? Will there be a restriction in the first 16 weeks, as previously, or will all the mortgage interest be paid? It would be extremely helpful if the Secretary of State could clarify those points.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Three and a half minutes ago, the hon. Gentleman assumed that insurance premiums would remain the same even though many more people would take them out. According to the normal principle of insurance, the wider the coverage, the more likely it is that premiums will fall.

Mr. Dewar: I agree with the hon. Lady and that no doubt is the hope. However, the hon. Lady will recall that things can go up as well as down. Between 1991 and 1993, premiums in the sector about which we are concerned increased by 43 per cent. and a large number of insurance companies made very substantial losses and withdrew from such business. If the proposal is to be the substantial foundation on which the Government are relying, it seems to be a very high risk strategy.

As I do not have time to deal with those groups in detail, I shall simply say that there will be great difficulties for the self-employed. I am told that most private insurance companies will cover the self-employed. However, they will pay only if they are satisfied that the self-employed have ceased to trade. The terms are usually that a business must be wound up or, in some cases, that the self-employed are in voluntary liquidation or are bankrupt. That does not seem to be a happy situation.

The disabled can be covered too, but not, of course, for any claim that arises out of their disability or an existing illness. Even for those who will be covered, there will be

[Mr. Dewar]

bad news and good news. The good news, according to the Association of British Insurers, is that one's premium is likely to be calculated to reflect the increased risk. In other words, they will be paying above the average. The bad news is that that degree of sophistication is probably still a year or two away, so that in the interim there will probably be no cover for them at all.

There are also single parents, who comprise about 20 per cent. of the claimants' group. They, I am told, will be all right. The Association of British Insurers says to me that we do not need to worry; most of them will not qualify for a mortgage, so they will not need mortgage interest support. Even those who have mortgages and whose marriages break up will get the support that they require from their former partners—ha, ha—or from the work of the Child Support Agency, we are told. [*Laughter.*] Definitely, there is cause for some laughter at that point.

For new single parents, the results of an immediate and unexpected divorce, there is unlikely to be any cover at all. They do not fall within the remit of the industry. If they did obtain cover or if they had cover, they would almost certainly not receive payment for 12 months, according to the Association of British Insurers, because it would not pay out because of the danger of fraud until decree nisi had passed. By that time they would have had the equivalent, anyway, of the nine-month period without any help and would be in grave danger.

It will not be easy to obtain comprehensive cover of the kind that the Secretary of State has suggested. I certainly recognise, as he does—it is a point that I have made about single parents—that most private contracts allow for 60 or 90 days without any payment or support in any event, so we are left with private insurance cover not covering the gap that the Secretary of State is creating, although insurance cover was supposed to be the answer to that gap. That must be very unsatisfactory.

A large number of people will not take out cover and may find themselves unexpectedly at risk. Fewer than 5 per cent. of existing mortgage holders have such insurance cover. It has gone up substantially recently, but again, to quote the Association of British Insurers, even if the advantages of this kind of insurance are pointed out—we know what that means—by the lender, then the "penetration rate"—a somewhat sinister phrase—

"can be as high as 35 per cent."

That does not sound like comprehensive cover by any reasonable definition.

Repossessions are dropping. That gives me great pleasure, and I hope that they continue to drop, but the Council of Mortgage Lenders, the Building Societies Association and the people who are in the business of lending will say that they are convinced that one result of the changes, if they are brought into force, is that there will be more repossessions than there should have been and that even if, as I hope, there is a continuing drop, it will be very much smaller than it otherwise could have been. The Secretary of State should take that point into account.

I ask the Secretary of State to deal with the 1991 agreement between the Department of Social Security and the Council of Mortgage Lenders. In it, direct payment was agreed and, in return for direct payment, it was said there would be no repossessions. It is very important that that holds good and continues.

I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the CML news update, issue No. 4, which has just come out and with which I am sure he will be familiar. Its second and most important conclusion is:

"it is difficult to see how the December 1991 agreement between lenders and the Government can now survive."

If that is true and if that fear turns out to be justified, that would be an extremely serious matter. One of the difficulties that worries the trade and me, although there have been some reassuring words, is how the new standard rate will affect people who have been prudent and have taken out a fixed-interest mortgage and who may find that there is a continuing gap on a permanent basis, when they are in receipt of support, between what has been paid on their behalf and their obligation and indebtedness to the lender.

I shall be very quick because I recognise the strictures of time in this short debate, but let me turn to the justifications, as I understand them, for the changes. One is that it is appropriate, proper and meet that those who own their own homes should stand on their own two feet. That is an attractive idea, and I understand that it may appeal to some members of the Conservative party, but I cannot understand the logic behind it.

If we assume—I believe that we are right to do so—that people on income support in rented property deserve to have their rent paid because of their financial difficulties and the situation in which they find themselves, why should people in exactly the same financial situation, who qualify for and receive income support, get no help whatever simply because they have bought their own homes?

There seems to be something of a turnabout in historic terms, because I am now defending home owners. I do not see why they should be discriminated against, and that is exactly what is happening. There will be help with rent for people on income support but no help with mortgage interest payments. Of course there should be no repayment of capital, because that would be preserving and enhancing a capital asset, but what is the logic behind the discrimination against home owners?

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Surely there is a considerable difference in circumstances between the two cases. People who buy their own houses not only take on a considerable responsibility, and should understand that that is what they are doing, but in the vast majority of cases, despite the fact that there is some negative equity now, will enjoy a capital gain in the long term.

Mr. Dewar: In view of the history of recent years that sounds like an argument about fool's gold.

There was once a time when a home owner would live in the stockbroker belt in a Tudor villa, but now many of my home owners live in former council houses; many have had to struggle, and are marginal home owners in every sense. I have not time to embroider the argument, but I feel strongly that the proposal is discriminatory and cannot be justified.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dewar: I shall give way for the last time.

Mr. Field: Is not the proposal so surprising that one must ask oneself what the next move may be? As the

people on the Treasury Bench are supposed to be so fully committed to owner-occupation; this should be the last thing that they would suggest. They could justify it to their supporters only if they answered my hon. Friend's question by describing it as a first move towards further reform. The next move could be to expect people to cover their rent through some form of insurance in case they become unemployed.

Mr. Dewar: My hon. Friend has been here too long and has been watching the Government for too long, as we all have. I understand his point, but I hope that it is neither valid nor justified.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: I must press on.

Mr. Jenkin *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: I am giving way for literally the last time.

Mr. Jenkin: In view of the hon. Gentleman's unhappiness about the apparent inconsistency between the treatment of rents and that of mortgage interest, is he undertaking that it would be a Labour Government's policy to harmonise those arrangements? Does he undertake not only to reverse the present situation but to go further? How much would that cost?

Mr. Dewar: At the moment I am arguing that discriminatory treatment should not be introduced and that we should oppose it. I genuinely hope—I am not being sarcastic—that as the hon. Gentleman has some experience in the subject, he will join me.

As I understand it, the second reason for introducing the measure is the idea that the insurance market can offer more comprehensive cover. For example, if people have savings of more than £8,000 they do not get income support, and if someone loses his job and the family income is cut by two thirds but his wife still works, the family may not qualify for income support. The idea is that for the £200 or £300 a year spent on the premium people will have a security and stability that would not otherwise be available.

I have been trying to tell the Secretary of State that I do not believe that such comprehensive cover will be achieved. Many of the vulnerable people will not buy cover and will end up in the vale of tears; there may be a considerable on-cost to public funds in the end. It may be right to be prudent, but prudence is not compulsory; it is an addition and an alternative to the safety net of the mortgage interest protection organised by the DSS.

There is another argument of great importance, on which I make no apology for quoting the Council of Mortgage Lenders again. The council first says that there has been a drive to encourage home ownership for people on more modest incomes—I approve of that. It adds:

"First, the Government remains committed to assisting people to enter owner-occupation—the Housing Corporation is being instructed to give an increasing proportion of its budget to low-cost home-ownership initiatives which supposedly enable marginal groups to enter owner-occupation."

The council then argues trenchantly and forcefully that the Government's proposals run counter to that aim, because they will have two effects. First, they will put at risk many people in that economic situation—the low-bottom tranche of home ownership, which many people have been artificially stimulated into entering. Secondly, according to the council, the proposals may frighten out many people in the commercial world who might otherwise have invested in such enterprises.

The council argues that the proposals are therefore incompatible with the general thrust of Government policy—a thrust with which, unusually, I sympathise. I do not believe that home ownership should be the privilege of the well-off. The policy causes an unpleasant clash of principles within the Government's scheme of priorities, and I ask the Minister to think again.

I shall finish—or almost finish—by giving the final reason for the proposals: the Government hope to save money. I shall ask the Minister to say a word or two about that. The DSS press release mentions £200 million in the long term—an interesting figure. We know that the minor adjustment in the cap on mortgages—the limitation to £1,000—will save only £1 million between October, when it is introduced, and the following April. From that April to the following October the savings will again be only £1 million. That may surprise hon. Members, because that measure sounds quite important. As the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) said—I do not want to draw attention to her in case she rises in her wrath—we are spending £1 billion. Yet the saving is only £1 million.

Let us take a more important figure—the estimated saving from new mortgage holders after 1 October. Those are the people who will find that they lose nine months' support. What will that save? I received a parliamentary answer to that question, and I can hardly believe it. Assuming that one includes all the people involved, the annual saving will be £18 million. What is £18 million compared with the cost of the scheme?

The adjustment will mean bureaucracy, discrimination, differentials and many other problems. It will put some people at risk, because some will lose their homes and possibly their jobs; there will certainly be casualties. Yet the figure for savings resulting from the main change is something like £18 million for a whole year. That is dogma run mad, and it will cause an enormous number of difficulties. I hope that the Minister will say clearly what savings he expects will result from his proposal.

Now I really shall finish, by saying that the Secretary of State is in a double bind. If the system is as comprehensive as he says, if he gets everyone on board and persuades them all to find the extra £200 or £300 a year, he will create a considerable additional burden for home owners right across the range. Many may escape the burden and will not have to pay, but then the trouble will be that the system will not be comprehensive, thus losing the only virtue that the right hon. Gentleman parades.

Better-off people in steady employment, who may well pay the insurance, may ultimately begin to think that they are paying for something that they do not need, and that they have been done. The vulnerable, the people who really need the coverage, will no doubt recognise that they cannot afford to take it out, and they will join the casualties.

In the consultation, I hope that the Minister will consider what is being said by the Consumers Association, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, the Association of British Insurers, the Building Societies Association and the Council of Mortgage

[Mr. Dewar]

Lenders, all of which have trenchant criticisms of the right hon. Gentleman's proposal. Some of those organisations are openly, root-and-branch hostile to the idea.

Some Conservative Members have already raised a cry of pain. I am confident that Tory Back Benchers who go to their constituencies will not be met with a quiet word of congratulation in the corner and a mutter of welcome for the new proposals. They will find—rightly and understandably—that the proposals are very unpopular.

I do not mind about that—it is not my problem. I do mind about a number of people whom I know personally, and many more whom I know exist in my constituency, who are existing on a budget that is stretched to breaking point by a mortgage. Those people have no room for error or for manoeuvre, and they may well be put to the wall because of the increases in costs. They may decide to run the risk, and end up as really difficult casualties, and find that they have no support at all for a vital nine-month period. I do not think that those people should be put at hazard by the measure. I do not think that people such as them—who exist in every constituency—should be forgotten in the House, and that is I why commend the motion.

4.50 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"condemns the Opposition's wish to continue the inadequate existing system of Income Support Mortgage Interest, which does not protect those with modest savings, those with small pensions or redundancy payments, or those with a working spouse, which has undermined the spread of private mortgage insurance and has contributed to 50,000 homes a year being repossessed; believes that the Government's proposals will lead to the development of more comprehensive, less costly insurance cover; welcomes the fact that pensioners on income support will continue to have their mortgage interest paid; and reaffirms its commitment to home ownership".

Much as I like the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar)—he knows that—we will take no lectures from him or from any of his colleagues, who voted at every opportunity to stop council tenants having the right to buy their own homes. They cannot pose as the friends of home ownership.

We will take no lectures from a party that has always used every lever available to it in Parliament, local councils and housing authorities to prevent people from owning their own homes. The Labour party has only one objective locally and nationally: to become the nation's landlord. We are the party of home ownership, and we will remain so.

The Labour party is trying to pretend to be on the side of home owners, but its position wholly ignores the problems of those who suffer the risk of repossession. Labour offers nothing, and in his speech the hon. Member for Garscadden offered nothing to help them.

Labour seems to oppose the spread of private insurance, which would protect such people because, on doctrinaire grounds, it is against private insurance. We believe that the present income support arrangements for mortgage interest, which are extremely costly to the taxpayer, are manifestly unsatisfactory and need reform. They fail to provide comprehensive cover.

The Labour party mentions the present system of ISMI as though it provides cover for everyone who finds themselves unemployed or without earnings: it does not. Two thirds of home owners would not qualify for help if they lost their jobs today, either because they have a working spouse or because they have a little saved. Many of the remaining one third would be disqualified simply because they were receiving redundancy pay or an early retirement package. Labour offers nothing to protect them from the risk of repossession.

As a result, some 150,000 people a year who lose their jobs receive no help from income support with their mortgage interest. Labour offers nothing to help them to avoid the risk of repossession. Some 50,000 people have their homes repossessed every year, many of whom are not in receipt of income support. Labour offers nothing to help them.

We are determined to improve the situation, and that means encouraging the growth of private insurance. Private insurance has been growing, but the very existence of income support for mortgage interest has undermined its growth over a period when it could have provided valuable cover.

People who believed that they were covered did not take out insurance, only to find that they could not receive help from the state. Our measures will help to reduce repossessions in a number of ways.

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): Will the Secretary of State comment on a problem that one of my constituents experienced? He took out mortgage protection insurance cover but, because he attended a Government training course the Employment Agency did not deem him to be unemployed, for reasons of which I am sure the Secretary of State is well aware. As the agency would not confirm that he was not in employment, his insurance company refused to pay out.

Is the Secretary of State aware that there will be thousands of such cases? People will have to read the fine print of their insurance policies carefully. Is he further aware that there will be endless wrangles between constituents, Members of Parliament, insurance companies and the Employment Agency over exactly what unemployment means?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady makes an important point. One of the consequences of our reforms will be that lenders and borrowers will have an interest in ensuring that insurance policies are good, high-quality policies that cover what they purport to cover and offer protection against the circumstances in which people may find themselves. Those include the circumstances described by the hon. Lady. I shall return to that issue; it is an important aspect of what we are seeking to achieve.

Mr. Jenkin: Should not home owners be advised to read carefully the small print of the next Labour manifesto? Is not it unclear what policies are being promised to make home owners more secure under a Labour Government?

Mr. Lilley: That is certainly true. Home owners should look not only for the small print but for the price tag; very often they will find neither.

Our measures will help reduce repossessions in a number of ways. First—I do not recall the hon. Member for Garscadden mentioning this—for existing borrowers,

we shall start paying ISMI direct to the lender from the outset. At present, during the initial 16-week period, when it is payable at a rate of 50 per cent., it is paid to the borrower, but it is often not passed on to the lender. Arrears can then accumulate, and that can cause problems. That will not happen in future.

Secondly, we will ensure that all those taking out new mortgages are encouraged to take out insurance or other forms of cover for the first nine months of any loss of earnings. It will be in the interests of the lender and the borrower to see that proper cover is in place. ISMI will be available after nine months—much as at present—to cover those who face loss of earnings.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Will the Secretary of State explain how the measure will help many borrowers who will lose income support for the first nine months? Those borrowers will be urged to take out private insurance, but most private insurance companies will not pay anything for the first 90 days, or at least the first 60 days. Where will the borrower obtain the money that the Government have removed?

Mr. Lilley: Responsibility for providing protection in the event of loss of earnings must be covered by the borrower, the lender and the Government. We all have a responsibility, but it is perfectly reasonable that during the first couple of months the lender and the borrower should meet the cost of any inability to pay interest.

We should remember that the vast majority of people who lose their jobs get back into work shortly—two thirds do so within six months and a large number within the first couple of months. That makes it unnecessary to make arrangements for paying interest to lenders, who are large institutions with extremely large resources. Lenders can deal with that in the first instance, as of course they do for the majority of people who are not covered by income support for mortgage interest.

Mr. Frank Field: The Secretary of State assures the House that all will be well when the measure is passed, but the Opposition naturally question whether that optimism is securely based. We are worried on a number of counts. Following his experience with the Child Support Agency, the Secretary of State has been converted to pilot studies. Has he thought about introducing them for this measure, so that before we make the scheme universal we can find out which side of the House is right—the Conservative side, which is confident that all will be well, or our side, which is worried that many people will suffer as a result?

Mr. Lilley: I do not think that this measure will suffer from the organisational problems that beset large-scale organisational reform. In a sense, we already have experience of private insurance and we want to build on it and to make it better. We know from our experience of the state system that it is inadequate and that it leaves many people uncovered—an issue that the Opposition have failed to mention. We are making the change only for the first nine months and for those taking out new mortgages, so it will be introduced gradually, as new people enter the market.

Pensioners on income support will continue to receive payments for their interest—

Mr. Dewar: At the standard rate?

Mr. Lilley: Yes, at the standard rate. At present, they are not subject to the 50 per cent. rule for the first 16 weeks and will not be subject to it.

We have begun consultations with those involved, will consult carefully about how the change may affect other groups and are determined to get the details right. I will deal with extensive coverage in a moment, but first I must deal with some of the criticisms that have been made here and in other Labour party statements in recent weeks.

The alleged increase in the cost of buying houses, as a result of the combined effect of the recent small interest rate rise, changes in mortgage interest relief and the introduction of private insurance, is one of the main complaints, which were widely faxed to the newspapers by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), to which the hon. Member for Garscadden alluded. They claim that that increase will price first-time buyers out of the market, which is sheer nonsense.

The two main determinants of the cost of buying a house are the price of houses, which by historical standards is low relative to earnings, and the interest rate, which is almost at a 20-year low point because of our success in getting inflation down, which will be put at risk by Labour's policies. Their combined effect means that, even after allowing for the tax change and the potential cost of mortgage insurance, the cost of house purchase is little more than half the proportion of net income that it was at its peak about five years ago. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister pointed out at Question Time, the typical mortgage today costs £140 a month less than in October 1990.

Claims that the cost of mortgage protection is high and is likely to rise are nonsense. One can already insure one's mortgage for 4p in the pound on one's monthly advance, if one insures direct, which is only £12 per month on the average mortgage. How many hon. Members spend as little as that to insure the contents of their house, and how many think it strange that they, rather than the taxpayer, have to pay the buildings insurance on their home, which is usually a condition of a mortgage?

Mr. Dewar: The cost of alternative protection is obviously important. Perhaps I have placed too much reliance on the Building Societies Association and the Council of Mortgage Lenders. Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that he believes that someone on an average mortgage could arrange adequate cover for under £150 a year?

Mr. Lilley: Yes, if they took advantage, for example, of the new General Accident Direct insurance, rather than going through a building society and paying it the additional commission. Commissions may well decrease as a result of our changes and I very much hope so.

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen) *rose—*

Mr. Lilley: May I make a little progress before I give way again? The hon. Gentleman may find that my comments will relieve him of the need to intervene.

We consider it normal to insure, and to be required to insure, the fabric of the building against fire and damage when we take out a mortgage. We do not think it unusual

[Mr. Lilley]

to take out life insurance policies to pay off the mortgage if the breadwinner dies. Moreover, competition is reducing the cost of home building insurance. The Halifax has announced cuts of up to 60 per cent. in its insurance premiums, with average cuts of about 20 per cent. The Association of British Insurers is convinced that the cost of mortgage insurance will come down as it becomes more universal.

At present, the worst risks—people who suspect that they may be made redundant—are those who are most likely to take out insurance, which means that costs are higher than they would be otherwise. The spread of insurance over a wider spectrum of people will give a better spread of risks, and so reduce costs and premium.

Some hon. Members have claimed that the changes will adversely affect the housing market. I certainly recognise the importance of rebuilding confidence in the market, but I do not believe that our announced changes will undermine it. On the contrary, it is clear that it is not the cost of purchasing houses that is holding back the housing market, as it is historically quite low relative to incomes and will not be appreciably affected by the modest cost of mortgage insurance.

The main problem is personal confidence and fear of unemployment at a turbulent time in the labour market, not merely here but worldwide, which is causing new buyers to hold back. When insurance cover is the norm, as part of a new mortgage, potential new buyers are likely to feel more confident, not less. Moreover, fewer people who become unemployed will be unable to cope and thus face repossession, so the market will be less depressed by forced sales.

Almost by definition, a market in which new buyers are properly covered against risk will be healthier, more active and more resilient.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): In my constituency nine people are chasing every job. Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that premiums will be higher in such an area, and what is his estimate of what they might be?

Mr. Lilley: Usually, insurers do not have regional premiums—

Mrs. Fyfe: What about car insurance?

Mr. Lilley: Of course they do for motor insurance.

The main threat to the housing market is people such as the hon. Member for Garscadden and others talking it down, scaremongering and spreading wholly unfounded fears, and they should be ashamed of themselves. The Council of Mortgage Lenders told me emphatically that people should not talk down the market, as the Opposition have.

Some Labour Members have asserted that cover will not be available for certain groups. The insurance industry has roundly rebutted that assertion. In its paper, the Association of British Insurers states:

> "Very few people, having first been accepted by a mortgage lender as a satisfactory credit risk for granting a mortgage will not be eligible for insurance. Even in these few cases, the competitive nature of the mortgage protection insurance market is such that new products are likely to be developed quite quickly, or existing products refined to provide cover".

Likewise, the Abbey National said:

> "If we have agreed a mortgage there is no reason why the borrower should not then qualify for mortgage repayment protection."

Of course, we shall take care when framing the regulations to ensure that we encourage comprehensive cover for all those who should be able to get a mortgage. I am pleased that the Council of Mortgage Lenders and the Association of British Insurers have agreed to work closely with my officials to ensure that we do all that we can to achieve that objective.

Mr. Denham: The Minister referred to the Council of Mortgage Lenders and said that it did not want people to talk down the housing market. Is that the same Council of Mortgage Lenders that has written to hon. Members, saying that it is

> "concerned about the potential impact on mortgage borrowers and on the housing market of the changes which have been announced"?

Mr. Lilley: Yes, it is, and a certain ability to argue its case when it has a vested interest in receiving more than £1 billion of public money with no questions asked is not surprising. Whoever suggested that the hon. Gentleman should be cautious about repeating everything that the Council of Mortgage Lenders says was right. It would be a first, in my experience, if an interest group in receipt of public money did not argue to continue receiving at least as much of it in future.

Mr. Brazier: I am most grateful for the fact that my right hon. Friend continues to set an excellent example by giving way to hon. Members on both sides. On the moral point about vested interests, does he agree that it is wrong that people who take out mortgages on large properties should be underwritten by the state—and the taxpayer—in some unlimited fashion? After all, the taxes are paid by people who are often on much lower incomes.

Mr. Lilley: That is certainly correct. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides will have been shocked by a number of recent, highly publicised cases of significant sums being lent to certain people. For instance, a part-time speech therapist was able to secure a loan of hundreds of thousands of pounds on the prospect that she would cease to be part time and be able to work full time—only to discover that she could not do so. The lender who made that decision felt it right and proper that the taxpayer should underwrite the risk. That is surely not an optimum use of taxpayers' money.

Insurers and lenders make it clear that policies are available for many of the groups for whom it is alleged they are not. As the hon. Member for Garscadden admitted, they are available for self-employed people. Policies have long been available to cover sickness and disability. Contract workers and people working in non-traditional ways are a growing phenomenon, and lenders are recognising that they will have to adapt to it if they want to be able to supply home finance for such people; otherwise they will lose out in an important market. They are therefore developing schemes involving repayment holidays between contracts built into the mortgage provision for people who are contract workers. We welcome that. In our discussions we shall attempt to find out what can be done to facilitate the growth of such policies.

The hon. Member for Garscadden mentioned the consequences of marital breakdown. Of course, insurance policies do not cover that, but we should at least question whether those who split up can use that as an excuse immediately to pass on the cost of their mortgage to the taxpayer. Why should married taxpayers have to subsidise divorce? Is that Labour's policy? If a husband scarpers and leaves a wife to bring up the children with no income, in the first instance it is for the building society to pursue the errant husband, to make sure that he meets that liability. Moreover, in such circumstances, the building society has a duty to be helpful to the mother with children; should the situation persist beyond nine months, income support for mortgage interest will be available to help.

I accept that, as the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) said earlier, policies have not always been satisfactory. That is partly because income support for mortgage interest reduced pressure from lenders and, to some extent, reduced the number of borrowers pressing for improvements in policies.

We recently agreed to a revised code of practice from the Association of British Insurers. About 95 per cent. of mortgage protection insurance is handled by members of the ABI, and by the insurance ombudsman service or the personal insurance arbitration service. A condition of membership of the ABI is adherence to the code of practice, which was revised in the light of recommendations of the independent code-monitoring committee, which includes the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

The code is now tougher, and it will ensure that the advice given by those who sell insurance policies, or when lenders provide such policies alongside a mortgage, spells out the fine print and details the obligations to borrowers. I hope that that and any further changes that emerge in the course of our consultations will enhance the quality of mortgage protection policies as well as extending their coverage.

Mr. Dewar: I hope that I shall not have to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman again, but before he finishes will he deal with the potential savings? A question in *Hansard* on 15 December 1994 asked the Secretary of State to

"estimate the annual savings in a full year to social security expenditure from withdrawing income support assistance with mortgage interest payments from new mortgages after October 1995 for nine months assuming that (*a*) all income support claimants with new mortgages are affected".—[*Official Report*, 15 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 794.]

The savings amounted to £18 million. Perhaps I have misunderstood, but if that is right it would seem an extraordinarily small figure.

Mr. Lilley: That is simply because we are applying it to new mortgages. As the new mortgage builds up, savings will grow. We expect, within a relatively short time, the savings from the measures that I have mentioned today to amount to £200 million a year—

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): By when?

Mr. Lilley: By the end of, I think, the third year of the expenditure round. Overall, however, savings will grow by more than that, as total coverage of mortgages comes in—

Mr. Dewar: Allowing for those who fall out of the figures?

Mr. Lilley: Correct, but most people are back in work within nine months. New mortgages are covered: existing mortgages are not, but over a 25-year period every mortgage will be covered. It will take time to build up—

Mr. Dewar *rose*—

Mr. Lilley: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman many times. If he has difficulty with the idea, there is not much that I can do.

Mr. Dewar: Give way for the last time.

Mr. Lilley: No, I am sorry. I want to get on to the interesting aspect of the debate, which was the failure of the Labour party to mention its policies to help those at risk of repossession. I know that my hon. Friends, whatever their views, are all determined to help such people. There seemed to be no determination by the Labour party to improve cover for those who are at risk.

Opposition Members have offered nothing. To extend income support for mortgage interest to everyone, including the two thirds of home owners who are not eligible at present, would cost an enormous amount. The costs have already risen from £31 million in 1979 to £1.1 billion now. The Labour party has not recommended—rightly so—extending such cover at the taxpayers' expense; but it is not the cost that puts off Opposition Members. It is the fact that they have another policy that does not bear on the issue but which would in itself be hugely expensive.

The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), Labour's housing spokesman, advocates a mortgage benefit for those in work. By definition, it could not help the jobless. According to the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, this idea would cost the taxpayer £600 million a year. The hon. Gentleman was at least unusually forthcoming about how he would pay for it. In an interesting interview in the magazine *Roof*, produced by Shelter, he said:

"I do think a mortgage benefit scheme has substantial advantages. If part of its costs were met by further phasing out of MIRAS, so be it. I will talk to my Treasury colleagues about this."

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lilley: I cannot resist the opportunity.

Mr. Raynsford: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will read the earlier part of that interview, in which I talked about how the Government were already phasing out MIRAS, with no benefit to home owners. In that part of the interview I deal with ideas for providing more effective help for home owners who are not helped by MIRAS.

Throughout his speech the right hon. Gentleman has criticised the present arrangements because of the lack of such help, but he has the gall to criticise the Labour party for having no positive proposals.

Mr. Lilley: So Labour's housing spokesman admits that these are the Labour party's proposals. They cost £600 million, and they would be paid for by a further phasing out of mortgage interest relief. It is a major step forward to have got that out of the hon. Gentleman.

[Mr. Lilley]

Mr. Jenkin: How many extra people would that put on means-tested benefits?

Mr. Lilley: I will have to look that up. I have no doubt that it would be a large number. It would be a means-tested benefit. It flies in the face of the criticisms that the rest of the shadow social security team has of means-tested benefits; that is an interesting but not unusual contradiction. I will look up the numbers and reply to my hon. Friend.

The hon. Member for Garscadden is not alone—he is not a maverick on this. The Commission for Social Justice made a similar proposal to extend income support to people in work on low incomes. Its proposals were helpfully costed by *The Independent*, with help from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, a member of which sat on the commission. They show that the mortgage benefit to low-earning home buyers will cost between £600 million and £700 million. It is part of total identifiable proposals in the commission's report that add up to £7 billion a year.

It is financed by what are euphemistically called "savings". The specific one that seems to be related to mortgage benefit is the abolition of mortgage tax relief—again—raising between £2.5 billion and £3 billion a year. In addition, the abolition of the married couple's allowance and tax on child benefit would in total raise more than £6 billion in extra income tax, paid by the income tax payer to finance the identifiable policies of the commission.

Mr. Dewar: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman had an opportunity to inform the House about his policies, but he did not do so. He cannot object if I fill in for him. The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) can tell us more later.

Mr. Dewar: I always knew that the Secretary of State was a "proper gent", as they say.

As the right hon. Gentleman is so concerned about the importance of MIRAS, and he will remember the 1992 Tory election manifesto, which I know he takes seriously, because it has stopped him doing all sorts of things, for example, to child benefit, I ask him whether he still stands by the promise in it—that Conservatives will maintain mortgage tax relief? Does that mean that he can guarantee that there will be no further adjustment downwards, and that it will be restored to its 1992 rate, at the first possible opportunity?

Mr. Lilley: It is clearly compatible with what the Government have done and is incompatible with what the hon. Gentleman proposes. It is a bit rich of the Labour party to criticise a reduction in the value of something that it proposed to abolish.

The position taken by the Labour party on the issue is irresponsible in the literal sense of the word. Labour is irresponsible in its criticisms, its scaremongering and talking down of the housing market. It is irresponsible in ignoring the real problem, which we seek to address: to provide greater and more comprehensive cover for those who are unprotected by income support for mortgage interest. It is irresponsible in that it will not even tell us whether it will reverse our plans should it ever get elected. It recklessly proposes extra costs and refuses to tell the House in detail about them. It is irresponsible in that it does not recognise that individuals should play a part and accept some personal responsibility for housing finance, who in general do not object to doing so.

The cost of mortgage protection must be borne by someone. There is no logic that says that that someone should always be the taxpayer. Our proposals will mean that everyone—it is fewer than one third at present—who takes out a new mortgage should be properly covered against unemployment. They will mean fewer defaults and repossessions and a healthier market. Far from taking protection away, we are making it more likely that future borrowers are adequately protected. I recommend these measures to the House.

5.23 pm

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): The Government amendment moved in the name of the Prime Minister says that the House

"believes that the Government's proposals will lead to the development of more comprehensive, less costly insurance cover".

That doctrinaire statement and the speech by the Secretary of State might be excusable from someone who had just landed in this country from another planet or who had just come out of business school full of free-market theories, but it could not be said by somebody with experience of the workings of the Financial Services Act 1986, or with responsibility for the workings of the Act, who had to oversee the disaster in the sales of personal pensions from which so many people are suffering, into which so much money will have to be poured and which has not yet begun to run its course.

The faith that the Government have placed in the way in which the insurance market will respond to their proposals is completely misplaced in a number of specific areas: first, the likely cost to be borne by home owners who must insure their mortgages; secondly, the consequences of the Government's determination not to regulate the market in the insurance policies that will be sold to cover the loss of income support for mortgage payments; and, thirdly, the area, scope and availability of cover for people wishing to buy their own homes.

On cost, it is interesting that, in 1993, home owners paid premiums totalling £220 million on mortgage protection policies, yet only £150 million was paid out on those policies. That suggests that some 30 per cent. of the premiums is absorbed in the cost of selling, marketing and administering the policies, and the profits of the insurance companies. One year's snapshot figures do not necessarily tell the whole tale, but I suggest that that sort of excess shows that it is an inefficient way in which to insure against anything.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that one year's snapshot figures do not necessarily tell the whole tale. They cannot possibly, because the insurance industry is necessarily cyclical and there will be years when it pays out more than it collects in premiums, and those are offset by the years when the industry collects more in premiums than it pays out. A single year's figures are completely misleading.

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman will agree that, throughout the insurance industry, the cost of administration and marketing of private insurance policies is vastly greater than the cost of administering those that are run through the state social security system, and the

cost of selling the policies means that home owners will be paying not only the cost of their own insurance but the great costs of administering and running the system. I believe that that makes it an inefficient deal for home owners at the best of times.

The second point on cost has been raised, but as far as I am aware it has not been answered: people will now be left with a period of three months in which no cover will be available to them from the state or from the typical mortgage protection policy. I have not yet heard an explicit statement from the Government as to whether that three months is to be paid by the individual, from separate savings which they must make, or whether the Government blithely assume that mortgage lenders will absorb that three-month shortfall without moaning about it. I suspect that it might be the latter, in which case it is not surprising that building societies are talking about ending their agreements on repossessions.

It is estimated—I believe that it is widely accepted—that the increased cost of these policies over the lifetime of a typical mortgage will be between £7,000 and £8,000 per home buyer. That all points to the design of an inadequate system of cover, which would be more expensive to home owners, who are now the majority in our society, than other ways of insuring cover collectively through the social security system.

The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, among others, has called for a reform of the Financial Services Act, because it believes that the regulation of the sale of mortgage protection policies has proved inadequate. The Secretary of State asked us to rely yet again on codes of conduct and self-regulation that have so demonstrably failed in the sale of personal pensions and other products. Proper regulation of the sale of mortgage protection policies is essential under any circumstances, but to move into an enforced extension of the market to all home owners over time without regulating it properly is grossly irresponsible.

Such products suffer from arbitrary exclusion clauses. During the last recession, many of those who had mortgage protection policies found that the policies were withdrawn once the insurance company realised that somebody might face redundancy. In coal mining areas and other areas where redundancies were widely mooted, insurance companies tore up the policies just at the moment when people were likely to want to claim on them. The codes of practice that we have been offered so far will not ensure that those policies remain in force when they are needed.

Inappropriate policies may be sold. After all, on paper, people would require a policy that replaced the interest payments that the Government are taking away. Yet it is likely that, just to show that I do not take everything that the building societies say at face value, faced with a captive client, the building societies will be tempted to say that insurance is necessary and to sell a policy vastly more expensive than the client needs in order to cover the interest payments that the Government are taking away.

The Secretary of State asserted that there would be a fall in the costs of commissions and fees charged by the sellers of insurance policies. But it is interesting that, in parliamentary answers, Ministers have said that they have no intention of regulating to require the disclosure of commissions and fees at the point of sale of the policies.

For the past three weeks, anyone selling a personal pension policy has had to disclose fees and commissions. Yet when it comes to the sale of mortgage protection insurance, no such disclosure will be required, nor will there be any requirement to show that alternative and perhaps cheaper sources of insurance might be available.

It is easy to see how the new home buyer, possibly a first-time buyer who is quite unsophisticated in the financial services market, will be at the mercy of the building society agent who is not only providing the mortgage but under instructions to sell the insurance policy as well.

There will be no regulation to cover the widespread problem that most of these policies are invalidated by a short period of return to work. A person who is covered may claim on his policy. After nine months he may receive the job seeker's allowance. Within 14 weeks he may be forced back to work through threat of loss of benefit, but into a short-term or temporary job—the sort of job that the Secretary of State has made it clear people will be forced to take or they will lose their benefit.

Immediately, under most of the policies, people will make themselves uninsurable for future purposes. When the temporary or short-term job that they have been required to take comes to an end after a few weeks or months, they will be without cover. There has been no explanation from the Government about how they will cope with such a situation. It is impossible to cope with that without effective direct regulation of the industry.

The third area to which I wish to refer concerns the scope of the policies that are on sale. That seems to be the point at which the whole exercise becomes an article of faith rather than a rational analysis of what the market is likely to be. Currently, 19 per cent. of home owners are on short-term contracts, are self-employed or are part-time workers. But 36 per cent. of the work force are in those relatively insecure categories and most people believe that the number of people in self-employment, in part-time work and on contract work is likely to grow.

The reality is that some of those people, probably a substantial number, will no longer be able to enter into home ownership because of the difficulties or the risks of obtaining mortgage protection cover.

As a statement of faith, it is right to say that insurance cover will be available. Insurance cover is always available for anything at a price. But the one thing that the Government have ruled out is any regulation to ensure that insurance cover is available at a reasonable price for everybody. In replies to me, Ministers have ruled out the regulation of premiums.

We know, because it is there in all other forms of insurance, that the insurance industry is disaggregating its client group more and more every year. It simply is not realistic to believe that insurance companies will be happy to spread the risk of insuring against unemployment equally across those in secure employment and those who are in the most marginal part-time and short-term work.

Compared with today's costs, some cheaper policies will be available for those in the most secure employment. It is intrinsically unlikely that anything else would happen. But that would be balanced by a sharp and prohibitive rise for those who are clearly in insecure employment. That would be sufficient to bar altogether a substantial and growing number of people from entering

[Mr. Denham]

the housing market. That is an extraordinary policy aim for a Government who have always said that they back home ownership.

On grounds of cost and the efficiency with which insurance is provided in our society, this is a mistaken move. The Government's refusal on dogmatic grounds to regulate the very industry that they seek to promote is inexcusable and irresponsible. The damage to the aspiration of becoming a home owner of people who would rather have full-time permanent employment but cannot find it will be devastating.

5.35 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham). He has raised a number of important issues, but I hope that he will forgive me if I do not follow his line of debate.

Members on both sides of the House, either in their speeches or interventions, are seeking to concentrate on the inequities for certain specific groups inherent in the proposals that we are debating today. But as chairman of the Manufacturing and Construction Industries Alliance, I am personally deeply concerned about the impact of the proposals on the housing market.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for spending a considerable amount of time with me earlier this week when we had a full and frank discussion on the matter. We covered many if not all of the issues that have been covered so far in the debate.

My right hon. Friend is aware that I have met representatives of the Council of Mortgage Lenders, the Building Societies Association and the Association of British Insurers and the chief executive of the building society whose head office is located in my constituency, the Cheshire building society, an extremely efficient, progressive and fast-growing building society.

I remind my right hon. Friend that the Conservative Government were returned to power at the last general election in 1992 on a manifesto which pledged:

"The opportunity to own a home and pass it on is one of the most important rights an individual has in a free society. Conservatives have extended that right. It lies at the heart of our philosophy."

That commitment, the promotion of home ownership, advocated by the Conservative party ever since it took office in 1979 and even before that, has transformed, particularly since 1979, the political complexion and the very structures of our society, and has proved to be, as I said to my right hon. Friend earlier this week, a winning formula.

People from lower income groups who had in the past felt alienated, marginalised or ignored by the main political parties could, albeit often after struggling to make ends meet, finally buy a stake in the property-owning democracy, a stake which often brought them into the Conservative fold for the very first time in the history of our party and gave my party the electoral boost that it needed. Ownership of property brought people enhanced self-respect and a stake in society, creating both a sense of responsibility and greater social stability—something in which I fervently believe; I hope that my party believes in it too.

Today, sadly, as we examine the Government's record in recent years, that commitment to a property-owning democracy and to home ownership—that pledge—seems a little ragged. Mortgage interest relief at source—MIRAS—is being phased out in what I consider to be a Treasury-driven exercise: it was reduced from 25 per cent. to 20 per cent. last April, and will fall to 15 per cent. in April this year. There has been no increase in the £30,000 ceiling since 1985, nearly a decade ago.

Notwithstanding the comprehensive speech made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the Government's latest proposal to reduce mortgage interest support for home owners who lose their jobs carries a number of serious risks for those people, and also represents yet another nail in the coffin of the housing market and the property-owning democracy for which I stand.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Come on!

Mr. Winterton: Let me tell my hon. Friend that the housing market is showing signs of weakness which reflect a lack of confidence, job insecurity and the prospect of further MIRAS reductions in April. That was confirmed only last night at a dinner that I had the pleasure of attending, when the Governor of the Bank of England told me openly and honestly, "The housing market is flat; the housing market is weak; there is indeed a problem."

The timing of my right hon. Friend's proposals is particularly unfortunate, and is likely to cause still more house purchases to be deferred. Indeed, figures relating to sales negotiated and new inquiries for the first weeks of this year already reveal that we are set for one of the worst years for house sales for some time. That is very bad news for the economy, because the housing market can influence a wide range of economic activity. Moreover, the implementation of such confidence-dampening measures causes a hiatus after their introduction. I need only cite the ending of double interest relief in August 1988 and the ending of the stamp duty moratorium on 19 August 1992.

In short, the housing market—which has not yet participated in the more general economic upturn—seems set to head further downhill into the doldrums. That is not due to high prices, lack of desire to own a home or a shortage of quality homes in all income ranges; it is due almost entirely to what I would describe as a series of Treasury-inspired blows which have left house builders punch drunk from the impact of what genuinely appears to be an attack on home ownership.

Mr. Porter: Author!

Mr. Winterton: Let me tell my hon. Friend—who is intervening very effectively from a sedentary position, as he generally does—that these are not just my own views.

Mr. Jenkin: Who wrote it, Nick?

Mr. Winterton: My hon. Friend should note that the House would do well to consider the recent third report of the Treasury Select Committee on the 1994 unified Budget, which stated:

"We suspect that a long list of factors such as rising interest rates, poor job security and the announced changes to income support for mortgage payments, would incline individuals to stay out of the housing market, and explain a static market. None of our official witnesses gave us cause to change our mind."

Let me inform my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) that the Treasury Select Committee—chaired as it is by my long-standing and respected hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Sir T. Arnold), a former vice-chairman of the Conservative party—is not a maverick voice, but a credible commentator that has wisely sounded a serious warning to the Government at this time of consultation.

The fear of a reversal in the Government's attitude to home ownership is not only in the minds of observers. It was the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration himself who sounded the warning in a recent interview with the magazine *Roof*, which has already been mentioned. He said:

"I don't think there is some undiscovered new wave of owner-occupation which is about to burst upon us, quite frankly. Most people still do have that as a natural aspiration"—

this is the section that I consider important—

"but I don't personally attribute any moral superiority to owning a house".

Wise words, perhaps, in some people's view; but they relay a grim message about the Minister's own approach to home ownership.

Mr. Jenkin: Does the Treasury Select Committee report, which my hon. Friend quoted, actually say that a steady and stable housing market is a bad thing?

Mr. Winterton: No, indeed it does not—although I do not have a copy of the entire report with me; I shall certainly look at it after the debate to see whether that is specifically spelled out. Of course we want a stable housing market and low interest rates, because they are desirable for a sound economy.

Let me refer my hon. Friend to statistics produced by the House-Builders Federation, which show that the number of weekly site visitors so far this year is dramatically down on the figures for last year and the year before—and both those years were bad. Moreover, weekly net reservations also show a dramatic reduction on the past two years. I am glad to say that the federation produces its figures very quickly. Those, I think, are serious warnings.

Let me also tell my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), who is sitting behind the Minister—I assume that he is the Minister's parliamentary private secretary—that January and February are usually good months for the housing industry. The figures are therefore quite serious, and I hope that they will be noted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

The Council of Mortgage Lenders now predicts that, as a consequence of the change in income support for mortgage interest,

"mortgage arrears will rise and repossessions are likely to increase in 1996".

Let me point out to my right hon. Friend that that may bring us dangerously close to a general election. Furthermore, the council predicts that, given the current economic climate and political approach, there is never likely to be an upturn in the housing market. The social implications of such a position are grave.

The new proposals will again place a smothering pillow over the slumbering face of confidence in the new housing market. They will discriminate against households and individuals wishing or needing to move house. As *The Times* put it on 1 December—it is important to note the views of these commentators—

"crucially for the Government's fortunes, it will further heighten middle-class insecurity. Home ownership, house prices, economic security and middle-class support for the Tories are inextricably linked".

I share that view. I invite my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State not only to reaffirm his commitment, and that of the Government, positively to promote home ownership, but to tell us clearly how that is to be done.

I do not intend to go into the details of the proposals, because that has already been done by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and will no doubt be done again by other speakers. The essence of the social injustice, however, lies in the fact that—as the Prime Minister proudly boasted in a written answer to me just a few days ago—

"Owner-occupation in the United Kingdom has risen from just over 54 per cent. in 1979 to over 66 per cent."—[*Official Report*, 23 January 1995; Vol. 253, c. 25.]

That is important.

In keeping with their political vision of society the Government have enticed and encouraged into the property market many council and housing association tenants and many people who are on low incomes. Now they appear to be withdrawing from those groups the safety net of support, however inadequate it is. The policy has gone seriously awry for the most vulnerable, although I appreciate and support the steps that are to be taken to limit interest relief, where it is available, to a maximum value of £100,000.

There is now a clear and deliberate policy emerging from those who advise my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to stifle the housing market. Such Treasury mandarins—and I include the Governor of the Bank of England—continue to display an irrational fear of the childhood bogeyman of inflation which was rooted in social and economic conditions that no longer apply because our economic recovery is export driven. They see the housing market as a smouldering fire of intolerable price rises.

I do not want to see a return to the ludicrous, spiralling house prices of the late 1980s, but more movement and more confidence are prerequisites for growth in the economy as a whole and of the electoral prospects of my party. If we are committed to stimulating such growth, let the next Budget give a real, but responsible boost to the market by increasing MIRAS again from 15 to 25 per cent. for first-time buyers. It should be up to a maximum of £50,000 for a period of, say, five to 10 years. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will convey that message to the Chancellor. He should abolish the tax on prudence and responsibility which he imposed in his Budget when he introduced what I would describe as new and completely unjustified taxes on insurance premiums.

The proposals are well intentioned, but at this time they amount in practice to a betrayal of those on low incomes, the self-employed, people on short-term contracts and others who are struggling to have their stake in the property-owning democracy. I believe, and I hope that I am right, that it was Sir Winston Churchill who spoke about the need for a safety net for those who fall off the ladder of life. I respected him and I believe that when he said that he meant it. Society has a responsibility for those who through no fault of their own fall off the ladder of life. In this period of consultation I say to my hon. Friend

[Mr. Winterton]

that the proposals are poor economics, they are weak housing policy and they are bad politics. I shall not be able to support them in the Lobby.

5.52 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I am pleased to take part in the debate, although I realise that my speech and those of other hon. Members will probably have no effect whatever on the Government. Their policy is ill considered and will depress the property market, as the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) has said. In the long term it will cost jobs. At the same time as the Government are introducing the measure they are penalising the rented sector by cutting housing benefit. The policy will be an absolute disaster and the Government must do a U-turn before it is too late.

In his letter to all hon. Members, the Secretary of State for Social Security stated that mortgage interest benefit had risen from £31 million in 1979 to £1.1 billion today and that reform was clearly essential. It is indeed essential, but he should have gone on to say that the reason for the need for reform is the mess that Tory policies have created over the past 15 years. The letter said that from October existing borrowers who were not on income support would get no benefit for two months, 50 per cent. for four months and 100 per cent. thereafter.

Many, although not all, of those people will get into debt. The letter states that for new loans after October people will get nothing for nine months, but I should like the Secretary of State to clarify that. I have been led to believe that those who take out mortgages after the Budget statement will not get benefit for nine months.

These are not reforms—they are cuts. If the Minister were serious about reform, he would look at the underlying reasons for the problems and listen to people who have pointed to Government policies over the past 15 years. I was not against some of those policies, such as the right to buy, which was introduced by Mrs. Thatcher. But the Government have been responsible for economic mismanagement, the boom and bust of the 1980s, record unemployment and a record recession. Their employment policies are designed to encourage people to accept low pay and part-time work and contract work, which many people are now accepting. That is leading to insecurity in employment and in the housing market.

Those factors are linked and lead to higher mortgage interest benefits, but instead of looking at them the Minister is considering cuts. In the past four years, 250,000 homes have been repossessed. The figure is coming down and that is welcome news. I hope that it will continue to come down, but I am afraid that this policy will lead to even more repossessions.

Some 1,250,000 mortgages are greater in value than the value of the homes that they represent. The available statistics show that the growth in the number of people buying homes between 1984 and 1991 was in the so-called blue collar sector—the people who have faced more unemployment. The Government tried to persuade them into home ownership through the right-to-buy scheme.

The Government must realise that unemployment is not usually the fault of the unemployed. Yet the proposals make it look as though that is what the Government think. Unemployment is due to the economic climate. The policy will deal a further blow to the housing market and mortgage lenders are crying out about it. I gather that there was a fairly acrimonious meeting recently between the Secretary of State and the mortgage lenders, who stated that they thought that there would be thousands more repossessions and that that would cause a slump. I know that the lenders have a vested interest, but we must heed that warning.

The Secretary of State says that that cannot happen, that he will modify the Administration of Justice Act 1970 so that people will have longer to pay—perhaps even within the lifetime of the mortgage. That is fine so far as it goes, but mortgage lenders do not have to lend money and will pick and choose. The Government have always said that a thriving housing market is an indicator of economic recovery and they still keep saying so, but perhaps the Secretary of State does not agree. He will say that people should take out insurance, but that is not always available as illness or marriage break-up and unemployment is not always covered. We must face the fact that only 40 per cent. of those claiming benefit are unemployed.

Let us examine some existing insurance policies. Citizens advice bureaux have reported that people have been duped into buying policies with loopholes and that claims are not being met. One bureau reported the case of a man who had been made redundant. He did not want to sit around, so he got employment which lasted for some time but in different jobs. Eventually he became unemployed again, but he was not covered by his insurance because he was not in continuous employment for six months. That has not been addressed. Such happenings are not uncommon. How will such people survive? They will not if they do not have benefit and many will face repossession and homelessness. As I have said, that will be a further blow to the housing market.

One in three people buy insurance protection, but the policies are riddled with exclusions, as I have illustrated by my reference to the man who was made redundant. People are also ruled out by pre-existing medical conditions, illness in the previous 12 months or lack of continuous employment. It would bar people on fixed-term contracts, unless they run for a number of years. It would bar a number of building workers on contracts. It would bar a number of actors and people working in the media. Above all, the self-employed would suffer.

Those with mortgages will have to find an estimated £7,000 in insurance payments over 25 years. From October, the cost of a mortgage in real terms will be 10.5 per cent. higher than it is now, taking into account mortgage tax relief and other factors. That does not include the mortgage interest rate rise of 0.3 per cent. announced last Friday. At the same time, the Government are cutting housing benefit. Where will people go? Housing association grants are due to fall in 1996-97 to 1989-90 levels. Housing investment will fall because of the end of the capital receipts holiday. The Government's subsidy to council housing will continue to dwindle. Council and housing association rents continue to rise. If the rug is pulled from underneath home owners, they will find that there is no low-cost rented accommodation available for them. All of that will contribute to the lack of the feel-good factor about which the Government seem to be so worried.

If the Government are thinking about reforms, they should introduce real reforms and put people with mortgages on the same basis as tenants. They should introduce a benefit for mortgage holders—*[Interruption.]* I accept that it would have to be paid with the phasing out of MIRAS—*[Interruption.]* That is in our policy document and it has been for some time. We are suggesting that in the long term there should be a new benefit for householders and tenants alike, which would mean that everybody would be better off in work.

I agree with the view that currently people on income support who have help with their mortgages are not motivated to take low-paid work. With a merger of the two benefits in the long term, they would always be better off in work. There would be a taper in the same way as there is a taper on housing benefit. The cost of income support would be reduced because there would be an incentive for people to get back into employment.

All that the Government's policies will do is to impose a cost on people in the long term. There will be more repossessions and more homelessness. There will be a further destabilisation of the housing market. The Secretary of State's policy will cause misery and will not contribute to the feel-good factor about which the Government are always talking.

6.2 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): I have listened to the debate with interest and care. I was interested to note the inconsistency with which Labour Members attacked the Government and what they are trying to do. I have been in the Chamber for debates on subjects such as housing and inner-city matters when, time and again, Labour Members have criticised the Government for increasing the dependency culture. The number of people dependent on mortgage interest relief in 1979 totalled 100,000; in 1988 the figure was almost 400,000; and last year it was just short of half a million. It is obvious that there is an increasing dependency sector and the Government, as part of their proposals, are suggesting how that could be reduced. I should have thought that the Opposition, who have so strongly criticised the extension of the dependency culture, would applaud that—but they have said not a word.

With the new spending rectitude of the Labour party, broadcast daily throughout the media, one would have thought that there would be considerable concern about how expenditure has risen from £31 million in 1979 to more than £1 billion last year on this item alone. One would hope that the Opposition would be consistent in their arguments and say, "Hold on, the Government are sensibly trying to be responsible with public expenditure, so let us welcome the tough decision that the Government have taken." But no, throughout the debate Labour Members have insisted that this is just one more attack on a particular group of vulnerable people.

The Conservative party stands for home ownership. It stands for the ability of people to buy, own and live in homes happily and comfortably. Indeed, the record referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) stands for itself. Home ownership has risen from almost 55 per cent. to almost 67 per cent. I have argued many times that the experts might be wrong, but they say—and they are all agreed on this—that there is a ceiling on any predictable level of home ownership of about 70 per cent. On that basis, we are only some 3 per cent. short of what the experts say we could conceivably achieve in home ownership, so we have done well in that area.

We must ensure that home owners are assisted, encouraged and live in the real world; that is what the proposal is about. I looked, I listened and I was prepared to criticise the Government if they had not included a transitional period, but they have. It is only with insurance taken out after 1 October this year that the rule will apply. It is vital that a fair, good and thoughtful Government provide a transitional period. We could not do that with milk quotas because the European Union would not allow it. As a result, many farmers were tied to their equivalent of mortgage or business loans.

That will not happen with the Government's proposal; there is to be a proper, phased introduction. The results are sensible, as I understand them, and it is why I support the Government. If any of our conclusions do not hold, we will have to think again, but in the round the results are such that I would argue strongly that we should back the Government's proposal.

Of course there will be savings—small to begin with, but larger by stages. There was an extraordinary paradox in the remarks of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). I do not know whether my hon. Friends noticed it, but he began by saying that this was an horrific and damaging proposal for many people—yet only a paragraph later he said, "Well, the Government are going to save only a small amount of money." If that is true, why the horror? The point is that the proposal exercises something that we were elected to do—to spend responsibly.

We are becoming more sophisticated on the subject of debt. It is a most important subject that we need to deal with in this country. Young people in Germany do not borrow money to buy houses at the age of 25 or 30. The average age for doing so—and they do not buy that often—is nearer 35 or 40. It is certainly right to encourage the purchase of homes, but it is also about time we thought about responsibility in the acquisition of debt. Over the years, the Government have been consistent in their dislike of debt. That was why, in the face of opposition from Labour Members, we reduced the national debt at several stages during the 1980s. We do not like debt and we do not like young people getting into debt irresponsibly. The proposals will assist the culture of thinking about debt and of getting into it only when one is ready for it.

I am descended from a group of people with a Puritan past, which many hon. Members have. Those people did not like to borrow at all. People will have to consider the acquisition of a mortgage with the extra hurdle. They will have to think about the acceptance of the nine-month period that is included in Government's proposal. That is a sensible addition to the growing culture.

With regard to the opposition of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield and of Labour Members, there may be a temporary effect on the macro-housing market. The proposal may lead to a points depression in that market, but as we are close to the 70 per cent. maximum purchase level, that effect would probably have occurred anyway. In the end, however, more people will take up mortgages, with more thought to the debt that they take on, and with more planning. I conclude, therefore, that

[Mr. Hartley Booth]

fewer people will claim, even though they could claim. As I said earlier, the proposal will strike a blow against the dependency culture.

The Conservative party is the party of home ownership and of spending responsibility. It is a party of debt responsibility. For all those reasons, I support the Government's proposals and oppose what has been said by the Labour party.

6.11 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): I must take exception to some of the remarks made by the Secretary of State for Social Security. It is almost beyond belief that he has the effrontery to stand up in the House and to say that he is seeking to improve the position for people unfortunate enough to become unemployed who have to pay a mortgage. It borders on the mendacious.

The Secretary of State talks about the two thirds of people who cannot benefit because they are not in receipt of income support. Obviously, those people do not need the relief. If they have redundancy payments and more than £3,000 in the bank, they may be able to manage for a few weeks. In case the Secretary of State is not aware, the income support level is below what is regarded by the European Union as a decent level. When those people go on income support, they will have difficulties, which shows how barren the thinking is behind the legislation.

Since 1979, a string of Bills have been introduced to worsen the plight of people who are unfortunate enough to be unemployed. First, it must be said that unemployment is brought about by the Government's policies and not by people who happen to be unfortunate enough to become unemployed. That is an important factor, which the Secretary of State seems to overlook.

Two unedifying strands in the Government's philosophy seem to have come together in the Bill. The first is their lack of respect, concern or compassion for the unemployed, which borders on disdain. The second is their love of providing work for their friends in the City. That was shown when the Government sought to abrogate their responsibility in relation to the payment of state earnings-related pensions. Because it was costing the taxpayer too much money, the Government decided that private insurance should take over. What a disaster that has been, and what a cost to the taxpayer it has proved to be. Not many strands in the Government's thinking are philosophically satisfactory, but those two strands are the worst.

The Government are forever stating that they believe in a property-owning democracy. Some Labour Members also believe in that. Since 1967, I have been in the privileged position of having my own house. When I started to buy, however, the circumstances were much more propitious than they would be for anyone buying now. I issue a challenge to those on the Treasury Bench: I am willing to give way if the Minister will stand up and guarantee that every person who seeks and obtains a £45,000 mortgage will be able to obtain for £12 per month satisfactory insurance which covers them against sickness and unemployment?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans) *rose—*

Mr. Etherington: I am delighted.

Mr. Evans: There is a fatal fallacy in the hon. Gentleman's premise. If the hypothetical person in the example that he mentioned is granted a mortgage because his credit is sound and because he is in a reasonable position to expect reasonably to repay that mortgage, there is no reason to suppose, if a sensible lending judgment is made, that he cannot be insured as well.

Mr. Etherington: Those were weasel words. I asked for a guarantee, not a platitude, but that was what the Minister offered. No guarantee was given. The Government are in favour of people owning or paying for their own houses, and getting into debt. They support that so that those people can be controlled by their employers, so that the threat of the dole queue becomes ever worse, so that they can be forced into taking poor employment, and so that they are not in a position to fight back when an employer tries to worsen their conditions.

That is what this is all about. It is not about financial constraints. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) has already pointed out that a small amount of money will be saved by the Treasury by the measure. It is not, however, a small amount of money to the victims who find, after a few weeks of unemployment, that they are likely to become homeless. That is how much the Government care about people's security. The Government do not give a damn for the citizens of this country unless they are making money for someone else—preferably the Government's friends in the City.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) mentioned that insurance companies can sometimes be a little fickle in the way in which they deal with policy holders. He understated the position. He said that if a miner became unemployed, the insurance company would try to find ways of abrogating its responsibilities. It is not quite so bad as that because the insurance company would not have condescended to give a policy to a miner in the first place. I do not speaking from anecdotal evidence, but from personal experience as in 1967 I sought to obtain just such a policy.

I have no doubt that some Conservative Members, who have made many interventions, who are hired hands of various insurance companies, and who are on their payrolls but do not bother to declare it on occasions in the House—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman has just made a very serious allegation. I hope that he will either withdraw it or substantiate it.

Mr. Etherington: I shall substantiate it. A Conservative Member stood up on, I think, five occasions this afternoon during a debate on an important matter in

which the insurance industry is involved, and from which it benefits, but he has not declared an interest. I invite him to comment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows the rules of the House. Any hon. Member who makes a speech in the House is required to declare an interest. Hon. Members are not required to make such a declaration in an intervention. The hon. Gentleman should know the rules of the House and he should challenge only hon. Members who disobey those rules.

Mr. Etherington: I accept your reprimand, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If I am required to withdraw my remark, I shall do so. I hope that if the hon. Member concerned makes a speech he will clarify the matter for the benefit of the House.

On the notional figure of £45,000 of borrowing for a mortgage, it has been stated that the payment required will be about £12 a month, but people in the financial services business say that it will be £21 a month.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) who alone of all Conservative Members spoke with compassion and some understanding for those who find themselves in the vulnerable position of having a large mortgage, on the payment of which the retention of their home depends. It is to the hon. Gentleman's credit that he recognises their plight, but I am sorry that his understanding was not reflected in the speeches of other Conservative Members, least of all that of the Secretary of State.

The Government's proposals should be taken in conjunction with various pieces of legislation that have been introduced since 1979 and which discriminate against the unemployed. Together, they create a society to which fear is the key. If people do not have very good jobs but are paying a mortgage and have the threat of things being made so much worse if they become employed, the more fearful they will be of challenging their employers. That is what the proposals are all about.

I trust that people outside will see the proposals for what they are: they have nothing to do with improving the lot of those who are unfortunate enough to be unemployed and have a large mortgage to service, but they have everything to do with further intimidation of those who are fortunate enough to be employed.

6.20 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I am happy to declare an interest as an adviser to Legal and General Group plc, which is an insurer and an arranger of mortgages. I am a little distressed that the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington), with whom I have had many debates in European Standing Committee B where I have often declared my interest, should not expect me to make that declaration. This time, I shall put his attitude down to the heat of the debate and leave it at that. I shall respond later to several comments that he made, especially that about the unattractive motive that he feels lies behind the Government's policy.

I deal first with a recurrent theme that was mentioned by opponents of the measure and others, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth), who represents the constituency which, perhaps more than any other, resonates with the principle of home ownership. The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) and my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) also mentioned the effect that the measure is likely to have on the housing market.

I do not participate lightly in the debate. My constituency has probably suffered some of the biggest falls in property prices. Negative equity on a large scale is one of the major problems facing my constituents. My constituency was an area of considerable new build in the 1980s when houses were purchased at what we now regard as inflated prices, with the result that negative equity is a serious problem in huge parts of my constituency. Therefore, I would not dream of supporting a measure that would have a seriously deleterious effect on the housing market. It would not be in my interest to do so and as, I think, the hon. Member for Rochdale—but certainly the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar)—suggested, it would be extraordinary for a Conservative Government to propose such a measure.

The measure will have an extraordinarily slight effect in its first year. Indeed, the hon. Member for Garscadden derided the Government for the fact that the measure will remove a mere £18 million from the housing market in that time and will build only over a period of time—perhaps 10 years—to savings of perhaps £200 million. I should explain how that will happen.

In the first year, a small proportion of householders will be eligible under the scheme and only a small proportion of them might trigger the effects of the scheme. In the second year, perhaps twice as many households will fall on hard times and be eligible for the scheme. That is how the scheme will build and how savings will accumulate year by year. In that sense, the scheme will have a minimal impact in its first year of operation. It cannot be described as a knockout blow to the housing market when it is being introduced so gradually.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) complained that we have are not piloting the scheme, but, in effect, the first year of operation will be the pilot because such a tiny proportion of the housing market will be affected. It is important to keep this important, revenue-saving measure, which has other benefits that I shall discuss later, in perspective.

Before I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield, I must say that his somewhat hysterical comments about the state of the housing market, made in this place in what may be a delicate period of transition from decline to recovery, probably do more damage to confidence in the housing market than the scheme ever would.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I am not considering the measure on its own; I am considering it with the reduction in MIRAS, which is extremely unpopular and is having an impact, and with increases in mortgage interest rates, although they are as yet only nudging higher. Job security must also be taken into account. Although we do not often do so under a Conservative Government, dare I say that there has been an increase in taxation, which means that people have less to spend and are therefore less likely to buy a new house?

Mr. Jenkin: Interest rates have fallen substantially over the past three, four or five years. We may have to expect small increases in future to continue our successful anti-inflation policy, but we do not want to return to the 1980s when so much economic activity was diverted into speculative property investment. My hon. Friend praised

[Mr. Jenkin]

the Government for the export-led recovery, and we must ensure that investment in assets for export remains more attractive than investment in property for speculative gain. We should encourage people to invest in property in which they want to live rather than to invest in property for speculative purposes. We are succeeding in that, and this slight measure is probably not even relevant to the argument about incentives to invest in property.

Two main issues have arisen in our debate. The first involves equity of treatment for those in the rented sector and those with mortgages in owner-occupied properties. The hon. Member for Garscadden in particular implied that the benefit and tax system should treat similarly owner-occupiers and those in the rented sector. In fact, there is a certain balance. We give home owners generous support—some billions of pounds—through MIRAS, and it is entirely logical that those who benefit in one respect should accept a little more responsibility in another.

Secondly, what has been lacking in the debate is an appreciation of how the insurance and lending markets operate. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) chuckles, but, if we had accepted Opposition Front Benchers' advice over the past 15 years whenever we placed our faith in the way in which the markets operate and can take over functions previously carried out by the state, we should not have privatised anything, contracted out anything or achieved anything. Economically, we would be in a substantially worse position today. Well may the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras laugh—at his own folly for all the mistakes made and bad advice given by his party to the country over the past 15 years.

The important thing is that the system will make more demands on lenders and borrowers. Just as during the recession lenders were required to make finer judgments about who they lent to and about who was a safe risk, the insurance markets will be required to do the same. It is hardly surprising that there is not a flourishing insurance market for mortgage insurance at the moment, when so much of the market has been displaced by state activity. That is what one would expect. When the state has been undertaking an activity, one would not expect the private sector to come in and take part.

The theme—I return to the comments by the hon. Member for Sunderland, North—behind the proposals is to try to make borrowers and lenders make more responsible decisions on loans taken out and houses bought. We do not want a market—indeed, we cannot afford a market—which is insulated from all the consequences of its decisions by the state underwriting every risk taken by the consumer. That creates the problems which overheated the property market in the 1980s.

Finally, I shall deal briefly with the issue of mortgage benefit, which arose earlier. That is perhaps the maddest idea that the House has heard for some time. I have great sympathy for what the Labour party says about the number of people who find themselves on income-related, means-tested benefits. I agree that there are too many people on means-tested benefits. If we moved more towards a system of tax allowances and away from means-tested benefits, we would avoid the indignity of means-testing for quite a number of people.

The proposal of mortgage benefit would increase the number of people—most of them probably already paying tax—on means-tested benefits and paying tax, thereby increasing the poverty trap and increasing all the problems which currently beset our benefits system. It would be a major step backwards. I urge the House to reject that idea and to support instead sensible measures such as the Government's proposals instead.

6.32 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I begin by declaring an interest as a consultant to HACAS housing consultancy company, although, to the best of my knowledge, it does no work relevant to the debate. I have certainly undertaken no related work.

This has been an important and revealing, albeit short, debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) spelt out with his characteristic incisiveness the main problems associated with the Government's proposals for home owners and the impact on the housing market. His concerns have been echoed by my hon. Friends the Members for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) and for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) and by the hon. Members for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), all of whom raised valid and extremely powerful points about the adverse impact of the Government's proposals. By contrast, the Secretary of State secured support only from the hon. Members for Finchley (Mr. Booth) and for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin).

The Secretary of State's speech was extraordinary in three ways. First, he had to reveal that even now, two months after the proposed changes were first announced in the Budget, he is far from clear about the precise details of how the scheme will work in practice and what will be its various impacts. Secondly, even more extraordinary, coming as it does from an apologist—

Mr. Lilley: Is the hon. Gentleman complaining that we are consulting about the details? That is extraordinary given that Labour Members often make the allegation—false, of course—that we come out with things, which were thought out in great detail, without consultation.

Mr. Raynsford: The Secretary of State made great play in his speech of the adverse effect on the market of scares. He has introduced proposals which have scared the market substantially. He only has to talk to the House-Builders Federation, the Council of Mortgage Lenders and all the experts, to reinforce that point. It would have been wise on his part to have thought a little more carefully about the precise details of what he proposed before coming forward with them. That is the point that I am making. He does not appear to have worked out precisely what he is proposing to do.

Secondly, and even more extraordinary, coming as it does from an apologist for the market, the Secretary of State showed little understanding of the consequences of his proposals on the housing market. Thirdly, and perhaps most extraordinary of all, he chose to present himself rather like a latter-day Mr. Bumble; as a benefactor of the poor. In that famous section in "Oliver Twist", one recalls Mr. Bumble expressing the great principle of outdoor relief, as it was then, and social security as we would call it now, which is

"to give the paupers exactly what they don't want; and then they get tired of coming."

The Secretary of State appears to believe, and certainly tried to make the House believe, that his cuts in income support discussed today were really an act of kindness to struggling home owners in difficulty. That is nothing to do with reality. The proposals are not necessary. They are ill thought out, they are confused, they are unlikely to achieve the savings that they are supposed to generate, they will be difficult to implement and they are likely to cause severe administrative problems, widespread anomalies and immeasurable anguish to thousands of families.

The proposals are not necessary because the rising trend in income support expenditure is already beginning to reverse. From a peak of £1.22 billion in 1993, expenditure has fallen to £1.08 billion in 1994—by far more than the savings that the Secretary of State expects to achieve this year. If measures were now being taken to help recovery in the housing market, as well as to tackle the continuing scourge of unemployment, we could expect further substantial reductions over the next few years, achieving savings far in excess of the £200 million that the Secretary of State is claiming that he will save. That figure has already turned out to be a rather elusive target.

The proposals are ill thought out and confused. Under the Secretary of State's proposal, most existing home owners will receive no benefit for the first two months and then only 50 per cent. for the next four months. Thereafter, even though they will qualify in full for income support, it will be calculated on a standard rate which could be significantly below their outgoings, especially if people have opted for fixed-rate mortgages.

Pensioner claimants, we now understand, will not lose entitlement in the first two months, but they will, apparently, have their benefit assessed on the standard rate. That makes a mockery of the claim in the Government's amendment that pensioners on income support will not be adversely affected because those who have mortgages at higher rates than the standard rate will be adversely affected.

New borrowers after October will have no entitlement at all for the first nine months. We have not yet heard whether that restriction will apply to new borrowers who subsequently reach retirement age. Perhaps the Secretary of State would like to tell us whether future pensioners will be subject to that restriction. We do not know.

Hon. Members: Answer!

Mr. Lilley: Yes, they will.

Mr. Raynsford: I am delighted to hear it. We have achieved, at least, a certain further clarification.

Mr. Lilley: Not at all. I said it during my speech and the hon. Member was not listening.

Mr. Raynsford: We are delighted to tease out some of the more obscure features of the Secretary of State's proposals.

We must ask why the Secretary of State is introducing this complex series of arrangements, riddled with anomalies, ostensibly to save £200 million. Once again, confusion reigns. The Secretary of State cannot tell us precisely how that saving will be achieved. He expresses hope that, in the long term—over three years, he says—the figure will be reached. But he has some difficulty with the arithmetic, because in the written answer of 15 December in column *794*, he indicated a saving of £18 million in the first year for new borrowers, which must be the main category of saving.

We accept that the figure may be larger in the second year, but if, as the hon. Member for Colchester, North suggested, the figure doubled, it would reach only £36 million. Even if it were to double again in the third year, we would still be a very long way short of £200 million. So the Secretary of State has a certain amount of explaining to do about where the mythical £200 million will come from.

Not only can the Secretary of State not provide good answers on those figures, he cannot provide convincing answers either to questions on the likely additional costs which will flow from what he is proposing. There will be costs, and the Department will have to bear some of them. It is clear that the measures will lead to an increase in repossessions.

Mr. Lilley *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Raynsford: The Secretary of State may shake his head, but the Council of Mortgage Lenders, which is in a far better position than he is to make an estimate, states that the increase could be between 12,000 and 24,000. I would rather believe the Council of Mortgage Lenders than the Secretary of State on that particular issue.

If the council's upper figure is correct, that would push repossessions back to the level reached in 1991 when they were at their peak. That in itself is bad enough, but when we think about the consequences, the full stupidity of the proposal becomes clear. Many of the home owners who will forfeit their homes as a result of the Secretary of State's plans could find themselves in a bed-and-breakfast hotel or other temporary accommodation. While the average weekly cost of income support for home owners towards mortgage interest is £37.98, the average weekly cost of keeping a family in a bed-and-breakfast hotel is £231. In other words, it is £193 more or, in annual terms, an extra £10,036.

If just 1,800 home owners end up in bed-and-breakfast accommodation as a result of the Secretary of State's action, he will have wiped out entirely the supposed £18 million from withdrawing help for the first nine months for new home owners. That is an indication of the stupidity of the proposals because we need only think of the personal cost to the families concerned if they are condemned to bed-and-breakfast hotels and cannot stay in the family home.

The Secretary of State would have us believe that that will not happen because a new and thriving insurance industry will come to the rescue. Once again, the problem is that the Secretary of State has not done his sums and has apparently only the flimsiest grasp of the realities in the market place. The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, which was quoted by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), has made it clear that, for many individuals, mortgage protection policies are unavailable or inadequate. According to NACAB,

"Many citizens advice bureaux report clients who have taken out mortgage protection policies in good faith only to find that when they come to make a claim, the policy fails to pay out."

Many others do not even get that far. I received a letter last week, which I suspect is typical, from a home owner in Cumbria, who said:

"When I bought my home last year my mortgage company"—

[Mr. Raynsford]

which happens to be a very large and reputable building society—

"required that I should take out redundancy insurance. I agreed. No policy however could be found which would provide me with cover. My job? I am a primary teacher with years of experience who had a short break to have children. On my return to work I was given a temporary fixed term contract. The Secretary of State does not seem to realise that a large number of teachers and other workers will not qualify for redundancy insurance simply because the natural termination of a fixed term contract is not considered to be redundancy. He offers no solution to those of us in a very unpleasant situation."

How many other employees in an increasingly deregulated market, where fixed-term contracts are ever more common, will find that they are uninsurable or can obtain insurance only at a prohibitive premium? As the Secretary of State has been reminded frequently in the past two months, unemployment is only one of the factors leading to claims for income support from home owners.

Of the 548,000 claimants receiving such help last year, less than half were unemployed. Eighteen per cent. were over retirement age, 22 per cent. were lone parents and 19 per cent. were claiming for other reasons, mainly disability. The Secretary of State has yet to give us hard evidence in relation to where people will obtain insurance cover against the risk of a relationship breakdown or disability. All that he can offer is his optimistic hope—no hard evidence, just his hope—that new insurance products will emerge to cover many of those risks. However, I doubt whether many potential buyers would put their shirts, let alone their houses, on his hopes.

I challenge the Secretary of State to put this challenge to some of his colleagues. If he suggests to his colleagues, and particularly those in seats with majorities of less than 15,000, that they seek insurance cover at the moment, he might be interested to learn the terms that would be offered—if any of them qualified for cover at all.

What about the impact on the housing market? In its brief, the House-Builders Federation makes the point that it is evident to anyone with an understanding of what is happening at the present time in the market that it is, in the federation's words,

"Showing increasing weakness, reflecting lack of confidence, job insecurity and the possibility of a further reduction in MIRAS in April. The timing of these proposals"—

Mr. Jenkin: It would say that.

Mr. Raynsford: They are not my words, they are the words of the House-Builders Federation. The federation has a direct interest in a flourishing house building industry. It states:

"The timing of these proposals is particularly unfortunate and they are likely to cause more house purchases to be deferred."

The federation continues:

"the measures will go on to discriminate against those households wishing or needing to move and will slow down housing transactions even further."

Against that background, what is needed is a positive package of policies to restore confidence in the housing market. The Secretary of State is offering the opposite. In addition to the threatened increase in interest rates, and the further cut in MIRAS in April, the income support changes constitute a lethal cocktail which will poison any prospect of recovery in the market this year.

Mr. Lilley: That is scaremongering.

Mr. Raynsford: According to the Secretary of State I am scaremongering by quoting the words of the House-Builders Federation. That is an indication of how extraordinarily badly informed the Secretary of State is about the market. The story in today's *Daily Star* about his reluctance to meet representatives of the House-Builders Federation is perhaps another indication of the problem. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State intervenes from a sedentary position, but I understand from the director of the House-Builders Federation that a meeting was arranged hastily this morning after the article appeared in the *Daily Star*.

Mr. Lilley: I had received no request from the federation to see me. On reading the article, I telephoned the federation to say that my door is always open to any organisation, such as the federation, which wanted to see me. I said that if the federation wished to come and see me, it was welcome to do so. I am pleased if the hon. Gentleman has discovered that the federation is willing to come, but those are the facts and I hope that he will now withdraw his remarks.

Mr. Raynsford: The Secretary of State said that he received no request for a meeting. Any sensible Secretary of State doing what he is doing would have asked for the federation's opinion before he acted.

The measures which the Secretary of State is proposing, and which we are debating tonight, are ill-conceived and incoherent and will, if carried through, have a devastating impact on thousands of families whose dream of home ownership will turn into the nightmare of repossession. That comes from a Government who have presided over the worst-ever crisis of mortgage debt and repossessions in the country's history. It comes from a Government whose Prime Minister claimed in January 1992 on "Desert Island Discs" of all extraordinary places:

"We've stopped, if you recall, the repossessions just before Christmas."

Since then, 176,000 former home owners, many now languishing in miserable and expensive temporary accommodation, can bear witness to the falsehood of that pre-election claim. It comes from a Government with no constructive thoughts on how to stimulate recovery in the housing market—recovery that is vital to liberate the millions of home owners who are trapped in negative equity.

The only good thing to be said for the package is that it will, if carried through, put paid to any prospect of a feel-good factor returning to the housing market and, by so doing, it will hasten the end of this discredited Tory Government.

6.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): It is pretty rich of the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) to talk about positive packages for the housing market after that grossly exaggerated negative conclusion to his speech. How he believes that it will improve the housing market to talk of a lethal cocktail of poison, I leave to everyone's imaginings.

In his analysis, the hon. Member for Greenwich wholly failed to deal with the Government's two main arguments. The first relates to how to deal with the inexorable rise in the cost of income support mortgage payments. Does he believe that that rise should continue? Does he believe that the taxpayer should continue to support it at that level without any further restraint?

The second point with which the hon. Gentleman failed to deal relates to the 70 per cent. of those who are not on income support and who are not covered by the present arrangements. The Government are proposing to deal fairly with both those problems.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) powerfully expressed, when there is such state activity, it is hardly surprising that private enterprise tends to be displaced. The home protection insurance market has undoubtedly been affected by the existing scheme. What is sought to be insured must be borne in mind. What is proposed is short-term insurance to cover the nine months for new borrowers. That is a finite and insurable period. It is something which the market can reasonably be expected to make arrangements to cover.

Mr. Denham: The Minister has said that we can reasonably expect the market to insure the nine-month period. Will he confirm that one cannot buy a policy for the first three months of that nine-month period?

Mr. Evans: Policies vary enormously. Not all of them are couched in the terms to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

The Abbey National says that 40 per cent. of its new borrowers are now taking out mortgage protection policies. The Association of British Insurers makes it clear that about a third of its new borrowers are taking out such insurance. General Accident has insurance cover at £4 for every £100 of repayment.

It is reasonable to expect that, as the market develops and as competition comes into play, the price of policies will go down, and the terms of such policies will steadily improve. The fundamental fact with which the Opposition have not dealt is that it is in the interests of lenders—one would never have imagined it, judging from what was said earlier—that the type of policies that their borrowers take up, which, after all, are designed to pay those lenders, do not have the exclusions about which we have heard so much. In other words, the market will demand that improvement in insurance policies, and we can reasonably expect that to happen.

Mr. Dewar: The Minister will agree that the crux of the argument is what happens in the limited period at the start of the unemployment or ill health—the nine-month period. The Association of British Insurers says that almost all policies have between 60 and 90 days in which no payment will be made. Is it the Government's intention to negotiate an agreement with the industry so that that gap will not exist?

Mr. Evans: It is the Government's intention to stimulate the market. It is perfectly possible—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should listen for a moment, instead of assuming the ignorance of the market. The self-employed and contract workers can take out sickness insurance policies that come into play after three days, three months or six months, depending on the relevant terms. The market is well used to and quite capable of introducing products to deal with that matter.

The Opposition's attack on the insurance market is quite astonishing. No doubt it will be noted in the City. No doubt it will be noted, as the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) put it, as working for our friends in the City. The hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) deplored the costs of private insurance administration. He agrees with the proposition of the hon. Member for Sunderland, North. He apparently thinks that nationalising insurance or doing it collectively would be cheaper. He also attacked the terms of policies, but I stress that mortgagees have an incentive to improve the terms of those policies. The fact remains that the self-employed and, indeed, contract workers, can take out policies for all sorts of contingencies.

The hon. Member for Greenwich said that one cannot insure against divorce, and no one should be able to do so. A prudent couple will take out insurance to deal with contingencies, including the consequences of such a situation. *[Interruption.]* One can obtain insurance because one is unemployed or because the mortgage is not being paid. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) appears to be wholly ignorant of the basic terms of policies.

Let us take the matter one stage further. The Government are committed to consulting on the details of the arrangements. Pensioners on income support mortgage interest payments are and will be fully protected. We shall consult in respect of other vulnerable groups.

I advise the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) that all new transactions after October 1995 will be classified as new from that date, not the date of the Budget statement, and we shall consult on protection for those on benefit who, for example, become disabled and require expenditure on improvements.

The Government welcome the opportunity to talk with the Council of Mortgage Lenders about the details of the scheme. We accept that, from October, the 1991 agreement will need to be negotiated, but there is a strong element of common interest among borrowers, lenders and the Government: repossessions are failures for mortgagors and mortgagees. A repossession inevitably leads to a vacant sale, which never recovers as much as a sale with the person in possession. An alarming number of repossessions—one building society put it as high as 30 per cent.—have come about as a result of borrowers simply walking away, leaving the place empty, and leaving mortgagees with no option but to repossess and to sell. That does not help the borrower, because he incurs alternative housing costs and his liability to the lender continues.

There is room for considerable improvement in the public's understanding of the rights and obligations of all parties to such arrangements. There is also scope for better practice in the management of mortgage arrears and repossessions. In November 1993, the Government tightened the county court rules. To answer the question of the hon. Member for Rochdale, we have no proposals to alter the Administration of Justice Act 1970, but mortgagees have realised that the courts possess wide powers to give some mercy to borrowers who are in difficulties. It is very unfortunate for the Council of Mortgage Lenders that the public appreciate the considerable forbearance that building societies and other lending institutions have already shown.

[Mr. Evans]

There are positive signs. Mr. Adrian Coles, the director of the CML, stressed that people may move from the standard 25-year mortgage. There is no reason why different, more flexible mortgage terms should not be arranged, for example giving the option of making higher payments when in work to meet a holiday period if a contingency such as unemployment strikes. It may be much better to focus discounts not so much on first-time borrowers but on the contingencies of life such as childbirth, when a wife ceases to work for a period. There is absolutely no reason why there should not be variations of the repayment period.

Instead of that constructive approach, we have heard from the Opposition nothing but doom and gloom about the housing market. The hon. Member for Rochdale described the proposals as a further blow to the housing market. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), who no doubt stirred Tory souls by saying that the ownership of property brought enhanced self-respect, nevertheless hardly assisted house building or the mortgage industry by referring to yet another nail in the coffin of the housing market. The reality was met by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North, who pointed out that it is not desirable to have an overheated, excessive housing market that distorts the economy. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield may find an interesting conflict in his priorities between manufacturing industry and housing.

The Opposition's prevailing theme has been consistently to talk down the state of the housing market. No Conservative Member can see how that could benefit any prospective home owner, anybody engaged in house building, or the economy generally. The facts are nothing like as black as the picture that the Opposition painted. Housing starts in the first nine months of 1994 were up 13 per cent. in the private sector. Indeed, they are the highest since 1989. Negative equity and repossession figures are tending in the right direction. The Government's support on MIRAS, which my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield said was being reduced, is still at £3 billion per annum. Under the proposals, the Government's commitments under the income support mortgage payment arrangements will still run at not much less than £1 billion a year.

On top of that, mortgage rates are at their lowest for many years and, perhaps above all else, the ratio between average earnings and average house prices is now classically at the most favourable point, because undoubtedly the cycle will turn as confidence returns. What the housing market needs and what home owners and borrowers with mortgages need is confidence, not the doom and gloom that we have heard from Opposition Members.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 242, Noes 277.

Division No. 52] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F
Berry, Roger
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael

Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. George Mudie and
Mr. Joe Benton.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'frd-on-A)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sth)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Salisbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas

Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whitingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House condemns the Opposition's wish to continue the inadequate existing system of Income Support Mortgage Interest, which does not protect those with modest savings, those with small pensions or redundancy payments, or those with a working spouse, which has undermined the spread of private mortgage insurance and has contributed to 50,000 homes a year being repossessed; believes that the Government's proposals will lead to the development of more comprehensive, less costly insurance cover; welcomes the fact that pensioners on income support will continue to have their mortgage interest paid; and reaffirms its commitment to home ownership.

Rural England

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

7.12 pm

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. Robert Atkins) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Will hon. Members leaving the Chamber please do so quietly?

Mr. Atkins: When we think of England, we think often of the countryside. Our countryside has seen great changes over the past 50 years and it will face new challenges as we enter the next century. We must face those challenges with optimism and a clear sense of direction.

That is why the Government have decided to produce a White Paper on the future of the English countryside. The English countryside is at a crossroads. Traditional industries are declining. There are demands for new jobs, new homes and more leisure opportunities. We must ensure that our countryside provides a good quality of life for people today and that it is ready to meet the challenges of the future, but we must take care that we do not destroy the qualities which make our countryside so valuable.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my hon. Friend accept that the assurance from my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 8 December—that the Education Department will be closely involved with the steering group—will be extremely important to people like me, and my hon. Friend, who believe in rural schools? Does he condemn the efforts made by Lancashire county council to attack and destroy village schools?

Mr. Atkins: As a constituent of my hon. Friend, as well as a parliamentary neighbour, I am only too well aware of the pressure on village schools in Lancashire and elsewhere. My hon. Friend is a renowned and doughty fighter for the village schools in her constituency, and she makes an important point to which I shall return later. It is an entirely fair point, and we shall be considering it. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who will be winding up the debate, will be more than happy to support my hon. Friend's concerns.

The aim of the White Paper is to set out our vision for the medium to long-term future of our countryside. It will not be about quick fixes. Instead, it will look 15 to 20 years ahead to the sort of countryside that we want our children to enjoy. It will examine the pressures on the countryside and review the Government's responses to those pressures. It will set a framework for future policies.

Most importantly, the White Paper will help ensure that all policies which affect the countryside are part of an overall strategy. Our policies need to support each other and not pull in different directions. The White Paper is being co-ordinated jointly by my Department and by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The presence of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary demonstrates that. It involves, and must continue to involve, many other Departments right across Government.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the greatest worry of people—particularly in the

south-west, but in most rural areas—which is the spread of the concrete jungle? As an illustration, I fought my constituency in 1967, when it had an electorate of 63,000. If I had the same parishes in my constituency today, the electorate would be 118,000. That is the kind of growth we are having in the south-west, and the concrete jungle is eating into the countryside. When planning applications come to the Department, they seem to be approved without enough thought being given to the protection of rural England, which is what we all wish to see.

Mr. Atkins *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the Minister replies, I must point out that there are many right hon. and hon. Members who wish to speak in this debate, and long interventions do not help.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) is a distinguished and long-serving Member, and he speaks with considerable authority about rural matters, which he has represented in constituency terms in this place for many years. I was in my right hon. Friend's constituency during the summer, and I saw for myself the sort of pressures about which he talks. I shall be addressing some of my later remarks to planning, but he has put his finger on the concerns. The pressure from those who have moved from the town, or from those who are visiting the countryside from the town, is matter which my right hon. Friend and other hon. Friends have raised.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): My hon. Friend keeps talking about our countryside, but why have we excluded Scotland and Wales? Why have we also excluded forestry from the debate?

Mr. Atkins: I have enough trouble looking after the problems in England without being concerned personally with Scotland and Wales. The Ministers responsible for rural matters in those two parts of the United Kingdom are only too well aware of the concerns which my hon. Friend wishes to raise. My task is to be responsible for the English countryside, and I shall certainly make sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends are aware of my hon. Friend's concern.

It is important to realise that my hon. Friend, as an English Member, has been able to raise his particular concerns about Scotland and Wales. Perhaps—under the proposals from the Opposition—that might not be the case in future, and that is an important point. My hon. Friend will know that forestry throughout the UK is led by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, and that adds more fuel to the point that I just made.

Where were we? *[Laughter.]* There is a penalty in giving way to so many hon. Friends.

People in the countryside tend not to shout as loud as well-organised and influential urban lobby groups. In a world dominated by towns and cities, it is all too easy to overlook the needs of rural areas. Country folk think that no one is listening and that their interests have been forgotten or neglected, but that has changed since I was appointed Minister for the Environment and Countryside. I have made it my top priority to get out into the countryside—from Northumberland to the Isles of Scilly, from Shropshire to Kent—to discover the real needs of rural England.

One thing that I have learnt is that there is no single voice for the English countryside. Some people want more development, others want less. To some people, the countryside is a place to enjoy, to others it is the place where they live and work, and it is the latter to whom I am paying particular attention.

Many people have a stake in the future of our countryside. That is why we have asked more than 300 organisations to tell us what they think should be in the White Paper. We have also publicised it through national, regional and specialist press and invited people to write to us directly with their views. At the last count, we had received about 200 responses from organisations and individuals alike and we know that many more are on the way.

In addition, we are arranging a series of regional seminars during the next few months, which will provide a further opportunity for Ministers from my Department and from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to listen to people who know and understand the countryside.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I are delighted to have this opportunity to hear the views of hon. Members. Many Members, on both sides of the political divide, represent rural constituencies and I look forward to an informed and constructive debate. It is particularly helpful to have this debate during the early stages of our work on the White Paper. I cannot promise that we shall be able to deliver everything that people ask for, but my hon. Friend and I will take away the promising ideas that I am sure will arise—especially from the Benches behind me—to explore with our ministerial colleagues in other Departments.

The Environment Bill is being discussed in another place and contains provisions to safeguard our national parks and protect hedgerows. We appreciate the heritage provided by our national parks. They are frequently termed, with justification, as the jewels in the crown of our landscape. When they were established 45 years ago, however, few people can have imagined the pressures that they face today. The Bill therefore provides for the establishment of independent national park authorities, which will provide the framework within which a more integrated approach can be taken to the management of those areas. For the first time, it will also oblige Government Departments and other public bodies to have regard to the purposes of the parks when operating within them.

The national parks can thrive only by maintaining a sensible balance between the purposes of conservation and recreation, for which they have been designated, and the needs of local communities. That is why we also propose a duty requiring the new national park authorities to have regard to the economic and social well-being of the local communities.

We are also honouring our commitment to protect hedgerows. They can be an important part of the fabric of the countryside as a wildlife habitat, a valuable landscape feature or simply a reflection of our history. The Environment Bill includes powers enabling us to introduce a statutory scheme to protect important hedgerows in England and Wales. We intend to introduce a scheme that is reasonable, practical and fair—a scheme that minimises the burden on those who will be subject to the controls and those who will administer them. The

[Mr. Atkins]

detailed arrangements will be settled only after we have listened carefully to views expressed as the Bill progresses through Parliament and during separate public consultation.

The Government are committed to the protection of our hedgerows and to the future of our national parks. Traditionally, our policies to protect the countryside have worked through designating particular areas. The White Paper provides an opportunity to consider how far we want to move further in that direction and whether we want to consider new approaches that will help to safeguard the assets in the wider countryside.

Environmentally sensitive areas and countryside stewardship point the way towards a new approach, providing incentives for farmers and land managers, who are the stewards of the English countryside and who, over the centuries, have helped to create the countryside as we now know it—a fact often forgotten or ignored by urban dwellers. The White Paper will assess the roles of regulation, advice and incentives and map out a strategy to make the most effective use of our resources.

In addition to special programmes to protect the countryside, we must ensure that the major forms of land use are conducted, as far as possible, in a way that enhances the environment. That is particularly true of agriculture, as about 73 per cent. of the land surface of England is farmed. We may need to study the prospects for new crops and positive alternatives, such as forestry, which can offer a range of benefits.

The White Paper will consider the future priorities for land use in the countryside. In doing so, it will need to take into account the likely future course of the common agricultural policy. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has established a policy group of independent experts to advise him on future developments and the United Kingdom priorities for change. The results of that review will feed into the White Paper.

The planning system is one of the main ways in which we protect our countryside, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton said in his intervention. I hear many different views of its effectiveness, as do many of my hon. Friends. The Council for the Protection of Rural England, for example, tells me that the planning system needs to be strengthened, but the Country Landowners Association tells me that it should be more permissive. We shall be dealing with that problem in the rural White Paper.

More development is necessary in rural areas if it is to provide new homes and new jobs, but that development must be in the right place and be of good quality, if it is to fit in to the English country landscape. That means design that responds to local styles and materials and I have some plans for that.

People in the countryside—perhaps not so differently to those in other parts of the country—are sometimes accused of NIMBYism. Often, it is not the principle of new buildings to which they object, but the imposition of ugly developments that look totally inappropriate. We are lucky to have inherited a country with a myriad of local styles and we should celebrate that diversity, enhance the natural environment and, above all, resist the advancement of drab uniformity.

Sir Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will my hon. Friend undertake to be especially vigilant about road schemes? Does he agree that some of the motorways that have been driven through our countryside have done more to despoil and desecrate it than any other development?

Mr. Atkins: My instinctive reaction is to agree with my hon. Friend—I see my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) in his place who, in a previous incarnation, was the Minister responsible for some of that. In many rural areas, a bypass enhances the environment and adds greatly to it, but in other instances, proposed developments do not.

I found that out when, at the behest of the Labour-controlled county council, it was proposed that a six-lane motorway be driven through my constituency. Fortunately, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury, then the Minister responsible for roads, was able to help me to defeat the proposal. It is a question of the local view prevailing. Sometimes it is a good thing and sometimes it is bad. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Sir P. Cormack) that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is only too aware of his concerns, which are shared on both sides of the House.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): My hon. Friend mentioned the views of the local people. He will know that recently a development was approved in Ambleside in my constituency, which was opposed 100 per cent. by the local people. He said how important it is to listen to the local people, but in that case they were ignored, in spite of a series of planning inquiries. Will he undertake that the planning laws will be studied, with a view to giving more consideration to the views of local people?

Mr. Atkins: I cannot but agree with my right hon. Friend. I do not know the case to which he refers, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend, the Viscount Ullswater, who is responsible for planning matters, is aware of it. Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) will tell me more about it later. His general argument is entirely fair and, as a Minister responsible for planning in a previous incarnation, as well as being involved in a council planning committee, I know only too well of its importance. One of the intentions, in the rural White Paper, is to ensure that we pay more attention, in all the multiplicity of areas that are important in the countryside, to what local people have to say. As usual, my right hon. Friend makes a particularly good point.

The creation of green belts around major conurbations, to check urban sprawl, is one of the major achievements of our planning system. They have assisted greatly in protecting the countryside. Earlier this week, we published revised planning policy guidance that reaffirmed our resolute commitment to green belts and made limited changes to strengthen policy for the 21st century and secure yet greater environmental and economic benefits.

There are sometimes tensions between those who live in the countryside and those who visit it. I have heard the pleas that the countryside should not become a giant theme park,

but we must recognise that, as people's leisure time increases, they will wish to visit the countryside more and more. About 590 million journeys to the countryside were made last year and I have no doubt that that number will increase in the future.

I was in the peak district park not long ago, and was astonished to learn that, as many of my hon. Friends who represent the area will know, it is the second largest park of its kind anywhere in the world—second only to a park in Japan. The pressures on it are great indeed. We cannot ignore this trend and hope that it will go away, but we can manage it to secure the maximum benefit for rural areas, while still conserving those qualities which attract the visitor in the first place. The livelihoods of those who live and work there must come first.

The White Paper will also look at the urban fringe, an area which has yet to realise its full potential.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Does the Minister agree that when it comes to access to the countryside, we have an excellent right of way and bridleway network? More and more farmers, especially in East Anglia, are very responsibly maintaining those rights of way. Does my hon. Friend agree that Labour's proposal for the right to roam the countryside is sheer lunacy, and that it would destroy the good will that has been built up between the public and the farming community?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend is a consistently staunch defender of the countryside interest. He knows it as well as, if not better than, anyone else in the House. His point was on the nail—I could not but agree with it.

The White Paper will also look at the urban fringe, an area yet to realise its full potential. There is great scope to provide leisure opportunities on the fringes as well as in the heart of our cities. That will reduce the demands on the countryside and breathe new life into a part of our urban areas which has been neglected for too long. Community forests are a good example of how to exploit the potential of the urban fringe, but I am sure there is plenty of scope to do more.

Our vision of the countryside, particularly if we live in towns and cities, usually focuses on beautiful landscapes, sometimes of the chocolate box variety, but people are just as important. They maintain the land and the traditions of rural life—not least country pursuits, crafts and country sports.

Sir Peter Emery: Hunting and shooting.

Mr. Atkins: As my right hon. Friend says. Today's countryside is filled with people as varied as blacksmiths and computer programmers, although I sometimes ask myself how easy it would be for a blacksmith to get planning permission these days: the smells, the noise, and so on. The strength of our countryside lies in its diversity—the variety of people and economic activity as much as the variety of its landscapes.

I have travelled quite extensively around the English countryside in recent months.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Not more trips!

Mr. Atkins: Well, they bear repeating, since I suspect that the hon. Gentleman has not moved out of Leicestershire.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will my hon. Friend be extremely careful to distinguish Leicestershire from the city of Leicester?

Mr. Atkins: Yes. In the course of my perambulations, I have been able to hear at first hand some of the concerns of country dwellers. For instance, when I was in Northumberland in the company of my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), we saw the pressures that Hadrian's wall is bringing to bear on local activities, and the consequences for tourism. We also went to a village shop in Otterburn and saw the importance of the Army to what goes on there. We listened to people's views.

I also went to Todmorden moor and saw for myself the problems on the edge of the Pennines. I saw how local people, with the aid of Rural Action, are dealing with the problems of fly-tipping by those who pass through the area. Then I went to the Malvern hills, to see the problems of tourism and to visit a small cider maker and taste her wares, which I publicly endorse whenever I get the opportunity. I saw how much can be achieved in such a small operation.

I went to the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) to see a small cheese maker; I went away with some excellent Somerset cheese of a prize-winning variety. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name it."] I am sure that my right hon. Friend will be happy to help out my hon. Friends.

One of my most enjoyable visits was the one to Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, to see the problems and to talk to the constituents of my hon. Friends the Members for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) and for St. Ives (Mr. Harris). Arguably, one of my most fascinating visits was to west Dorset, in the company of my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer). He is a well-known member of the Parachute Corps, and he asked me to meet his constituents, to enjoy the delights of the area and to see the problems of the coastline. We talked to local people. I am only sorry that in the course of so doing, my hon. Friend stumbled and injured himself—for which I apologise.

All these activities allowed me to see and hear at first hand what the problems were, and to realise the strengths of the countryside. There are some wonderful people out there. There is great heart there, and a great deal of which to be proud.

Many of these rural communities see an adequate supply of affordable housing as the key issue. Of course that is linked with jobs, transport and the location of schools, shops and health care facilities. Policies for rural housing need to be considered against the background of the changes that are taking place in the countryside. We need to take account of the needs of those who have traditionally lived and worked in the countryside and who wish to continue to do so.

[Mr. Atkins]

There are costs as well as benefits to living in the countryside. People complain about the closure of village shops and village schools, the lack of public transport, the shortage of affordable housing and the difficulties of building new premises for businesses and new houses.

There are no easy answers to those problems—although I am sure that Opposition Members will try to offer some. We know that there are none. To some extent, those problems are a reflection of higher standards of living and increased choices. The car has given many people greater mobility and has enabled them to make journeys to shops and schools which would have been inaccessible to their parents, but this freedom has its price. If people drive to the supermarket on the edge of town rather than use their village shop, the village shop will inevitably close. The same is true of village schools and local buses. The slogan "Use it or lose it" is not new but it lies at the heart of the battle to maintain village services. We can all help.

The Government need to think carefully about their role in protecting services in the countryside. Would it be right to subsidise village shops but not corner shops in cities? Indeed, why should not people shop in supermarkets, where there is greater choice at cheaper prices? When is it right for extra resources to go into village schools to enable them to deliver good quality education rather than releasing resources to enhance the provision for children attending large schools? In answering those questions, it is necessary to be aware of the value of village services to the local community.

These are not easy judgments to make. We need to take account of people's changing expectations, the extent to which reduced choices lead to market failures and the extent to which urban dwellers should cross-subsidise people who live in the countryside.

In many cases, the way forward is to build on the strengths of the countryside, rather than to impose urban solutions where they do not fit. Adaptability and a sense of community are at the heart of rural life in many areas. I know that my hon. Friends would endorse that. Schemes such as the Home Secretary's parish constables initiative build on the fact that people in rural communities often know each other well and are prepared to invest time in their village.

The other guiding principle in delivering services in rural areas is making the best use of what is there and being flexible about using facilities for different purposes. The Post Office has an unrivalled network in rural areas and we shall consider how further diversification of Post Office Counters, which was never going to be privatised, can help to deliver more services to people in the countryside. Plans for the automation of the Post Office network offer exciting possibilities to improve the range of advice and information available to people no matter where they live.

Access to transport is one of the key requirements of people in rural areas. In many cases, it will be the car, which is an essential part of rural life today. Although car ownership in rural areas is high, some people do not have a car. It is a particular problem for women, young people and the elderly. We must look at people's need to travel, rather than focus on transport providers. In some areas, buses would have only one or two passengers. It would not be practical and it probably would not be the best environmental option.

We must consider flexible approaches that build on what is already available. Many hon. Members will know about post buses. There are other opportunities, such as car sharing schemes and making better use of statutory transport, such as school and social services buses. The problems of providing services in rural areas are not intractable. We must start with an understanding of people's needs and then look at the best way in which to meet them—building, again, on what is already available in the countryside.

Overall, our countryside is a success story. Its beauty is an asset for the whole country. The countryside also contributes to the growing strength of the national economy. During the 1980s, employment in the countryside grew almost twice as fast as in large towns. Places with an attractive environment, broad-based employment and easy access to markets are well placed to help lead the recovery and contribute to our national competitiveness.

Some traditional rural job providers, such as mining, defence bases and agriculture, employ many fewer people than they used to—in our own countryside as in other parts of Europe. Many of the more accessible parts of the countryside have met that challenge. Old jobs are being replaced with new and employment is rising. The economy of today's countryside is very different from the traditional image. Small-scale manufacturing and the hotel and distribution sectors provide almost half the jobs in rural areas. Some 40 per cent. of farms in England now also run non-farming businesses. Those are huge and successful changes in the countryside. They are testament to the flexibility and the entrepreneurial skills of our people in the countryside.

The rural White Paper will look at how the Government can best play their part in helping the countryside fulfil its economic potential by building on its natural strengths—the skills and resourcefulness of the people and the quality of the environment. It will examine how the Government can help diversify rural economic activity, remove barriers to enterprise and build on local strengths. The new rural challenge competition, administered by the Rural Development Commission, is an example of our approach. The winning bids in the first round show an encouraging integration of economic and social development with environmental enhancement. I congratulate the Rural Development Commission, particularly its chairman, Lord Shuttleworth, on the immense amount of work that it does in the countryside.

I have received, as, I assume, have many of my hon. Friends, a note from the RDC. It is worth emphasising the second paragraph, which reads:

> "The Commission's overriding concern is that the Government should put people at the heart of rural policy and it should restate its belief in the importance for the conservation of the countryside of a strong rural economy and balanced communities with a reasonable access to services."

I could not have put it better myself.

The White Paper is still at an early stage, but I have tried to give the House an idea of the issues that it will address and look forward to hearing the view and ideas of hon. Members.

There are problems in the English countryside today and there are challenges for the future, but I am confident that we can meet them by building on the strengths of the countryside: the values of stewardship and inheritance, which we see in the way in which farmers and landowners

value their land; the respect for quality and building things to last, which we see from magnificent country churches to dry-stone walls; the sense of community in which people support one another and work together, whether to raise money for the church roof or to keep the cricket club going—even expanding; and the sense of place and pride in what makes one village different from the next. I am sure that, if we build on those traditional values and adapt them to meet new challenges, the English countryside can look forward to a bright and prosperous future.

7.43 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I welcome the debate—the first major debate on rural issues for many years—because at last it appears that the Government understand the importance of rural issues. It is right that it should be a major focus for all the political parties.

It is a pity that the debate is taking place on a Thursday evening, on a day when there is no opposed business at 10 o'clock, but it is good to see so many colleagues in the House, ready and willing to participate in the debate. I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) here today, because I am sure that he will be able to tell us of all the good things that are happening in Lancashire. It is good to see so many distinguished Conservative Members, so many knights of the shires—I do not know whether Croydon, Central quite counts as a shire—so many knights-to-be and so many knights-who-should-be. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Sir P. Cormack) is here.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It is sexist to refer only to the knights of the shires.

Mr. Vaz: There is nothing like a dame, and I am sorry that I overlooked the presence of the honourable dame opposite.

The English countryside is a precious asset, which is neglected at the peril of the nation or any Government, especially this Government, as so many Ministers, including the Secretary of State, represent rural seats. It was interesting to hear of the trips that the Minister has made around the country, and a quick glance at his curriculum vitae shows why he is so keen on those visits. As a former sales executive with Rank Xerox, he has had plenty of opportunity to look at various parts of the country.

Living as I do in a shire city, every weekend I have the opportunity, when I return to Leicester—as I shall do this evening—to see the beautiful Leicestershire countryside. On the way, I pass some of the glories of England, among them the counties of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Northamptonshire. I agree with the Minister to this extent. It is a great joy. But like the rest of the rural areas of England, there have been dramatic changes over the past few decades.

Tonight, I hope to set out what I believe should be done to change rural issues from being considered as a fringe political subject to one that is brought into the mainstream of political debate. It is a move that the public support. It is an issue that the House must tackle.

The title of the debate, "The future of rural England", gives hon. Members enormous scope to raise so many issues of concern to them. I promise to be much briefer than the Minister was in his contribution, as so many hon. Members wish to participate.

After 15 years of neglect, some might say that the answer to the question "Is there a future for rural England?" is no. The view from the Opposition is an emphatic yes. Environmental policy, for far too long, has been based on action being taken after the damage has been done: cleaning our rivers after pollution; protecting sites after neglect; and protecting wildlife after their species has been threatened. Opposition Members believe in taking action to prevent damage to the environment from occurring in the first place. That is why we are committed to creating an environment protection executive, which will set and enforce standards, in co-operation with local authorities.

A thorough overhaul of the land register is necessary to provide a comprehensive guide to ownership, quality and land use. There is far too much confusion in that area. We need an improvement in conservation legislation, to protect natural habitats and create more nature and marine reserves. We strongly welcomed the creation of the new national parks. We believe that there should be more, especially in southern England, to meet the regional imbalance.

We need a new Clean Water Act, to provide clean water. The water environment naturally has an effect on the nation's tap water. We want to ensure full compliance with European standards, as set out in the European Union drinking water directives. It is outrageous that water disconnections for residential properties are still allowed. We believe that they should be outlawed. Water costs more in rural areas. Now the water companies are under pressure from the regulators to change the cost of delivery of water to each location. That is accountancy gone mad. The price of water, which has already increased, will quadruple.

It is high time that we developed policies for native and broad-leaved woodlands which recognise their amenity value and ecological importance. I want to see a huge reduction, if not elimination, in opencast mining, which has been described by the Council for the Protection of Rural England as one of the most environmentally destructive processes carried out in the United Kingdom. New opencast sites should be permitted only where they are of benefit to the local community and the environment.

The countryside belongs not to government, either local or national, but to the people themselves. There should be a legal right of access to common land, mountain, moor and heath. There should be co-operation with local authorities to ensure that public rights of way are kept open and clearly signposted.

We heard a great deal from the Minister about "Cider with Rosie". We did not hear enough about the cider-makers and the rural economy. For far too long, the hopes and aspirations of those who work in our rural areas have been taken for granted. One rural household in every five is now living in or near a state of poverty.

A survey carried out two years ago found that 55 per cent. of workers in farming, forestry and fishing were earning less than £200 a week compared with an average of 26 per cent. in all industries. With employment in agriculture falling, it is vital that new industries and businesses are fostered in the countryside.

Regeneration is not something that can be applied only to our major towns and cities. Macro-economic policy should not ignore the job-creating and wealth-creating potential that is based outside our urban areas. Businesses

[Mr. Vaz]

in rural areas must have access to the help and advice that can be provided locally. We firmly support the concept of one-stop services for small businesses which will concentrate on providing management support systems and which will have their roots in the local community.

New technology will be the key to development in that area. Regional development agencies, with powers to provide industrial estates and encourage long-term investment will ensure that decisions about local needs are made by local people who understand the needs of rural areas.

Developments in telecommunication services will be a key to helping districts far from large towns and cities to stay in touch—for example, through telework. There are now 129 telecottages in the United Kingdom, 75 of which are in England and they boost the rural economy by encouraging town-based work to move to the country. It is important that that new technology should be available to rural areas at the same price as to other areas.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): The hon. Gentleman is enunciating some interesting ideas which will form part of the Opposition's manifesto when the time comes. Can he give us a clue how some of the proposals will be funded?

Mr. Vaz: Nothing in what I have said will result in an increase in Government expenditure. If the hon. Gentleman had listened to what I was saying, and if was aware of what our policies are in terms of encouraging support for employment prospects, he would know that we believe firmly in the concept of partnership between the public and private sectors. I shall come on to planning and partnership issues later.

We welcome the initiative of ACRE—Action with Communities in Rural England—and the Rural Development Commission with help from British Telecom and the Post Office which last week launched a £1 million grant scheme known as countrywork to help with job creation in the English countryside. As Michael Simmonds wrote in *The Guardian* this week, this will hardly create a revolution, but it is a start. He said:

"But it is so good to see the post office championing the cause of development when not so many weeks ago they were talking of rationalisation and closure."

We need to train our work force, especially the school leavers. There is a need to co-ordinate those agencies that offer training. Raising the low wages of those who work in our rural areas is also a priority. That is why the Opposition support so strongly the concept of the minimum wage. About 4 million people will benefit from the initiative, many of them in rural areas where a large number of people are on low pay. That will be of special relevance to women who make up a large proportion of the low-paid rural workers.

We did not hear much from the Minister about housing and I am not surprised. Britain is in the midst of an appalling housing crisis, with interest rates now on the rise again and a staggeringly high level of mortgage repossessions. At the same time, we are seeing the lowest rate of new houses built since the second world war and record levels of homelessness.

In the midst of that crisis is the crisis of rural housing. The scale of need in the village is greater than in any single city, but because of their scattered nature, they are often ignored. The concept is of an idyllic village—the little house on the prairie. The truth now is that the little house has become overcrowded. People on low incomes with young families are unable even to think of buying a home while fewer opportunities exist to rent.

We need an effective housing policy in order to sustain rural communities. Unless affordable housing is provided, the viability of some villages may be threatened. If people with younger families have to move out, school rolls will fall, causing the closure of schools and the redundancy of teachers.

The knock-on effect will be impossible to curtail. Other community facilities, such as shops and pubs, would then be threatened as businesses would slump accordingly. Thus, housing plays an integral part in the fortunes of the rural economy. There is an urgent need to act. Local councils in rural areas should be permitted to start small-scale building programme and offer a range of options for affordable housing, including part rent, part buy schemes, either in partnership with housing associations or by councils in their own right.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): The hon. Gentleman has already told my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) that none of his policies will involve additional expenditure. The Government this year are providing £2.5 billion to the Housing Corporation to provide some 45,000 housing starts this year in the low rental sector. How will the Labour party, as it says, solve the problem of homelessness, about which the hon. Gentleman complains, despite all that building, without the injection of further public funds?

Mr. Vaz: I have had the advantage of having a meeting recently with the chief executive of the Housing Corporation. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is unable to grasp the fact that there was no increase in the amount of money available to the Housing Corporation, there was a decrease, which will result in fewer houses being built. I am sure that even the hon. Gentleman can understand that.

In the 1980s, the Minister's predecessors in the Department of the Environment boasted of a bonfire of planning controls. The consequence of the extraordinary approach that we have seen during the past 15 years is now apparent in all areas of rural Britain. We have witnessed extraordinary developments destroying some of the best of rural Britain while other areas are starved of necessary investment in new industry and housing. Sensible planning controls, firmly rooted in the local community, are vital if we are to have the right type of development at the right place in the right time.

Development must be plan led, not market led. The market on its own cannot provide affordable housing. We want to see local authorities using the planning system to ensure that new housing developments include some affordable housing for rent. I want to see a partnership approach so that local authorities work with the private sector and local people to protect and enhance our countryside and to secure balanced and appropriate development.

We want to see local people consulted much more carefully over the drawing up of local plans. That is why, on Second Reading of the Town and Country Planning (Costs of Inquiries etc.) Bill on 12 January, I announced

the establishment of a review of planning law. The results of that review will have a direct effect on the quality of lives of those who live in rural areas.

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West) *rose—*

Mr. Vaz: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but this is the last time that I shall give way because other hon. Members wish to participate.

Sir Jim Spicer: All the emphasis so far on housing has been on what is done by the local authority. In my part of the world in west Dorset we would not even begin to understand the sort of situation that the hon. Gentleman outlines. The main thrust for new affordable housing in west Dorset comes from housing associations, which are getting cheap land, are using the money that is being provided by the Government to the full and are providing a massive input of new housing in every village in west Dorset.

Mr. Vaz: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has been listening to what I have been saying, but I made it clear that we believe in a partnership between local authorities and the private sector. I wonder where the hon. Gentleman thinks the money that goes to the Housing Corporation comes from. It is public money, and what goes to the Housing Corporation goes to housing associations. We welcome the work that has been done in that regard. The hon. Gentleman should listen more carefully to what is being said before intervening.

We believe in planning for prosperity—the prosperity of our local areas and local people, which will preserve the rich diversity of life in England. The House should be very concerned about the new information provided by the Council for the Protection of Rural England, which shows that between 1945 and 1989 we lost more than 700,000 hectares of rural land to urban development. That is an area greater than Berkshire, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire and greater London combined. The disappearance of the land—England's lost land—needs urgent consideration.

It is important for education opportunities to be available to all our children. That means that we must take special note of the requirements of rural communities. Local schools are often the focus of their communities, and there should be no prejudice against small village schools in decision-making. Resources must be made available to ensure that rural schools are closed only for educational reasons.

We need to improve access to further and adult education in rural areas. We must examine all options offered by new technology for distance learning and promoting the spread of information. That is why we propose that local agricultural colleges should be expanded into countryside colleges, with a wider curriculum providing key skills in new technologies, business techniques and environmental matters, thus meeting the training needs of a much broader section of the rural community.

The national health service was founded on the principle that the best health services should be available to all, wherever they lived and whatever their circumstances. In many rural areas, people do not have easy access to health services: mobility is of key importance to them. Mobile services can help to improve access to services in such areas: they could include mobile clinics equipped to provide primary care—immunisation clinics, child health clinics and family planning services in local premises. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that the hon. Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) will need the support of such services.

Consultants and general practitioners must share responsibility for care so that people who need long-term treatment, such as diabetics, do not have to make so many long journeys to out-patient clinics. More tests and treatments should be available in GPs' surgeries and health centres so that patients do not have to go to hospital. We should also ensure that minimum activation and response times are as laid down in the Orcon standards, which require 95 per cent. of responses to be made within 19 minutes. Those standards should be maiatained, and improved wherever possible.

I am sure that the House will agree that good transport is vital to the quality of life in rural areas. We look forward to hearing from the Minister what new measures she proposes to improve rural transport. Under the present Government, services have been cut dramatically: villages have become isolated and fares have soared. To end the isolation of those villages and to improve the prospects of small rural industries, we must have better road links between rural areas and centres of population. We must also have bypass schemes to make villages safer, taking traffic away from where people live and children play. That is why I support the eastern bypass in Leicestershire so strongly.

Mr. Garnier: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Vaz: As I taunted the hon. Gentleman earlier, I think that I ought to give way to him.

Mr. Garnier: The last thing that I would want to do is disappoint the hon. Gentleman. As he has cast a fly across the water—if he understands that analogy—I think that it would be rude of me not to rise to it.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that the plan for the eastern bypass was drawn up by the Labour group on Leicester city council to wreck the countryside of south-east Leicestershire. Is it not true that the hon. Gentleman understands not a jot of the speech that he has been reading out, and that he has no experience of rural life and no understanding of rural Leicestershire, let alone rural England? Is not his speech a total abomination?

Mr. Vaz: That is rich, coming from the hon. Gentleman. He supports the A46/47 link road, which will destroy so much of the green space in my constituency and, eventually, his own. He ought to be ashamed of himself, and I am sure that the electors of Harborough have noted what he has said.

The car alone will not solve all the problems of transport in rural areas. There has been a massive increase in the Government's road building programme. The Department of Transport projects an increase in road traffic of between 83 per cent. and 142 per cent. by the year 2025, because of policies pushed through by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) when he was a Minister. That is enough to form a queue 124,000 miles long. Those extra vehicles could be accommodated on a new motorway from London to Edinburgh, if it were 257 lanes wide. Such a policy is environmentally damaging, both

[Mr. Vaz]

because roads require land and because they encourage greater use of private vehicles, with all the attendant potential for an increase in air pollution.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury) *rose—*

Mr. Vaz: Good, affordable public transport is vital—

Mr. Key: The hon. Gentleman referred to me.

Mr. Vaz: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to apologise to the House—in his own time, not in mine—for what he did when he was a Transport Minister.

Good affordable public transport is vital, allowing the networking that enables rural communities to prosper. We need to encourage the use of innovative bus services such as post buses. We must provide greater route flexibility for the regular network services, ensuring—dare I say it—through ticketing between transport services. In the present climate, when the Government seek—incredibly—to privatise our railway system, we need public and private partnerships to invest in our railways. We need to examine ways in which lines that are currently restricted to freight can be reopened to passenger service; we want to ease congestion on and damage to rural roads by promoting the use of rail for the movement of goods. The proper use of the railway system is one of the most effective ways of protecting the rural environment.

The organised hunting of foxes, deer, hares and other animals for pleasure, in which pain and suffering is inflicted, is unacceptable. The present law relating to cruelty to animals is seriously flawed, as statutes outlawing cruelty do not apply to wild animals. The law must be changed and strengthened. We have never proposed further limitations on country sports such as angling and shooting. We recognise that angling provides a healthy recreation for millions of people, and we should encourage angling associations and clubs to develop the sport through training schemes which will include the education of the young angler in the importance of caring for wildlife and the countryside generally. It is a wonderful occupation and recreational facility for ex-Ministers.

Sir Patrick Cormack: What about shooting?

Mr. Vaz: As for shooting, there is the issue of rural crime. It is not just the controllable crime seen through the eyes of those who watch the television series "Heartbeat"; it is real crime, and, as the Minister knows, there has been a staggering increase in it. In Kent there was an increase of 106 per cent. in recorded crime between 1987 and 1993. The hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Sir P. Cormack)—the new knight of the shires—will be astonished to learn that, during the same period, there was a 70 per cent. increase in recorded crime in Staffordshire. In Sussex the figure was 59 per cent., in Lancashire it was 43 per cent., in Hertfordshire it was 33 per cent., in Leicestershire it was 96 per cent., in Dorset it was 35 per cent., in Hampshire it was 48 per cent., in Norfolk it was 55 per cent.—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. There are too many seated interventions and commentaries. If hon. Members wish to comment, they must rise and seek to intervene in the customary fashion.

Mr. Vaz: Conservative Members do not want to hear about the increase in crime in rural areas. They are ashamed and embarrassed about it. There appears to be no strategy for dealing with the problem. There are no more bobbies on the beat, in their cars or even on their bicycles and crime is disfiguring the lives of people in our rural areas.

The debate will show that the needs of the countryside and those who live in it are of great importance. It is not a case of competition between town and country, of city hall versus village hall; the real competition is with time itself. We must ensure that we do not waste our most precious assets, so that all who care for the countryside can work together—as William Blake wrote—

"Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land."

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. A number of hon. Members are anxious to contribute to this short debate so I ask hon. Members to exercise self-control and to make short speeches.

8.9 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): After the quite extraordinary speech from the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), I hope that we can return to the issue of the future of rural England. The hon. Gentleman was not kind enough to give way when he attacked me. I am sorry that he did not agree with my policy of cancelling five motorways, which I deemed to be unnecessary. I was keen on promoting bypasses, one of the most famous of which was at Broughton and Scruton in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Minister, who is unable to mention it himself.

I declare an interest as president of the Wiltshire Association of Local Councils, and local councils have much to contribute to the future of rural England. Like the Minister, when I worked in the Department of the Environment I was able to travel the length and breadth of this country, which was a great privilege. One of my ambitions was achieved when I attended a parish council meeting in Warkworth castle in Northumberland and attended a meeting of the council of the Isles of Scilly.

I fervently hope that the future of rural England will not include regional government. The Labour and Liberal Democratic parties are wedded to the idea of devolution and regional government. In my book, that means more interference and bureaucracy and negates many existing checks and balances, such as the National Consumer Council and a number of regulators and the like. Above all, it means more Members of Parliament, more cost and more officials, and it raises the terrible issue of where regional assemblies might be located.

It may be seen as obvious that the north-east of England should have an assembly in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. In the north-west, an assembly might be located in Manchester,

and in the midlands it could be somewhere in Birmingham. Those who have dealt with the councils in those fine cities, all of which are under Labour control, know that the Labour leadership of metropolitan authorities loathe the idea of regional government. It would emasculate the politics of their regions and reduce their influence for good, in their terms anyway, in their areas. They do not want it, and I know of no one who does.

In the south-west you can bet your bottom dollar that someone will decide that any regional assembly should have its headquarters in Bristol. Unfortunately, many people believe that Bristol is in the west of England. I hate to disillusion them, but it is not. Bristol is a proud and ancient city that has always looked rather in towards itself, but if it is anywhere, it is in the west midlands. It is absolutely not in the west of England, which is why I fought so hard when I had the honour of being a member of the Government to locate some of the new regional government offices in Plymouth, which is far closer to the centre of gravity of the south-west. The delivery of Government and local services is what matters, and Government regional offices have made a major contribution to that.

Thank goodness we are getting to the end of the review of local government because it has been a difficult time for us all. Much of the opinion-taking by the Local Government Commission has been flawed. I regret having to say that, but there is a perception that it has not worked. A constituent of mine wrote to the Secretary of State for the Environment on 20 January. He stated:

"There was a distinct lack of popular interest and even less comprehension of the true facts resulting in a natural reluctance to opt for change. A MORI interviewer indicated that of all the people seen in several different areas I was the first who could answer her questions without reference to the sparse green leaflet."

He went on to give further examples of the flaws as he saw them.

The Local Government Commission issued a number of press notices informing the local population of its decisions. I was rather alarmed about the Wiltshire decision because, in announcing a unitary authority for Swindon, for Thamesdown, which we all applaud and agree about, it announced that there would be no change to the rest of the county. Of course, that could not be further from the truth because, if a third of the population is taken from a county, the rest of the county must experience substantial change in the administration of local government.

My district council in Salisbury is excellent by all objective tests in financial management, administrative cost, tax collection and arrears and housing benefit: 98 per cent. of claims are dealt with within five days. On matters such as rent arrears, void council homes and energy ratio scores, my district council is doing very well. I know that we in south Wiltshire are fortunate in having one of the lowest rates of unemployment in the south-west. That is a privileged position but it has been achieved through hard work: it has not happened by accident.

I shall now deal with some of the particular issues affecting rural England, not just in my part of the world, but throughout the country, and I shall start with one or two points about the military. We in south Wiltshire are proud to have the largest training area in the country on Salisbury plain. The military have made a positive contribution to the development of rural England and will continue to do so. They are a good neighbour and they look after the rural and built environment.

The military are good conservationists and plant so many trees that the nature conservation bodies complain that the habitat might be upset if planting goes on at the same rate. They are good at archaeology and at liaising with archaeologists and at the preservation of habitat for flora and fauna. If my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) were here, he would say that and I have no doubt that my other neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber), will hope to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The military are good employers of civilians, and have been so in south Wiltshire for the best part of this century. They have made a dramatic impact on employment, so with particular sorrow I shall tomorrow attend the closure of RAF Chilmark, which is being closed because of the changing needs of the Royal Air Force.

Of course, the military bring housing problems in their wake, which was referred to earlier in the debate. Pressure arises when a family that has been in the Army for many years decides to leave it and needs housing. That family may originally have come from Liverpool or Manchester, but it has ended up in Salisbury via Germany, Belize or perhaps Hong Kong and its members feel more at home in my community than they do in their place of birth and upbringing.

There are great housing pressures on us all and good management by the housing authority has enabled it to cope very well. There has been a dramatic improvement, and the only measure that I shall offer is that in the past five years the number of letters and surgery cases about housing management has dropped dramatically. It is now manageable because there is a proper housing plan. Despite all the great financial difficulties that my housing authority faces, the housing stock is better than ever for the 15 per cent. of people in my constituency who depend on public housing.

There are also pressures on schools, social services, vehicles and roads and, of course, there is the pressure of noise. I pay tribute to the Ministry of Defence, which has done all that it possibly can to minimise noise disturbance. Firing ranges and RAF aeroplanes inevitably mean noise, but it is manageable and sophisticated computer models are operating on Salisbury plain to try to ensure that when meterological conditions are not right firing is stopped for a few hours.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): With his knowledge of that military training ground, perhaps my hon. Friend could tell my constituents, who are to receive the AS90 gun from Salisbury plain, that the charges to be fired in practice at Otterburn will not be the same as the rounds that caused the disturbance on Salisbury plain.

Mr. Key: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to confirm that. He is absolutely right. The AS90 is seen as something of a bogey. Of course it has the same barrel as the gun that has been firing on these ranges for 30 years but it is a high-tech version. What matters is the charge that is put in the gun, and the very high charge can be fired only on Salisbury plain. I think I can confirm that it will not be fired on the Otterburn ranges. At the same time, we want to share a little of the grief with Otterburn. I have known Otterburn all my life. I have cousins who farm at Otterburn, so I

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understand the problems that my hon. Friend faces with his constituents. However, the position is not nearly as bad as he may imagine. Indeed, those living close to the plain sometimes wonder what is happening when it is quiet. Noise can be a problem, but the military take good care of the plain.

Another aspect is the science base of the MOD in rural areas. I have the good fortune to have in my constituency the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment and the centre for applied microbiology and research at Porton Down. Both are fine establishments that have done much to further basic medical science, to provide remedies and to protect our service men in time of war or threat. The science base is not just a matter of what goes on behind wire fences; it is part of our community. Its families are part of our community, of our schools and of our social life. That enriches our community. We are proud to have so many distinguished scientists in our midst, and are grateful for the employment that the establishments bring.

One area that concerns me is policing. Contrary to what the Opposition claim, the police—certainly in Wiltshire—have made dramatic strides in reducing crime. It is good news that crime has fallen for the first time in my constituency for some years. That is due to the excellence of the Wiltshire constabulary, whose motto rightly is primus et optimus. It is the oldest police force in the country and, of course, it is the best.

The problem with the Home Office funding under the new formula is that it does not take proper account of the sparsity of rural areas. My hon. Friend the Minister has already discussed that matter with me and others and we shall continue to press him on it. The basis of the new budget for the new police authority is one issue, but sparsity is another.

There is another side to the matter. Rural areas often have far more than one police force; seven police forces operate within my constituency. Many people do not know that there are seven police forces. The Home Office force has primacy, but we also have a full constabulary of the Ministry of Defence police. I pay tribute to their work, which is often unsung. It is important to the villages on Salisbury plain to know that the military police are supporting the county constabulary.

From time to time, we have the Atomic Energy Authority police and the British Transport police on our roads. There are other forces such as the provost marshals and, now, Guard Force. I suspect that in future there will be more semi-official police organisations—such as that on the Queen Elizabeth II bridge at Dartford. Its security force personnel look very much like policemen, although they are not strictly and legally policemen. Despite that, we are grateful for the work of all policemen, whichever uniform they may wear.

Inevitably, after the increases in police numbers in recent years there will have to be some constraint. There are now more police in Wiltshire than ever. There has been a 23 per cent. increase in the number of uniformed policemen since 1979 and a 97 per cent. increase in the number of civilians working in support of the police. It is not widely known that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary is a special constable. Parish constables have been a success.

We like special constables in our community—they are people we know and meet every day. I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary that it would be cheap, in his terms, to boost police forces in rural areas with sparse populations by using more special constables. I am sure that crime would reduce as a result.

Farming is absolutely basic to my constituency, as it is to most of rural England. Farmers have created our environment and preserved our countryside. They are quick to respond to changing needs and they deserve our congratulations. If anything has gone wrong, it is that 20 years ago no one would have air freighted calves to the continent, to be fattened and returned to our country as dead meat. All that added value should be going to our farmers, butchers and consumers, not to transport companies and French business interests.

I do not want to pursue that argument, but surely there will be some changes. I have suggested to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that we should be tweaking a very heavily subsidised industry to encourage more home markets. We must remove the need for that trade and encourage home subsidies.

For reasons that include the care of the environment, I am sure that we will move from a high-input, intensive farming regime to a more natural farming tradition. The system of environmentally sensitive areas is a major advance, which I welcome. Perhaps there will be a return to traditional farming in areas such as Wiltshire, which means the grazing of sheep and cattle on the plain—as at Parsonage down and Winterbourne Stoke—with dairying in the valleys. There may be less grain growing, which depends on a high input of nitrogen fertilisers. That could make a big difference to the pattern of agriculture. It may be a long way off, but it is definitely on the way. If we want a few clues, we could do worse than look at the example of New Zealand.

Land tenure changes will make a big difference to the future of rural England. I welcome the Government's plans and I look forward to the Bill being debated in the House. A serious review must be made of county council farm tenancies. In my county, there are many such farms, covering about 12,500 acres. The tenancy was designed to be a short-term stepping stone, but the average now runs for about 26 years; something is wrong there.

Forestry is gaining increasing attention as we manage to think long-term, but foresters need short-term cash flows to pay the wages. It is folly to tie them up in red tape and tie them down with planning restrictions, which is what I fear happens in some places.

I draw my hon. Friend the Minister's attention to an area that he has taken great care with, for which we are grateful—the New Forest heritage area. There are still problems with the overlapping of local plans and there is a fear that commoners, farmers and landowners will find themselves so tied up in red tape that they cannot do any productive farming.

Mineral extraction and waste management are matters that other hon. Members may wish to pursue, but planning is the key to so many things—as my hon. Friend the Minister said in his speech. Should there be a free-for-all? He was right to suggest that the instinct is to say yes, people should be able to use the property they own to their own advantage, in their own way. However, pragmatism insists that we provide an active framework of community

co-operation. Therefore, I have no quarrel with the concept of being locked into a tight planning system. Local plans have proved a great advance.

This is a small island, which is another reason why we do not need regional government. The transport needs of London and Manchester cannot be seen in isolation from their impact on the home counties, the east Thames corridor, Cheshire or, for that matter, Barrow-in-Furness. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment was right in his aim of deterring green field development even further. However, we must be careful not to deter regeneration in existing communities. As a former Minister with responsibility for inner cities, I know what it is to talk in billions of pounds about the regeneration of urban environments.

It is wonderful to see Hulme crescent in Manchester coming down and Housing Association modest housing being put up in its stead. However, I am not talking about that; I am drawing my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that in most market towns there are hundreds of acres of derelict land. Much of it may be railway land; much of it has simply been derelict for many years. Enormous problems need to be dealt with.

We need to deal with transport constructively. I do not wish to get sidetracked into issues of inter-urban travel. In preparing his White Paper, my right hon. Friend the Minister should consider the problems of rural poverty, which undoubtedly exist, low incomes for rural workers, however diversified industries become in rural areas, and the retired population, who will always be on tight budgets. They are all dependent on the motor car. My worry is that less well-off constituents in rural England will suffer most from a carbon tax and similar proposals. I cannot imagine how one can devise a subsidy system to get round the problem.

This country spends more than £1 billion a year on subsidising not people who want to travel but bus companies. Is that the right way forward? My right hon. Friend the Minister drew attention to the fact that we need to be much more imaginative in tackling the issues of rural travel. Of course, the rural transport development fund, which he mentioned in connection with post buses, is important, but sick and disabled people have transport problems in rural areas, which is understandable. The concessionary fare scheme may partly deal with that, but it does not deal with the needs of most people.

I am increasingly concluding that the best way of ensuring better targeted transport subsidy in rural areas is to subsidise not bus companies but people who need transport, which could be done through voucher systems. Many local authorities already operate such systems. To some extent, they are linked with voluntary car schemes. An extremely important study has been undertaken in Wiltshire by the Health and Safety Commission. It was published only this month and I draw it to my hon. Friend's attention.

Airports are another issue from which we cannot escape in discussing rural England. Regional airports are becoming increasingly important and they have an impact on rural development. There are many examples of that around the country. If ever there was one example of an airport that was a major opportunity waiting to happen, it is Newquay airport in Cornwall. That could make an enormous difference to the economy of western England. World tourism will continue to expand. Newquay can take jumbo jets and Concorde. The matter should be considered carefully. Could Cornwall cope? I believe that it could.

The Rural Development Commission has been mentioned. I reiterate the comments of my right hon. Friend the Minister. I congratulate Lord Shuttleworth and all the people who work for the commission. I hope that it will reach the right conclusions in its difficult and controversial decisions on market failure and direct rural training. It has saved thatching and wheelwrighting from extinction. Some of the trades that it has taught have moved entirely into the private sector.

I support the withdrawal of taxpayers' support where it is unnecessary, but we must be sure that we do not just abandon some of those traditional rural crafts where there is no alternative. Distance learning, telecottaging and small-scale tourism are taking place and the Rural Development Commission has played its part.

We have employment problems in, for example, Wilton, where, tragically, the carpet factory closed this week. Of course, Wilton carpets will continue in one form or another. The name may have been raided by Bradford, but the land, buildings and heritage remain.

Conservative Members and the Government are so often accused in rural areas of destroying rural communities. There is the image of school, church, pub, post office and shop. In one breath, we are condemned by Opposition parties for putting strains on those institutions. As soon as those parties get into a position of power and influence to do anything about the problems, they do the closing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) has his own example; I have mine. My county council, where a pact has been formed between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats, is putting under threat schools at Barford, St. Martin, Fovant and Dinton in my constituency. It is not being done on educational grounds. The hon. Member for Leicester, East said that those schools should close only on educational grounds. I hope that he will tell his county councillors of the decision that he has made.

Mr. Garnier: If he will not, I will.

Mr. Key: If our rural communities were being offered wonderful rural centres, with schools, sports halls, village halls for live culture and telecottaging, that would be fine and many of our little rural schools would say, "That is a better education," but that is not happening. Little rural schools are being closed so that we can have bigger town schools. That is not what my constituents want.

Tourism is crucial and will be more important than ever as the years go by. I remain worried about the structure of tourism and support for it. My message is that we should make tourism as local as possible in terms of the organisation of the tourist industry. In my time as a Minister with responsibility for tourism, I found that it was best for a town to take an initiative on tourism rather than rely on a regional tourist board or even a bigger tourist organisation.

England is a land of great diversity with a bright future and we should never talk it down; to do so costs jobs and prosperity. When I lived in Cornwall in the 1960s, I was told that Cornish fishing, the daffodils on the Isles of Scilly, early potatoes and broccoli, railways and the Cornish way of life were in terminal decline. None of that

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was true. There was uncomfortable change in the area. If one group of people should shoulder some responsibility for that, it is those who made their way in the world by convincing people that the south-west was in terminal decline.

The Liberal party, which became the Social Democrat party, which became the Liberal Democratic party, made the politics of the south-west the politics of decline, protest and defeat. That was not clever because every Liberal Democrat vote in Devon, Cornwall, Somerset, Dorset, Avon, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire is a vote for surrender. That party tells boardroom decision-makers from Newquay to New York, from Truro to Tokyo, and from Salisbury to San Francisco that the people of the south-west cannot cope, that they opted out of the challenge for progress and quality of life.

Every Liberal Democrat vote says to Whitehall and to Brussels, "We beg for your money and we will do what we are told. We want federalism, the single currency, the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy." At the vote on fishing last week, which was so cynical and opportunistic, the leader of that party was not even present.

The south-west can make a great deal of difference to itself: it has a choice. It should not sulk or sink into that orange sunset and be represented at Westminster by a party that is proud to be out of step with the rest of the United Kingdom and that lacks influence.

In rural England, we see today's enterprise culture gaining markedly from the rich resources of the south-west. The heritage is better cared for than ever. I hope very much that in 1995 my constituency, where a quarter of jobs are in manufacturing industry, will be an example to the rest of the south. If my constituency is anything to go by, and I think it is, rural England has never had such a broad economic base. It is poised to take full advantage of the economic upturn. We have many problems to tackle, but we have never been better equipped to tackle them.

8.38 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I join in the all-party welcome both for the debate and for the Government's announcement that they will publish a White Paper on rural policy. Although I have no doubt that there will be plenty of disagreement about rural policy, it is good news for all hon. Members representing rural areas that the real problems and challenges affecting the communities are coming under scrutiny in that way. I welcome the tone and most of the content of what the Minister said at the start of the debate. Whether he will deliver on that remains to be seen. Regrettably, I noted some omissions from his comments. He sought, however, to highlight some relevant and important issues.

To draw up the kind of integrated approach that has been suggested, across all policies and involving all sections of the relevant communities, is an ambitious target. Despite the best intentions, the policies from different Departments, quangos and various tiers of Government too often pull in conflicting directions. The answer is to start with the basics.

Let us think of a typical rural community—a small village or town surrounded by a few dispersed homes and farms. Traditionally, such communities were virtually self-sufficient. The starting point was usually farming or a similar primary industry such as fishing, which brought relatively high employment levels to the countryside. Nearby villages and small towns grew up to service their needs—markets, small shops and other services, a school, post office, church and chapel. The size of the community and the traditional methods employed in its business meant little risk to the environment and an essentially self-sustaining economy. However, I am not suggesting that everything was perfect. In many ways, opportunities were restricted, but it was in a very literal sense a sustainable economy and community.

However, all that has been under huge pressure in the past few decades and the net impact has left a huge question mark over the future of such rural communities.

In Cornwall, we are only too well aware that the urban view of the countryside—holidays, a good environment and a nice place to live—is very far from the reality for many of the people born and brought up there. To explain that we have to consider what is needed to keep rural communities alive.

First, housing must be available at a price that people can afford. However, several different pressures are making it ever harder for local people to find the housing that they need. The countryside has become a popular place to find a home for retirement, from which to commute or in which to buy a holiday or weekend cottage. City salaries or the value of a London house on retirement are available to such purchasers, but local wage rates cannot match them. With the supply of housing limited, not least by efforts to protect the countryside from over-development, local people are priced out of the market.

In Cornwall, for example, this has meant that a two-earner couple, with both individuals on average local earnings, could by the late 1980s secure a mortgage sufficient to buy only a house in the cheapest 2 per cent. of the housing stock in the county, almost none of it by definition in the more rural villages which were the most popular and, therefore, the most expensive.

Mr. Colvin: These days, people do not have to buy a house. In my constituency, there are on average 1,000 empty dwellings, roughly equivalent to the number of people on the urgent council house waiting list. If the Government's leasehold and short tenancy reforms were more widely known, more of that property could be let. People do not have to buy.

Mr. Taylor: I cannot dispute what is happening in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but that is certainly not the case in Cornwall, although I acknowledge that there are particularly acute pressures in Cornwall for the reasons that I have elaborated.

In the 1980s, more than half the sales in the most popular Cornish villages involved second homes and many of the rest were homes for retirement. That stops local people buying in their own communities, and I shall deal in a moment with the problems of rented accommodation.

If a young couple cannot find a home in their community, they have to leave. The village then empties of children, the school struggles and local businesses fail. When the summer holidays come, part-time residents wonder why the full-time services have disappeared—even though they are a major cause of that disappearance.

The problem is made worse by the loss of rented accommodation. Most rural communities have never had a great deal of private sector or council accommodation, but council house sales have been brisk and private landlords found that they could make more out of a summer holiday let than a year-round tenancy. The result is that homelessness has hit rural areas hard and forced young people out of their communities. We are all familiar with people who can get a winter let, but, when summer comes, are once again peripatetic, homeless, perhaps staying with family or friends or relying on bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Of course, well-paid local jobs could provide a solution to the dilemma. Traditional industries such as farming, fishing and mineral extraction employ nothing like the numbers that they once did, and they offer low incomes. In addition, out-of-town shopping and the concentration on larger towns by the major retail companies has destroyed much of the traditional small business base in villages. Once-thriving village centres now feel lucky if they can boast a part-time community post office.

For those with a car, that may be sad but not necessarily a real problem. However, for those without easy access to transport, it is a nightmare. On top of high housing costs, it makes rural living ever more unaffordable and, as young people, mothers and others are forced into the towns, more services are lost to the villages. Fewer children means pressure for the school to close, fewer people using local shops leads to still fewer shops; and so the cycle ratchets on. Fewer people use the buses, so routes are lost and the remaining people are stranded.

There is also the threat of the loss of rural post offices. Many have already closed and others are reduced to opening part time, but vast numbers are still struggling to survive although they have been hit by high business rates, by ever lower payment per item of business and by the Government's refusal to allow the Post Office to offer the new, competitive services that could help it survive while it remains in the public sector. If it is true that such an initiative is to be ruled out, it will be seen as nothing other than petty retaliation in a fit of pique by the President of the Board of Trade because he was not allowed the privatisation that he wanted. If the local post office is strangled in village after village, another strand of the mutual community and the elements of support that allow people to live in that community even though they are not rich is cut.

I hope that the House will now permit me to raise a couple of issues specific to the south-west which relate to Government decisions. The biggest fear in Cornwall, and what has most angered people in the region, is the cost of water. Capital costs used to be spread across the country but now fall to local communities. That may sound fine in theory, but the result is that the 3 per cent. of the national population living in the south-west has had to pay for more than one third of the national cost of cleaning Britain's beaches. With many bills soaring to more than £600—that is often the case for pensioners in my constituency—householders and, incidentally, local businesses, have been badly hurt. I fear that the same could happen with the decision to charge consumers for the costs of getting electricity and gas to us.

I have done enough to highlight the problems of rural areas which have been caused partly by structural and economic change and too often hastened by Government policy. I deal now with what we must do to turn this around, and the kind of integrated policies that we need at all levels to rebuild the thriving, sustainable rural economy that Ministers say they are seeking. The Liberal Democrats published their proposals last year in the document entitled "Reclaiming the Countryside" and have already submitted it to the Government for consultation.

I must draw some conclusions from what I have said. The rural community cannot survive if all sections of that community cannot afford to live there. We cannot allow rural areas to become commuter dormitories or holiday home ghost towns, and that means affordable homes to buy and rent and helping young first-time buyers, for example, through a part-ownership scheme. Yet the private sector will not finance housing schemes with restricted sale clauses to meet local needs and, as housing associations have been required to get private sector finance, it is becoming a real problem to guarantee that the land specially set aside for rural needs will remain for local needs thereafter and councils are then naturally reluctant to make land available which would otherwise not get planning permission.

Many rural housing associations have suffered huge cuts for next year. For example, Cornwall Rural Housing Association will be unable to build any homes. The solution must be to relax the restrictions on the use of receipts from council house sales to build new homes to rent, whether by the council, housing associations or any other bodies, but present policies cannot continue without wrecking the nature of many of the rural communities that I represent.

I cannot speak for all areas of the country, but where there is high incomer pressure and pressure for second homes, one cannot service the need for local housing for local people without substantial Government investment beyond that which remains after the recent cuts.

Housing alone is not enough—with it must come jobs. The best way in which to tackle that desire is to give more muscle to backing local business. That means single, well-financed local development agencies. The highlands and islands and Wales have shown that they can work and it need not mean much more money. It means taking the funds already held by civil servants in Whitehall and the Government's regional offices, all of which, incidentally, are in big cities, taking money from the quangos and from the plethora of competing agencies and giving it to a single accountable local agency to back local business.

Much as I appreciate the efforts of those involved with, for example, Business Link, I simply do not believe that an office in or on the edge of some rural town, for which people have to pay, meets the need, with part-time attendance by people from various Government agencies.

Creating jobs also means taking a broader approach to development issues and planning and transport. It is nonsense that no assessment is made of the often negative economic impact of road schemes on local communities. We need to look at the transport needs of rural communities in a broader way to take into account the environment, the effect on local businesses and those who may have no access to private transport.

Much of the destruction of the countryside has been in the name of economic development, yet has contributed to the loss of economic and business success in the communities affected. It is extraordinary to find it confirmed in parliamentary questions that no assessment is made of the local impact of such road schemes on jobs, even though the Government have, over many years,

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claimed that the schemes have contributed to the creation of jobs overall. They may contribute to jobs in the cities because the cities can supply the rural areas more easily, but, too often, such schemes destroy jobs in rural areas for small local businesses that never have any intention or ability to go into the cities to compete in that direction.

Creating jobs also means adopting a new approach to agriculture and protecting countryside. That is why we have advocated replacing the common agricultural policy with a new European common rural policy, in which agriculture continues to play a core role, but not an exclusive role. More advice and assistance needs to be made available for the start-up and expansion of small businesses, marketing and business planning, and diversification out of food production.

We need to move away from indirect price management in agriculture, which is not popular with the wider public and never will be. Therefore, it is always under threat from Governments responding to that public concern. We need to move towards direct payments for economic, environmental and social goods, which benefit the wider community, such as maintenance of the best features of the British countryside, biodiversity and areas of special interest.

It has been said several times in this debate that farmers have created the countryside. People value that countryside and we need to make people more aware that they cannot have it without a successful farming community. One of the ways in which to do that is to make people more aware that their support in pay goes into things that they want to keep, rather than a general impression that it goes into the pockets of people who buy and drive new Range Rovers.

Local government is best placed to respond to many of those local needs, but it simply cannot if restrictions, which were originally designed to tackle the sins of a few over-spending, out-of-control, left-wing city authorities, are extended to hit traditionally low-spending authorities in rural areas. It is especially harsh when authorities which for many years—decades rather than a few years—were low spenders, conserved spending as the Government wished, and very often underspent in areas such as education, find themselves, because the capping ceilings are based on historic levels, having to cut many more core services than authorities in the cities which were large spenders in the past and which have more fat to trim. It is not always the case, but some hon. Members would agree that very often that is what happens.

Extending the restrictions is especially hard to accept when the cost of services in rural areas, which cannot be delivered through one unit but have to be spread out over a wide area, are inadequately recognised by Whitehall. I shall give a couple of examples from the south-west.

In the south-west as a whole, the Government allow us £130 a year less in the standard spending assessment for each child's education than the average for England. Yet our schools have to deliver the same national curriculum and pay the same national wage rates. In addition, there is a tendency to employ older, more loyal staff in smaller village schools, so their wage costs are usually higher than average. Schools which may have only four, five or six teachers in the first place sometimes have to make a borderline decision about being able to afford to employ another teacher.

Secondly, the area cost adjustment transfers funding to London and the south-east. For 1995-96, the effect on the south-west is a £1.5 billion loss of funding, despite the high costs affecting us in the ways that I have already outlined. Ministers have already agreed that that transfer needs to be examined, but I regret that they are not doing it more speedily. Throughout the south-west, while there may be a debate about the detail, there is broad agreement that there is a problem for us with the working of the settlements.

Those problems are typical of rural areas, whose support the Conservatives have taken for granted for too long. If nothing else, the growing political success of the Liberal Democrats has helped at least to turn the political spotlight on the needs of rural communities. I have always argued that a marginal seat is best for the constituents in it. Politicians will always work harder and Governments will always seek to win or defend them as a result. The fact that the south-west has become an area of many marginal seats and a tight political battle has led to a change of attitude.

It is time that the documents on the lack of economic development funds, sitting currently on the Prime Minister's desk, the rhetoric about cutting water bills, and the rhetoric about greater investment in our needs and responding to the concerns that I have mentioned was turned into action. If the White Paper is to lead to real change, it will have to lead to a change of policies in areas to which the Government have wedded themselves ideologically. But embrace that change they must.

8.56 pm

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): I shall be brief because it is a great shame and very selfish of ministerial colleagues, Opposition spokesmen and other hon. Members to take so long on their speeches late on a Thursday night when so many of us wish to speak in this important debate on rural England. I condemn hon. Members from all parties for taking far too long and I shall make an example with my speech by making it short and cutting it down to specific questions. I hope that the House finds some ways in which to prevent such use of its time, especially late on a Thursday night.

I have a different problem with my rural economy. I have the only county seat in the west midlands—Meriden; the bit between Birmingham and Coventry, which includes all the farms and all the countryside. It is doing too well. It is encouraging too much economic activity. With the M6 and the M42, the national exhibition centre, Birmingham international airport, Birmingham international station and Birmingham international business park, there is far too much concentration on the use of the green belt.

We also have the problem that the people with those jobs, which is great for the economy and great for the west midlands, need homes. We now have an extra 3,300 homes in the green belt. My first question for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), is this: will she accept my strong concern about the unitary development plan and the extra houses required in the green belt? In my small constituency, that involves more than 3,000 houses. Will she comment on that? Is that really right in terms of the arrangements for the countryside?

Secondly, has my hon. Friend the Minister heard about the proposal, because of the magnet of the roads and all the rest of it, by Aston Villa and Birmingham City football clubs to build a new football stadium? That proposal could cause immense problems on the roads.

Thirdly, has my hon. Friend the Minister heard about, and what does she feel about, the widening of the M42 in the area by a further two lanes on each side which will lead to a super super-highway? What does she feel about that and its effects on local residents?

I have given my hon. Friend the Minister's office advance warning of my next question. All the developments to which I have referred pose questions for the rural countryside dweller who moved to the rural countryside in the belief that he would enjoy it. As I understand it, a judgment was made recently on appeal in the House of Lords that compensation can be paid to someone who can demonstrate that a property has lost value as a result of public works.

If the unitary development plan or a ministerial judgment gives rise to a planning permission in respect of which a rural dweller can prove loss of value in respect of his dwelling—whether due to a motorway, to airport expansion or to the construction of new houses close to the urban dweller's house—what does my hon. Friend believe will happen as a result of that judgment? My hon. Friend may have to reply to that later. I am not sure whether I am correct, but I believe that the judgment related to Colonel Owen.

I promised to be brief and I will be brief. I represent a rural constituency, but it will not remain a rural constituency unless we have concentrated and effective help from the Government and from all those concerned in preventing further development.

9 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (Lancashire, West): I noted what you said about brief speeches, Madam Deputy Speaker. Many of my hon. Friends asked me to use their 10 minutes, but I shall refrain from doing so. However, I shall not speak for as long as the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key).

When discussing this topic, it is very hard not to produce a shopping list of problems in rural areas. My constituents would expect me to do that and they would probably like to write such a list for me. My constituency is typical of scores of constituencies. It comprises a huge rural area between Merseyside and the River Ribble with a substantial new town, Skelmersdale, in one corner and two smaller towns, Ormskirk and Burscough, in the middle.

My constituency has eight rural parishes and four semi-rural parishes. It has the usual tensions between the contiguous rural and urban areas. While the townspeople envy what they see as the wealth of the rural parishes and strive to move into them, people in the rural areas envy the facilities in the urban areas. The solutions to reconciling those tensions lie in increasing ease of communication and the decentralisation of many public services. That has not proved easy in recent years. While the councils have done a great deal to decentralise some services into rural areas, recent swingeing cuts in local government finance have made progress very difficult.

For example, Lancashire county council's plans to extend nursery school and library provision, which have produced two excellent libraries in rural parishes and one nursery class in an area outside the towns of west Lancashire, have been put into reverse by the huge cuts in standard spending assessments that Lancashire has suffered since 1992.

Ease of communication effectively means the private car for rural west Lancashire. Three vital bypasses projected for the district have been considered again recently, partly by the Minister for the Environment and Countryside in his previous job. The most crucial bypass has been completely cut out; one has been put on the shelf and the remainder seems to be permanently stalled.

The two rural railway lines are under constant threat. British Rail's inability to alter platforms or to prevent the decrease in the frequency of trains has left many people in rural areas, particularly the elderly, isolated. That situation has been made worse by the virtual collapse of rural bus services since deregulation. That issue has already been discussed and I shall not repeat it.

I often hear hon. Members attacking tax rises on petrol on the ground that rural people need cars. That may be true, but the complaint does not cover many elderly people who do not drive. Nor does it cover, crucially I believe, young people for whom rural life becomes an irritating and limiting experience so that they cannot wait to leave.

My constituency probably has the greatest total mileage of moss roads of any constituency in England. Those roads are built on peat moss. A combination of drought years—we are not experiencing such conditions now, but we have in the past—and increasing vehicle size, especially farm vehicles, is destroying those roads. The county has come up with imaginative solutions involving patch, make-do and mend solutions. It has made yearly bids for transport supplementary grant, but it has not been able to secure any. Therefore, some of those roads must be closed, which will divert more traffic on to fewer roads and increase maintenance problems.

In my constituency, like many others, there is increasing pressure on rural schools. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) says, the county has supported the tiny rural schools in my area. One now has 20 pupils. Figures—they are public—show that, per pupil, a small rural school can cost four times as much as an urban school, and there is great pressure from other areas to do something about that. Again, the shortfall in revenue support grant, particularly for education, makes it more likely that such schools will remain under threat.

If the argument for the retention of rural schools is based at least partly on their essential nature in the community—I support that, of course—and if small local communities are to flourish, perhaps we should consider other methods of top-up funding, possibly from the Department of the Environment, to relieve pressure on the education budgets of certain areas. Perhaps parish council precepts will even be considered.

There is increasing unease in the farming community of west Lancashire, which is brought about by pressure to sell county smallholdings, and uncertainty about medium-term and long-term effects of the abolition of minimum-term tenancies. The Prime Minister was wrong to suggest a few weeks ago in Parliament that all members of the National Farmers Union favoured the abolition of minimum-term tenancies. In the north-west, they certainly do not. The majority of tenant farmers, even though the decision will not be retrospective, are dead against it. Both

[Mr. Colin Pickthall]

developments, they believe, could stifle new entrants into farming and horticulture, and, far from encouraging them, might point young people away from careers in agriculture.

Shops, post offices and housing have been adequately discussed, but the planning policy guidance to which the Minister referred still continues to use the wonderful phrase "limited affordable housing". When many of my constituents in rural areas see the word "affordable", they fall about laughing. What is affordable in the opinion of someone in Whitehall is different from what people in west Lancashire and others in the north can achieve by putting their hands in their pockets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) tempted me to refer to matters such as the police service. Hon. Members might know—the Minister certainly does—that it was announced that Lancashire's police budget was to be cut by £280,000. A letter was received a few days later, saying, "We are terribly sorry, but we got the decimal point in the wrong place," and the budget was to be cut by £2.8 million. That is the equivalent of 100 policemen. It is likely that we shall see a reduction in police numbers in rural areas, whereas in west Lancashire there has been the opposite tendency in the past.

I wish to spend a few minutes dealing with green belts. I intended to ask the Minister, "Where is the new PPG2?" Of course, it was published on Tuesday. That spoilt my best line. However, I am pleased to read revised PPG2, particularly paragraph 3.2, which states:

> "It is for the applicant for planning permission to show why permission should be granted for development which is inappropriate within the Green Belt."

I am pleased also to note the stiffening of controls on building adaptation. The regulations have been substantially clarified, and my local authority will certainly be grateful for that.

I am sure that green belt policy commands support across the House and with the large majority of the population. But for local planning authorities, balancing the need to defend the green belt against the needs of the rural economy is like dancing on ice. The huge changes in rural employment, and hence in the make-up of the rural population, since 1955 when the green belt got going, have created stresses and pressures that planners find hard to resist and even harder to accommodate. It is something of an indulgence, but I must pay tribute to Les Abernethy, the chief planning officer in west Lancashire, and to Councillor Bob Pendleton, the chairman of the planning committee, who have both retained a clear, flexible and forward-looking attitude throughout all the difficulties.

In PPG7, published in 1992, the Government said that the retention of

> "as much land as possible in agricultural use no longer has the same priority. The priority now is to promote diversification of the rural economy so as to provide wide and varied opportunities for rural people, including those formerly employed in agricultural and related sectors".

That passage, coupled with the drive to reduce agricultural surpluses, has led to substantial pressures to diversify in rural areas, which naturally push at the limitations in the green belt. Most of the diversification involves new or altered structures, and those involving leisure and sporting activities can be extraordinarily ugly. The pressures continue to increase.

In my constituency, one of the most important industries is horticulture, which presents the familiar problems involving acres of derelict glasshouses, and land clearance. In horticulture, the influence of the main retailers—the large supermarkets—has been significant. They require produce to be packed under set conditions and delivered direct within a specified period, and the costs of meeting their requirements, as well as the introduction of tougher hygiene regulations over the years, have been prohibitive for smaller agricultural holdings. That has resulted in the rise of specialists providing facilities to wash, pack and distribute not only their own produce but that of other holdings.

Now, however, it seems that diversification is going back the other way. For example, because of demands to decrease the amount of handling of tomatoes, the tendency is to move back to the holding where the tomatoes are grown, and to do the handling and packing there, which will increase demand for buildings and new structures in more areas.

Similarly, it was common practice for most holdings to own vehicles for use in the distribution of their produce. Use of such vehicles was ancillary to the operation of the holdings, and therefore did not require planning permission. The move towards greater efficiency has led to an increase in the numbers of haulage contractors who primarily transport agricultural produce but may not themselves own land.

The number of farm holdings that use their vehicles to transport not only produce grown on their land but that grown on other holdings is increasing. That leads to enormous rows about planning permission, about which I have had endless nightmares over the past couple of years. There is a clear and obvious need for small industrial estates to accommodate hauliers and others close to the main roads, but also close to the farms that they serve.

That is difficult to achieve even under the revised green belt regulations, if I understand them rightly. Moreover, confusions in the wording of the original PPG2 and the resulting court cases, especially concerning alternative uses for agricultural buildings, have soured relationships and in some cases set for local farmers and landowners what they take to be precedents. The precedents are still there for local planning authorities to tackle, even now that the revised PPG2 has been published.

The more careful wording in the new version will help planners, but will hardly prevent the rows stemming from those precedents. Regulations concerning agricultural building for housing for essential workers have been mightily abused in the green belt. I could take hon. Members to see great mansions. No doubt the Minister will be seeing some of those—or at least, whoever defeats him in South Ribble will see them—because his constituency will inherit large sections of the territory that I am describing. I could take the Minister to mansions resembling Southfork, which technically are agricultural dwellings.

It is appalling, and the new annexe D in PPG2 is welcome, as is the inclusion of hospitals in paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9. That would solve many wrangles, such as at Greaves Hall, where we are dealing not only with the

hospital but with the local authority and the health authority, which is not even in Lancashire. The new annexe on white land is also welcome.

I have some questions for the Minister, which I shall rattle through. This is a little unfair, as I have not given her notice of my questions, but I would welcome an answer at any time. What is the precise meaning of the phrase in paragraph 1.7 of the new PPG2 which states that the purposes of including land in green belt are of paramount importance to their continued protection and should take precedence over land use objectives? Frankly, I cannot explain that.

Will the Minister also look at the extra difficulties caused by the sections of document that deal with the height of buildings and their visual impact? In an excessively flat area, such as the area that I represent, those buildings can cause enormous problems. One can sometimes see a house with a new roof from four or five miles away, and planners and inspectors have often said that someone cannot have a development in an area because it can be seen from five miles away.

On the question of sports facilities, the document says that possible examples of facilities include small changing rooms or unobtrusive spectator accommodation for outdoor sport, or small stables for outdoor sport and recreation. I can see what it is getting at, but most sports facilities require to be underpinned by a clubhouse or bar. There is tremendous pressure not just to develop a sports facility in a rural area, but to build a bar or a similar facility as well.

What does the Minister think the new policies—either those in the White Paper or those in the green belt document that I have been talking about—will do about farm fragmentation, which presents us with a terrible problem? The pressure to break up a farm is followed by the pressure to put a new building on each of the fragments of that farm.

It is possible to detect in the slow changes evidenced in planning policy guidelines, Department of the Environment circulars and subjects connected with the White Paper the evolution of an integrated approach to green belt policy, which will be enhanced by sensible district, strategic and structural plans, and by imaginative proactive policies that are emerging in some areas.

I read an imaginative document published by Halton borough council in Cheshire, which the Minister might like to look at. The document suggested—among other things—that rundown rural railway stations might be revitalised by planning proposals that allowed the reasonable development of affordable housing in the area of railway stations, in return for developer input into modernising the stations. That could include—crucially, in my area—raising platforms to allow people to get on to trains.

There will always be a problem in finding flexibility to allow the development of small businesses in the green belt. At some point, the problems of regulating farm shops must be sorted out, as must the problems of allowing non-agricultural businesses to occupy agricultural buildings. In the northern half of my constituency, the local economy depends to an enormous extent on such small enterprises.

The farmers and landowners of west Lancashire retain the sympathy and support of the rest of the population because the people in general like the countryside that has been constructed—to an enormous extent—by farming practices during the centuries. The people of the area enjoy their access to the countryside for leisure activities, but they also enjoy their footpath access. Many farmers accommodate such access easily and with total co-operation. The other day, a farmer complained to me about the amount of time that he wasted talking to the nice people who walk along the path close to his land. Many other farmers are more hostile and sometimes actively obstruct footpaths.

The Minister was right to say that the countryside is a working and a living area and not merely a "chocolate box picture" for visitors to enjoy. I recall with pleasure the former Minister responsible for food saying that one should not set the countryside in aspic. One of my hon. Friends retorted, "If it was, you'd bloody well eat it."

While we recognise that the countryside is a working and a living area, we must also acknowledge that there is poverty and isolation—I was pleased that Conservative Members also acknowledged that. Most rural areas suffer from homelessness, overcrowded homes and a drastic shortage of some services. If those issues are dealt with seriously in the White Paper, it may well gather widespread support—including support from Opposition Members—but if it does not, it will descend into platitudes and irrelevance, which will not help the future of rural England.

9.20 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I shall follow the advice of my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) and be brief, as some of my hon. Friends still want to speak.

When we listened to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) outline Labour's plans, we had a fascinating insight into what the Opposition would do for the countryside. He spoke for approximately half an hour—indeed, for more than half an hour—but he did not say one word about farming. How can the Labour party construct a rural policy without mentioning farming once, when they know that it is the bedrock of our rural life?

The hon. Member for Leicester, East listed a heap of new regulations. He seems to want a new Domesday book, a tougher environment protection agency, more national parks bringing more regulation, a policy for woodlands and a legal right of access to roam on common land, moorland, mountains, woodlands and heaths, which would destroy many country jobs, especially those that depend on grouse shooting, and affect the status of many wild birds for which privacy and quiet are essential.

To cap it all, in between talking about telecottages—I thought that I knew what a cottager was, but I am not entirely sure what they are—the hon. Member for Leicester, East proposed a ban on hunting. In my constituency—I also defer to your opinion on such matters, Madam Speaker—there are seven packs of hounds and the local hunts provide a social life and dances, and are an integral part of the community, but the hon. Member for Leicester, East wants to ban them. In contrast, my hon. Friend the Minister produced some good ideas, and showed his firm commitment to the countryside, and his understanding that it is not a plaything for urban people, but predominantly a place where people work and live.

[Mr. Peter Atkinson]

The countryside has manifest problems. First, there is far too much bureaucracy. Interestingly, my county of Northumberland has a population of just over 300,000, but it has no fewer than six district councils, one county council and one national park with planning powers. Now, the hon. Member for Leicester, East wants to add a regional development agency and the north of England assembly, on which the Labour party is especially keen. The poor Northumbrians would sink under that weight of bureaucracy.

The countryside already has too much bureaucracy. There are Ministries, organisations such as the Countryside Commission, English Nature and English Heritage, which are all valuable in their way, countless protection agencies, such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England, and animal welfare organisations, such as the League against Cruel Sports and others that want to stop us enjoying ourselves. The countryside is over-managed and, in many respects, over-governed.

I believe that the environmentally sensitive areas programme has been successful, but it gives rise to a problem. The danger is that the ESAs create environmental ghettos in parts of the countryside. Jobs inside the ESAs are slowly being destroyed. As farmers in those areas get more funds for not doing various things on their farms, so they have more money to spend renting grazing land in countryside belonging to other farmers who do not get the benefit of such grants. That is causing serious problems on the edges of the ESAs.

People who have listened to this debate have had a warning about the kind of countryside that there would be if the Labour party were in power—one run by urban busybodies wanting to tell rural people how to live their lives. If we ever had a Labour Government it would be a case not of merry England, but of a very dreary countryside indeed.

9.25 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) for keeping his remarks so short.

Although I am a Scot, I have the privilege of representing a Hampshire constituency which is the epitome of what rural England is all about—beautiful, vibrant, productive, historic, well conserved, but probably over-gentrified by townspeople who have come to live there. It is certainly facing enormous pressures from nearby conurbations and from the spread of the concrete jungle.

I have an interest to declare, as a farmer. I get a slice of my income, and probably of my losses, from farming. I am also a member of the National Farmers Union, of the Country Landowners Association and of the Council for the Protection of Rural England. I acknowledge that there can be conflicts between the former and the latter. They may not always march in step, but they march towards the same objective: a viable rural economy. That is how they will achieve what they both want, and perhaps people like me can be a bridge between the organisations.

Rural England is not just fields, woods, valleys and rivers. It is nearly a quarter of the nation's resident population. They live there, but they do not all work there. This evening, I shall try to suggest one or two items that the Government should consider for their forthcoming White Paper. That paper is timely, because another debate is under way about the common agricultural policy—the so-called CAP 3. It has been interesting to hear what hon. Members have to say about it this evening.

I hope that CAP 3 will be much more about the whole rural economy, not just about agriculture. Farmers and landowners are not only responsible for our food production; they are also the stewards of the nation's land and as such they must remain the focus of countryside policy. Farming remains the dominant land use in rural areas. CAP 3 must embrace agriculture but must also have clear objectives for the rural environment and for rural social economies. A sustainable rural policy for the United Kingdom must be the objective for CAP 3. In that way, we shall get a better return from the European Union and from the Commission than we have hitherto enjoyed.

Agriculture has already moved closer to the marketplace, but I should like it to reduce still further its reliance on supply control, and on subsidy payments. As a farmer I am only too well aware that my activities are already subject to many environmental regulations, because of the impact of agriculture on the environment, but I resent the compulsion of what is known as cross-compliance, which attaches conditions to subsidies or grants under the CAP.

For example, the small print on the back of the IACS—integrated administration and control system—forms says that farmers will receive no set-aside payments unless, for instance, they retain ponds and stone walls. The CAP insists on retention only: there is nothing to help with maintenance. It would be better to have separate, positive incentives for landowners and managers to maintain ponds and walls, and the moss roads to which the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) referred, so as to deliver the clean, attractive countryside, rich in wildlife, historic features and recreational opportunities, that we all want. At present, only 1 per cent. of last year's CAP budget of 36.5 billion ecu was devoted to agri-environment measures.

What about the workers in the countryside? Only a small proportion of that growing quarter of the nation's population who live in the countryside actually works there. Structural changes in farming have radically reduced the agricultural work force, while improved transport has extended from the cities the distances that people are now able to commute. Twenty years ago, only people like Sir Cedric Brown could commute to London from my home town. Now, the car park at the station holds 200 commuters' cars. Over the past decade, both population and employment have grown faster in rural areas than in urban areas, in spite of poor local communications and services, and higher infrastructure costs.

What about diversification? That is the way in which we shall retain the viability of our rural economies. My accountant constantly reminds me that the current tax rules are hideously complex and a real deterrent to farmers and landowners who wish to diversify. Two years ago, the Country Landowners Association proposed the idea of the rural business unit, which would allow all those commercial activities traditionally associated with a rural estate, with those that are being integrated, to be assessed as one trading unit for tax purposes. That is something that my right hon. and learned Friend the

Chancellor really should look at, because it would not only help the rural economy, but could also increase his tax revenues.

For most people, the countryside will be seen as a place for recreation, and therefore good access is essential. We are all pleased to see what has already been done to make the countryside easier to enter and enjoy for those who are welcome, and more difficult to invade for those who are not.

Forestry has been mentioned. I am sorry that it will not be part of the White Paper. It took a terrible knock in the 1988 Budget. We have now seen a welcome trend towards broadleaf woodlands rather than conifers, thanks to the Government's woodland grants schemes, but there is a need to increase our woodland cover and also manage our existing woodland better than we are doing. We must look again at the tax provisions for woodland owners and forestry. If we do not, although we may well continue to see an increase in woodland planting, we may see less proper maintenance of existing woodlands, and we want them to be maintained so that they can be enjoyed in the way that we are accustomed to.

It is unlikely that we would have much woodland were it not for countryside sports, which have been mentioned by a number of hon. Members this evening. It would be a dreadful omission if, during a debate on rural England, we did not mention the financial and amenity benefits of field sports. The Cobham report, sponsored by the Standing Conference on Countryside Sports and updated three years ago, estimates that field sports generate £2.7 billion-worth of business and give recreation to more than 5 million people, of whom some 3.9 million are fishermen. Perhaps that is the only reason why the Labour party supports fishing. Field sports are estimated to support some 65,000 jobs. They improve access to the countryside. Those who manage them help to keep Britain beautiful and rich in wildlife, and they also assist in maintaining employment in both urban and rural areas.

There is no doubt that, if one is to be able to diversify out of agriculture, the planning process must make it possible. At present, I do not believe that the development control system can do that. We must see a proper balance. I wish that other counties would take an example from Hampshire, which some time ago set up its Committee for Rural Hampshire, under the chairmanship of the noble Lord the Earl of Selborne, to address the problems of reaching balanced decisions on planning matters.

The committee's membership is drawn from councils at all levels—county, district and parish, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the Hampshire Council of Community Service, the Hampshire Wildlife Trust, MAFF, the National Farmers Union and the Rural Development Commission. It brings together all those bodies to

"promote a just and fair balance in the use and management of Hampshire's rural resources and sustain the well-being of balanced rural communities."

It will make a submission on what it thinks should go in the White Paper. It will be extremely valuable. If only other counties around the country had similar committees, it would be extremely useful.

Much has been said about the countryside, but one important subject that has not been touched on is rural crime. I am glad to see farm watch schemes springing up everywhere, as criminals go for what they imagine will be easy pickings in the countryside. We have some schemes around us.

I have put down a few markers for CAP 3, which is crucial and should be part of what is considered within the rural White Paper. I particularly welcome the Agricultural Tenancies Bill, which we shall be debating on Monday week and I look forward to the levelling of the European playing field.

It is with some authority that I can say that British farmers and landowners, together with many other people, will ensure that the rural England remains not only economically viable but the green and pleasant land that we want to see.

9.34 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): This has been an important debate. I am only sorry that many of my colleagues from rural constituencies in the north of England have had to return home tonight because of the deplorable weather conditions of which the Minister will be aware.

However, they have made it clear that they give me their full support, along with those of my hon. Friends who are here, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) who made an excellent contribution on behalf of his constituents. Not all Opposition Members can afford to live full-time in London, so they go home to their constituencies as soon as they can.

In Britain, 23 per cent. of the population live in rural England. When it comes to the way in which they are treated, they sometimes rightly think that they are the forgotten people. Many live in what some Conservative Members might regard as Conservative fiefdoms, but a great deal of good that has done them. We have seen their response to that in the verdicts delivered by local people in the recent county council elections.

Many British people have the same needs wherever they live, but the rural areas result in different emphases and circumstances. As has been said by some hon. Members tonight, not everything in the country is rosy. For example, 8.1 per cent. of the rural population is over 75—a higher percentage than in urban areas.

The elderly have particular needs. For example, they rely on rural sub-post offices. Despite what has been said today, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has made it clear that it is still his intention to privatise the Post Office. The privatisation of the Post Office is bound to affect the range of services provided by sub-post offices.

Even now, the move to have pensions paid directly into bank accounts is affecting the viability of many sub-post offices.There is no doubt that a privatised Post Office would ultimately lead to two-tier pricing for postal services, with higher charges for those who live in rural communities.

Some Conservative Members might say that that guarantees have been given and that there will be protection in law for single pricing for the postal service, but similar guarantees were given with regard to single pricing for the delivery of gas. That is no longer the case. The further away one lives from the points of entry in Britain, the higher the gas charge will be.

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

With regard to health, 74 per cent. of parishes have no general practitioner practices to which they need access.

Transport has been mentioned. The deregulation of buses has been a disaster for country areas. My village used to have an early morning work service going into the town. Now, some people who live in villages in my constituency are asked when they go for a job interview whether they have a car. Employers want to ensure that they can get into work. They do not have a car because they do not have a job and cannot buy one. They cannot get into work because there is no bus service. There is no bus service so they cannot get a job. That is the situation in many rural villages.

What new services there have been as a result of deregulation have not been extra services on Sundays or services to the more remote areas. They have been provided by the odd bloke in the second-hand coach with a bit of cardboard in the windscreen saying where he is going.

Mr. Atkins: Nonsense.

Mr. Morley: I see that in the rural areas in my constituency. Such people do not provide a comprehensive service; they move in on the peaks. Many long-standing small private operators who have provided a good service should not have to face such unfair competition.

A quarter of all women living in rural areas have no access to a car, and 73 per cent. of parishes have no bus service. I see no Government policies to help that.

The trains are under threat. I do not believe that the rural train service in my constituency will survive if British Rail is privatised. I hope that the Government will see sense in the matter and recognise the feeling of people who live in rural areas who do not want to see British Rail privatised and who fear for the future.

I was amazed by the comments of the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), who said that there were enough empty homes to meet the needs of the homeless and that Government policies would help. Government policy, however, has moved towards market rents, which are not much different from mortgage repayments in many parts of the country. If people cannot make mortgage repayments, they can hardly pay market rents. The Government have accepted that in recognising the increasing cost of housing benefit, which they intend to cut, placing more strain on those who must find the shortfall. Moreover, those who lose their jobs will no longer receive as much mortgage support, which will increase homelessness and other problems.

A large proportion of people living in rural areas are self-employed—16.6 per cent.—and there is a wide variation in unemployment statistics. Wages tend to be lower in the country: 55 per cent. of workers in agriculture, forestry and fishing earn less than £200 a week. A minimum wage policy would therefore be very welcome in rural areas.

Low pay means that affordable housing is needed. People are being priced out of rural areas: they are being forced to leave the villages for the towns. Between 1990 and 1993, only 8,800 public sector homes were provided in rural areas, meeting only 11 per cent. of housing need. The Housing Corporation target in 1994 was 1,850 new homes, 6 per cent. of the total need.

The right to buy has been a disaster in rural areas. Even Glanford borough council, in my constituency—which is Conservative-controlled—has complained bitterly about what it has done in the countryside, removing affordable homes and not giving local councils, whether Labour or Conservative, an opportunity to replace them because of Government restrictions. Some members of Conservative local authorities, however, do not recognise the problem. When challenged about homelessness, Glanford borough council's Tory housing chairman said that there was no homelessness in the area: he had asked persistently for the names and addresses of those involved, and no one had been able to give them to him.

In 1992-93, 46,270 adults and children were accepted as homeless. In January 1993, 4,542 families were in temporary accommodation. No one can deny that there are positive aspects of living in the community; it is often a nice place in which to live. As someone who lives in a village, I feel that the greatest advantage is the strength of the local community, shown in community action and village hall committees. I am proud to have played a modest part in the provision of a village hall in my own community. Good work is also done by parish and town councils, women's institutes, community councils, Action for Communities in Rural England and the Coalfields Communities Campaign. There is huge support for the voluntary sector—more than £20 billion worth, according to an estimate by the Centre for Policy Studies.

Football and other sporting clubs, such as Winterton Rangers, have applied for rate relief. As the Minister will know, it is discretionary. Winterton Rangers complained to the ombudsman about Glanford borough council, and the ombudsman criticised the council—*[Interruption.]* As the Minister suggests, it is a local authority decision, but he should realise that some borough councils—such as Scunthorpe—give 100 per cent. rate relief, while others such as Glanford are very difficult about it. Community organisations are being treated unfairly, and I hope that the Government will do something about it.

The problem may, in fact, be solved. Glanford and Scunthorpe are being amalgamated along with part of Boothferry, to form a new authority. The difference in political control will affect the situation, and I hope that all the rural football clubs who want their rate relief will support the establishment of a Labour-controlled North Lincolnshire authority. That will certainly provide better quality services.

There is no point in trying to duck the issue of Government policy towards the shire counties. We have heard about the problems of rural schools. Many shire counties have done badly out of the standard spending assessment calculation. A great deal of money has been shifted to the south-east, so it is little wonder that many rural schools are under threat. Labour-controlled councils, such as that in Humberside, have an excellent record of providing nursery facilities and of supporting tiny rural schools in my constituency. I doubt whether those schools would survive under any other political control.

Under Nicholas Ridley there was a huge growth in out-of-town planning and that had an impact on village and town shops. It will be said that people have a right to go to supermarkets and that is a fair point, but there should be balanced out-of-town development and a central

balance, and the impact that too much out-of-town development can have on rural shops and small towns and their centres must be recognised. We are currently experiencing that impact and there is a need for greater awareness. I hope that the Minister will confirm that planning systems within strong structural plans will be the principal future means of resolving land use conflicts. I hope he will recognise that planning in particular should meet local needs and should not be market driven.

We need a sensible roads policy, but if road building is reduced—and there are arguments for that—people must be provided with an alternative, and that must be public transport. Policies such as the privatisation of the railways and bus deregulation will not provide that alternative. Bus deregulation has led to higher fares, fewer services and a falling number of passengers.

Agriculture has an important influence on the countryside. Sadly, only about 3 per cent. of the population are employed in agriculture, and that percentage is declining. Between 1987 and 1998, it is projected that 38,000 full-time agricultural workers will be made redundant. In that period 20,000 farmers will leave farming. We must meet that challenge and the impact that it will have on the rural economy.

We must tackle the issue of the common agricultural policy which urgently needs reform. I pay tribute to the National Farmers Union, which produced an excellent document entitled "Real Choices", for recognising these changes and challenges. Support for agriculture has an important part to play in terms of agri-environment policy. We must support new entrants even in a declining market.

I am sure that the Minister has read, as I have, the 1993 report on agriculture in the European Union which contains some interesting statistics. For example, Britain is at the bottom of the European league for support given to entrants to farming. We are even below Luxembourg. Support has declined from 159,000 ecu in 1991 to 127,000 ecu. We should compare that with France, which supported new entrants to the tune of 100 million ecu. That is a considerable difference.

I recognise the impact of farming on the landscape and on recreation and leisure, nature conservation and jobs. There must be a balance between those, and schemes such as those for set-aside are especially important in that regard. The countryside is important to everyone in England and everyone pays for supporting it through taxes, the common agricultural policy and other schemes. The importance of tourism and recreation in supporting the countryside must not be underestimated.

There is great scope for agricultural reform that will support new access and diversification. We must support farmers in adapting farm buildings so that they can be used for businesses such as farm shops which sell everything from meat to ice cream.

The right to roam has been mentioned. I am strongly in favour of what most people see as a popular and sensible policy which applies only to uncultivated and common land. It is unacceptable for people such as the Duke of Westminster, who owns large areas of Bowland, to restrict access for millions of responsible people who simply want to walk on the land. There is no point in the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) saying that that would destroy nature conservation when I know that many birds, such as the hen harrier, are being illegally destroyed in that area by gamekeepers. When there is better nature conservation, I might have more sympathy with restricting access.

Conservation is an important issue, but time does not allow me to deal with it now. Indeed, it is worthy of a debate in its own right. The Minister will have seen the recent report called "The Bio-Diversity Challenge", produced by the Butterfly Conservation Group, Friends of the Earth, Plant Life, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Wildlife Trust and the World Wide Fund for Nature. I know that he will welcome it, as I do. I hope that he recognises the targets set in the report as being achievable and important. Above all, I hope that he recognises that rural policy needs an integrated and balanced approach. All Government policies are relevant to both rural and urban areas and many of our people in both those communities feel that the Government have failed them miserably.

9.50 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): As my hon. Friend the Minister explained at the beginning of the debate, it has come at an opportune time. It is important that at the start of an exercise such as the production of a White Paper we establish the views of all those with an interest and identify the issues that are important to them. It has been helpful to hear the views of hon. Members tonight, especially those who represent truly rural constituencies. They have spoken with the depth of knowledge that that representation brings to them.

Mr. Garnier: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene at this early stage of her remarks, especially with the short time that is available to her. Does she agree that the speech that we heard for 26 minutes from the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) was a diatribe of nothing but ignorance and prejudice? Does she further agree that his absence from the Chamber during the winding-up speeches is discourteous not only to the House but to the rural residents of Leicestershire and the country?

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I had intended to draw attention to the fact that the speech of the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) was based on his experience of travelling on and looking through the windows of InterCity trains at night. Speaking as a truly rural Member representing a constituency in the heart of Devon, I can tell him that people there would have sussed him out in a couple of minutes. He certainly does not have any real muck on his boots at home. In fact, I would be surprised if he even possessed a pair of boots. His knowledge of working life in the rural communities is somewhat suspect. However, he made a good try, given the fact that behind him were the massed ranks of Labour Members who show great interest in rural communities and the important issues that the House has discussed tonight.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) was the one token representative of the Liberal Democrat party, which trumpets its support for and knowledge of rural life throughout the country. However, even the hon. Gentleman is not here for the end of the debate.

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): My hon. Friend has rightly highlighted the fairly typical absence of the Liberal

[Mr. David Faber]

Democratic spokesman for the wind-up of the debate. Some of us have sat through the debate but not had an opportunity to speak, so we consider that to be a gross discourtesy.

Had the hon. Gentleman stayed, he might have had an opportunity to comment on the issue of rural schools, which he has said are so important to the Liberal Democrats. Perhaps he could have told us why, last Thursday evening, Liberal Democratic councillors in my constituency went around a village with a small school threatened with closure promising that the school would be safe in their hands, yet the next morning they voted with the Labour group to close the school. Only the Conservative group opposed it.

Mrs. Browning: I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituents will be glad that he has put that fact on the record. As we all know, the difficulty with the Liberal Democrats is that they say what people want to hear, but when they go to another area or when they have an opportunity to vote they speak or vote in a different way. The rural areas have come to understand their tactics.

We welcome the fact not only that the White Paper will be produced for England, but that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland announced today that the Scottish Office will embark upon a similar procedure for Scotland. I know from conversation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales that the Welsh Office is also showing great interest and has done some work in that area.

Many Conservative Members made significant speeches, talking with the knowledge of the issues that affect their constituents in rural areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), speaking not only as a rural Member of Parliament, but with the background knowledge that he gained as a Minister, raised many issues appertaining to his constituency, such as the military, housing, law and order, special constables, the pattern of agriculture, tenancy and derelict land.

All those issues are for debate and discussion. The Government hope that hon. Members who have spoken, including my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury, are happy that the White Paper, when it is produced, will not simply be an introspective look at what is going on. It will be a way of taking forward and fashioning policy.

That is in stark contrast to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), who again played the politics of fear with post offices, and other policies that affect people in rural areas, who are genuinely worried when the facts are not put to them, and when they are frightened into thinking that somehow they will be deprived of their post offices and other facilities. Playing the politics of fear is cynical. Many hon. Members mentioned that many people in rural areas are vulnerable and elderly. That tactic is especially deplorable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) raised many issues. I can give him some positive answers to the specific issues that he raised. One concerned the case of Colonel Owen. I assure him that the guidelines on purchasing property will be amended following the Court of Appeal judgment. The matter is in hand, and I hope that he will be reassured.

So far, no planning application has been made to Solihull metropolitan borough council to build a new football stadium in the green belt. I am aware, however, that the matter has been discussed. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden heard hon. Members raise other issues, and I hope that he will allow me to pursue them.

The hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) raised many issues, but especially referred to several points in planning policy guidance note 2, which we welcome. I am grateful for the support that he gave to it. He raised specific issues and I assure him that I will draw them to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister, who will write to him. They are technical and detailed and I cannot cover them all this evening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), again speaking with the knowledge of a rural Member, raised the issue of CAP 3. As he will know, my right hon. Friend the Minister has asked a panel of people to consider specifically the future of the common agricultural policy. My hon. Friend was especially anxious that environmental issues should be taken into account in fashioning the future of CAP. I assure him that the panel that has been appointed by my right hon. Friend will consider that.

Many hon. Members said that agriculture is still at the heart of rural life, although we understand the changes that agriculture has undergone. It is important, both for this country and for our role in the European Community, that we press on with reform of CAP and that we get it right. The introduction of new member states, many of which expect to enter the Community by the year 2000, will pose a great challenge to the CAP. That policy would not bear the additional costs and strains of widening the Community, although we support that widening.

I assure hon. Members that we want to influence our European partners so that the CAP will be reformed. We do not always have the support of all our partners, which is needed, but it is no good just saying that reform must be introduced. We must tell our partners how we believe it should be done and we should set out a strategy. It is for that reason that my right hon. Friend the Minister has formed the committee, which I hope will report with a positive and practical structure for reform.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside mentioned his support for rural business units. The House will be aware that the Bunbury report was presented to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The issues are being dealt with and they have been discussed. I am sympathetic to suggestions for rationalisation of rural taxation, but those are matters for my right hon. and learned Friend.

I am grateful to the truly rural hon. Members who did not allow a little snow to prevent them from being here this evening. Those of us who live in rural areas are not put off by the elements; we get on with life just the same. I am grateful for their contributions, and I am sure that the White Paper will benefit from the suggestions that we have heard tonight.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Great Barr Hall

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

10 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I represent an urban constituency. Much has been said today about the problems of rural areas, but people living in metropolitan areas such as mine like a little rural idyll and it has been provided for us thanks to the wisdom of the Victorians, who gave us parks, and the wisdom of civil servants and politicians in the 1930s and 1950s who gave us the green belt. I wish to retain the green belt in my area for the benefit not of property speculators but of the citizenry of Walsall, Birmingham and Sandwell.

Adjournment debates are literally local lotteries. The timing of this Adjournment debate is most fortuitous and I am grateful to the failure of the law of averages which permitted me to speak tonight. There are three reasons why the debate is fortuitous. First, a formal application has just been submitted to Walsall council by West Midlands regional health authority for

"the erection of 98 Dwellings, Country Park, Roads and associated structures".

I understand that the project is to be advertised in the press tomorrow. The advertisement will show that it is a departure from the Walsall unitary plan adopted only in December, but more about that later.

Secondly, the debate is fortuitous because it is just three days since the publication by the Department of the Environment of planning policy guidance note 2 on green belts, which I generally endorse. Thirdly, this is the week of the launch of a campaign by the Great Barr Hall action committee against the West Midlands regional health authority application. I co-founded the organisation in December 1987 after a previous fright for people living in the area.

There is, in fact, a fourth reason why tonight's debate is fortuitous. Today's debate on the future of rural England has a relevance for people living in urban areas. If the Minister ever travels north along the M6—or, preferably, takes the train—I hope that he will make a detour to visit the area that I am talking about. If he comes, I shall take him to the top of Barr beacon. If he looks down to the south, he will see the urban centre of Birmingham which was once described as a "little hamlet near Walsalle". In front of him he will see Sandwell, Dudley and, to the north, Walsall. In the middle of that metropolitan urban area is an oasis provided by farsighted politicians and civil servants.

This enormous site of 300 acres comprises three sections, one being St. Margaret's hospital for the mentally handicapped which is owned by the West Midlands regional health authority. It is scheduled to close in 1997. The site also comprises Great Barr hall, its chapel and grounds. It is a grade II star listed building from the late 1770s on a site that goes back deep into medieval history. It is built in the Strawberry hill gothick style and is a rare example associated with Joseph Scott. The grounds were designed by Humphrey Repton in collaboration with John Nash. The hall is one of only four examples of its type in the country.

It was a meeting place of the world-famous 18th century Lunar Society and of scientists and entrepreneurs such as Matthew Boulton, James Watt, Joseph Priestley, Erasmus Darwin and Josiah Wedgwood. They were the harbingers of the industrial revolution and the building served as a clearing house for the ideas that transformed this country and the world. It is therefore of great historic and architectural significance.

The hall and grounds were shamefully sold by the regional health authority in 1988 for £650,000 to a so-called financial adviser. I will not abuse parliamentary privilege by describing him in the way in which he should be described. I shall merely refer to him in *Private Eye* terms as a man with an uneven or chequered business career.

That man purchased the job lot, not for the purposes of preservation and conservation, but as a speculative development with the help of the regional health authority. He wanted to make himself wealthy and the former chairman of the regional health authority must accept ultimate responsibility for the shameful sale. The property is now in the hands of the official receiver Cork Gully and the Midland bank owns the freehold. I am afraid that many people have been left with their fingers severely burnt.

The third part of the site is away from St. Margaret's hospital; 89 acres of land south-west of Chapel lane, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), who supports everything that I say. The land is north of Sutton's drive, and it includes a road of 100 m. Within that acreage lies the male homes complex of the hospital. It is in structural order. It is not derelict, and could be re-used in line with the appropriate green belt policies.

The proposal which I am opposing most strenuously is to build 98 domestic dwellings. The planning history of the site is profoundly unsatisfactory. There have been previous attempts to demolish Great Barr hall. Birmingham regional health authority applied in 1974 to demolish the hall. In 1976, Walsall planning committee approved an application to demolish the hall and chapel.

Now, the hall is boarded up. It is in danger, in a few years, of being worthy of nothing more than a bulldozer, and it would be criminal to allow that to happen. I appeal to the Minister to assist the restoration of this fine building to some form of acceptable use.

In 1991, the regional health authority made four planning applications to develop the male homes complex site to build houses and to build an estate of offices. It was totally inappropriate under the planning law then and it still is under the present guidelines that have been issued.

This large site is the most heavily protected in the west midlands. It falls in the green belt, Sandwell green wedge, Great Barr conservation area, Beacon regional park and the English Heritage gardens register, it has a grade II star listed building and, as I said, it contains a protected nature reserve.

My interest in the site goes back many years. I have submitted evidence to inspectors, given written evidence, made oral presentations and written numerous letters as, no doubt, the Minister's files will testify. I was very encouraged by a letter that I received in 1994 from the Minister's colleague, the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), then Environment Minister. He wrote:

"However, the Secretary of State may well be involved at a later stage when precise proposals have been put to the Council and their attitude is known. Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council has assured the Government Office for the West Midlands that if it

[Mr. Bruce George]

decides to approve the proposals it will submit them as departures from the development plan. If and when this occurs I will need to take a hard look at the applications for the Green Belt amongst other matters. As part of this, I would emphasise that we would undertake a very thorough assessment of the overall package of proposals for the site."

I am also very encouraged by documents which have been issued recently—PPG2 on the green belt in January 1995 and PPG15 on planning and the historic environment in September 1994. I will not go into any great detail of what they contain, but I ask the Minister to look especially at paragraph 4.26 of PPG15, which is very important to our case.

PPG2, issued only this week, almost completely vindicates my argument. I believe that when Walsall council looks at it, it may approve of what I am saying. Paragraph 2.6 says:

"detailed Green Belt boundaries defined in adopted local plans or earlier approved development plans should be altered only exceptionally. Detailed boundaries should not be altered or development allowed merely because the land has become derelict."

The section headed "Control over development" and paragraphs 3.1, 3.2 and 3.4 contain a restatement of my arguments. At C.11, it states:

"Suitable re-use is to be preferred to redevelopment."

The male homes complex is capable for re-use in line, one hopes, with planning guidance. The unitary development plan, which was approved only very recently, again vindicates the argument. An inspector said that he wanted to see the site viewed in its totality. He said:

"It is perhaps, this diffuseness of policies which belies the importance of the Great Barr Hall and Estate. That it is important in a Borough wide context is without doubt in spite of the fact that public access to it is limited. Its combination of characteristics, its size, the variety and quality of its landscape and buildings, the wild life habitats and its proximity to densely built-up urban areas make it worthy of the prominence it has been given in the urban development plan."

However, the inspector wants it to be seen in its totality and not in little bits, which is what is happening now. Walsall declined to accept some of the inspector's recommendations. To my amazement, its version appeared in the document that was finally published and that is to my regret.

Walsall refused to accept the recommendations and the plan was adopted without the recommendations of Mr. Williams, the inspector. My final endorsement of Government policy—this will be detrimental to my relationship with my constituency party, so I hope no one finds out about it—relates to the document entitled, "Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands", which states at paragraph 10.3:

"Detailed Green Belt boundaries should be altered only exceptionally, and as a last resort."

It states that housing must be found at locations elsewhere and it refers to a list of priorities where housing is to be located. I cannot say, and I defy anyone to say, that the site is necessary for the building of houses. Other sites must be exploited first.

Walsall council's record with regard to defending the green belt is far from scintillating, but it is not one of total indifference. I appeal to the council to consider the application made by the West Midlands regional health authority very carefully, and I hope that its views will concur with mine.

The regional health authority's goal is to pick up a few million pieces of silver and then run like Mr. Worth, the so-called financial adviser. The way in which Mr. Worth proceeded is not much different from the way in which the regional health authority is proceeding.

We want to stop the development going ahead because, if it is not stopped, the regional health authority will see a green light and will build elsewhere on land that it already holds. There are more footprints in St. Margaret's hospital than in a Kenyan national park. The development would be exploited and there would be far more damaging applications in the next few years. West Midlands regional health authority is a danger.

The "listening bank", part of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, which knows a thing or two about building in confined spaces, quite rightly wishes to realise its assets. However, its aims are not for conservation or concern for the land. The commercial imperative is overwhelming.

I hope that I have not appeared to be rather negative, although I am sure that I have. I want that fine land to be properly utilised in line with Government policy. The scope for building on the land and for developing it is not limitless, but it must be used properly. I hope that it will be properly utilised in the next few years. I look to the Minister and to his Department to protect the land because I cannot look to the health authority and—I hope that I am wrong in this regard—I cannot look automatically to Walsall council to provide the protection that the land so richly deserves.

10.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): We have heard such support for the Government's planning policy this evening that it is surprising that it did not come from Conservative Members. Nevertheless, I must admit that I always look forward to contributions from the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George). He always approaches even the most difficult subjects with a touch of humour and more than a little journalistic licence. The subject of the debate is, of course, of considerable concern to the hon. Gentleman, his constituents and many neighbouring hon. Members and their constituents.

It is no exaggeration to say that Walsall is not over-endowed with properties and parklands of great historical and architectural interest. That adds, of course, to the importance of Great Barr hall, its chapel and surrounding and adjacent parklands, as outlined this evening. The fact that the chapel was never consecrated and has been used as a billiard room may appeal to the hon. Gentleman's sense of humour. As the hon. Gentleman has made quite clear, the areas under discussion this evening are in several parts and several ownerships—I shall concentrate on two—and subject to two different planning applications.

As the hon. Gentleman has said, those areas obviously interrelate with each other in the impact of one upon the other, and both are included within the confirmed green belt. To that we must add the fact that the hall is a grade II listed building and therefore of great interest to English Heritage. As the hon. Gentleman is abundantly aware, any

potential or aspiring developer must take note of the implications that will be of considerable interest to English Heritage, the local planning authority, and, of course, ultimately, the Department of the Environment. In addition, we all see that area as a valuable stretch of open space in a heavily built-up area, which makes it enormously important to those living in surrounding residential areas.

I shall now refer to Great Barr hall and its surrounding lands. I share the hon. Gentleman's concern at the state of that building, and it is recognised that English Heritage has classified it as seriously at risk. In fact, English Heritage has clearly expressed its extreme concern. The hall has been empty since the 1970s, and it has been subjected to fires, vandalism and structural problems. I understand that much of the interior timberwork is affected by dry rot, and a restoration job running into millions of pounds is obviously urgently required. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman and I can urge the borough to look again at the problem and to redouble its efforts to ensure that at least the building does not deteriorate further.

Of course, the sooner a long-term future for the hall is secured, the better. As the hon. Gentleman and I are aware, for some years development proposals for the hall have been discussed by the local authorities, the receivers and English Heritage. English Heritage has accepted the need for some enabling development to offset the high cost of repairs to the hall, but of course that must be balanced against the need to avoid further damage to the landscape and, if possible, to improve and reinstate the parkland setting of the building.

The most recent planning application for the hall and grounds was submitted about two years ago. It included the conversion of the hall for office and leisure purposes and the erection of an office building within the curtilage of the hall on land presently occupied by wartime agricultural buildings. English Heritage has given its views on the application to Walsall council, and it has suggested detailed amendments to the work on the hall and its extension.

English Heritage has also recorded its objection to the planned building within the curtilage. That building, it believes, should be smaller and differently designed. The borough, in response, has written to the applicants asking for more information. The response is still awaited. Equally, any application will be of potential interest to the Department, as has been mentioned, in the light of the recently tightened PPG2 relating to the green belt, and the consideration of English Heritage, particularly if it continues to express concern.

We must recognise that a balance must be struck between encouraging a viable use of the hall and the safeguarding of its essential character. The obvious answer, therefore, is that real progress must be made through detailed negotiations between the parties, locally.

The same concerns apply to the park, which, as has been mentioned, is classified grade II. In PPG15, which has also been mentioned, the Government have emphasised the need to protect registered parks and gardens in determining planning applications. As the hon. Gentleman might be aware, a golf course is proposed on the parkland. Although English Heritage generally regards golf courses as inappropriate, it believes, exceptionally, that a golf course may be acceptable, provided that it is designed on parkland principles. That re-emphasises the need for detailed negotiations between the parties to find an acceptable scheme. As a long-stop, the Secretary of State has reserve powers, especially in this case, as the land is within the green belt.

The adjacent site has been given the interesting name of the "male homes" land. Demolition of the buildings, to which English Heritage had no objection, will take place soon, and a planning application for a country park and 89 homes—I understand that that, rather than 98, is the figure; perhaps someone has dyslexia—has just been submitted. The submission is with the local authority, and obviously it is at an early stage.

The local authority has agreed that if it is minded to approve, it will definitely refer the application to the Department of the Environment before approval. In view of the complications that is, of course, to be expected. Any development will have to take account of PPG2, which has recently been tightened, including the section relating to a proposal to increase floor area in comparison with that occupied by the properties demolished.

We must recognise that the site is within a conservation area. In addition, English Heritage will be especially concerned about the impact of the development because of its close proximity to Great Barr hall and its parklands; clearly, although there are two applications relating to two sites under separate ownership, they are closely interrelated and extremely complex.

Nevertheless, we must bear in mind the importance of the restoration of the hall and the maintenance of the parkland. Mindless opposition—I make no accusation here—to change on the estate will hinder not only the long-term restoration of the hall and the parkland but the search for an acceptable solution for the redundant hospital. Obviously, the search for the best solution is best carried out by those on the ground, who have detailed local responsibilities and knowledge.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that, while he is watching closely over one shoulder of those responsible, the Government, conscious of their responsibilities for the green belt, for historic buildings and the historic parkland and for the overall situation, are looking closely over the other.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 27 January 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

9.34 am

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you received a request from the Secretary of State for Defence to make a statement later today, or would you allow him to do so, to clarify the apparent conflict and embarrassment that arises from the fact that his parliamentary private secretary, the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham), has declared in the Register of Members' Secretaries and Research Assistants that Mr. John Kennedy of John Kennedy Associates, a public relations firm, is his researcher or secretary?

I draw the matter to your attention because John Kennedy has been the spokesperson for the unrecognised Bosnian Serb Government and for Radovan Karadzic in London. Clearly, on the face of it, there is an acute conflict of interest and it is an embarrassment to the Secretary of State in his difficult diplomatic task, at home and abroad, of promoting the interests of the United Kingdom and carrying out the necessary international brokerage to reduce the problems of that dreadful conflict. We need some clarity and a statement today to explain that link.

Madam Speaker: That is a rather convoluted point of order. The Government have not informed me that they want to make a statement today, although there is time for them to do so, should they so wish. If that is the case, time will be set aside.

Orders of the Day

Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.36 am

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is a rare honour that the House bestows on a Back-Bench Member to have the pleasure and privilege of introducing a Private Member's Bill. It offers me a special opportunity to present a Bill on behalf of my constituents, which is relevant to parents throughout the country.

Sometimes, when a tragedy occurs where no one is at fault, it leaves us with a feeling of helplessness because no law, however well-intentioned, can overcome human error or an act of God. Sometimes, however, a profoundly significant event highlights the need for a change in the law and galvanises people of determination and good sense to change it—an event that was totally avoidable and was due, not to human frailty, but to human neglect. The Lyme bay tragedy was one such incident and because that event triggered the Bill, hon. Members will understand if I refer to it several times during my speech.

In March 1993, four teenagers from the Southway school died in Lyme bay. That was no accident. They died due to the criminal neglect of the people whom they and their parents thought were responsible for them—the people running the St. Alban's activity centre. The managing director of Active Learning and Leisure, Peter Kite, is now serving a three-year prison sentence for manslaughter.

Parents, governors of schools, local education authorities, teacher unions, organisations involved with running activity centres, the townswomens' guilds and many others, have called for action in this important matter. They have done so because the strongest instinct in any parent is to protect their children from danger. It is an instinct that is so strong in parents that they will often put their child's life before their own.

The parents who lost their children at Lyme bay are here in the House today, as are some of the survivors of that appalling incident who tried to rescue their schoolfriends. My constituents Dennis and Jackie Walker, Noel and Sylvia Dunne, Carolyn and Bob Langley and Gerry and Jackie Sayer have all suffered the greatest loss that any parent can suffer—the loss of a child. It was such an unnecessary loss, of four young, healthy people in the very prime of their lives.

Over the past 22 months those parents have borne the overwhelming pain of their loss with great dignity and, with extraordinary courage, they have turned grief into action. Realising that their own children can never return, they have campaigned unstintingly to ensure that no other parent will suffer in the same way.

My constituents, as well as many other parents, sent their children on activity courses because they believed that young people should have challenges, and the experience and excitement of the outdoors. There should be opportunities for young people to push their strength and endurance to the limits, and to find in themselves

[Mr. David Jamieson]

hitherto unknown capacity. In an age of television games and videos, the challenge of the outdoors is of even greater importance, especially for children who live in our great conurbations and monotonous inner cities. Those children, some of whom lack play space, need to find genuine adventure.

The national curriculum recognises that the outdoor environment has an important role in the physical, emotional and intellectual development of our young people. Our society puts greater stress on outdoor activities. Those who support the Bill support such activities for children, and want to see them grow and expand. But we must distinguish between activities that are exciting and challenging, and activities that are dangerous. We must distinguish between activities that are adventurous and exhilarating, and those that are hazardous.

Abseiling can be fun and exhilarating with ropes that are in good order and a competent instructor, but abseiling can be dangerous, as in a case recently reported in *The Times Educational Supplement*. It stated that Alan Cottle, the outdoor education manager for Surrey, visited Hyde house centre in Dorset and found that children were abseiling from a tower, but the instructor did not know how to use the braking mechanism. In his report on the incident, Mr. Cottle said:

"I was alarmed to see some appalling practice which was totally unsafe".

It is significant that the Hyde house centre is owned by Devon and Dorset Holidays, whose owner, Chris Reynard, had shares in Active Learning and Leisure, the company fined £60,000 for manslaughter in the Lyme bay case.

I wish to examine briefly the present position of activity centres and the framework in which they operate. There has been a rapid growth in those wishing to participate in such activities. Local education authority centres have declined in number as more funds have been delegated to individual schools and less has been held back by authorities. Squeezes on budgets have meant that many local education authority centres have closed and commercial centres have filled the gap.

I have no intention today of exploring the philosophical or political arguments on the ownership of the centres, which is not at issue in the Bill. Whoever owns the centre, it must be operated to standards that make it safe for our children to use. At present there is no need for anyone who sets up a centre to register. Anybody can set up a centre, almost at will.

It is a curious irony that we live in a society in which, if we send our dog to a boarding kennel, we can be assured that it is registered and meets high minimum standards, yet if we send our child to an activity centre, there is no requirement on the centre to register and no legally required minimum standards. In a civilised society, consumers have the right to expect high minimum standards of quality and care, whether in old people's homes or dogs' homes or hygiene in food shops. The Bill extends the right to safety standards for our children at activity centres.

A Health and Safety Executive report was published on Tuesday this week into activity centres inspected since April 1994. The report confirmed my belief that most centres work to satisfactory or high standards and some centres, both commercial and local authority, work to excellent standards. However, in their detailed examination of 192 centres, the executive reported:

"some areas for improvement were noted and appropriate action was taken to deal with both serious and less serious concerns."

The executive also established that 76 per cent. of centres with five or more employees had a written safety policy. That means that 24 per cent. of centres did not have a written safety policy. It also stated that 87 per cent. of centres had undertaken risk assessment of the outdoor activities provided and 13 per cent. had not undertaken that risk assessment. Some 92 per cent. of centres had procedures and equipment in place to deal with emergencies, such as procedures for evacuation from, and communication with, remote locations and 8 per cent. of the centres did not have such safety procedures. It found that 84 per cent. of centres ensured that formal or informal training was provided for instructors, while 16 per cent. did not provide that training.

I wonder how many of us would fly in an aeroplane knowing that 16 per cent. of pilots had not received training and that 24 per cent. of airlines did not have a written safety policy. Yet that is the very environment of risk into which we launch our children when we send them to outdoor activity centres. In all, it is estimated that there are 3,000 such centres around Britain. There is no register—no list—so we do not know whether that figure is accurate. The Health and Safety Executive's report appears to show that about 10 per cent. of the centres work below a satisfactory safety level. That means that 300 centres do not meet the required standards and each of those centres takes hundreds, if not thousands, of children through its doors each year.

It is also estimated that 75 per cent. of children are booked into centres by their schools and the other 25 per cent. are booked in directly by their parents. We must ask: how do parents and teachers distinguish between good centres and bad centres, and how do they know when they are making their choice that they are choosing a safe centre that works to high standards?

The position for teachers, governors and parents was made more difficult by the four-point plan introduced by the former Secretary of State for Education in November 1993, in which governors were made corporately and legally liable for the safety of children from their school booked into an activity centre. The situation in grant-maintained schools is even more difficult, in that the governors are individually and corporately legally liable for the safety of children engaging in these activities. Therefore, governors have rightly said that they cannot take responsibility for matters which they are not competent to judge.

Under the Bill teachers will still have a general care of duty, in loco parentis, and nothing can take that duty of care away from them. But how does that extend to a teacher who in good faith hands over responsibility for an activity to a person who he believes is an expert instructor in that activity? That is precisely what happened at Lyme bay. The teacher handed over responsibility for the canoeing activity not knowing that one of the instructors had a qualification that an eight-year-old could have achieved in an afternoon and that the other instructor had barely more.

The Bill will be welcomed by all responsible centres, and I know that many people are concerned about these matters. Evidence in recent months to the Select Committee on Education has come in droves, and it all states the same thing. It is almost as if those providing it are working from a script. They all say that there needs to be compulsory accreditation and inspection and a framework of law to cover these centres.

It is interesting to note that much of the evidence has come from the industry and that many centres report that in the past 15 months business has fallen by up to one third because public confidence in it has been undermined. Some of them say that a huge burden of paperwork and bureaucracy has descended upon them as schools and local education authorities seeking to meet the criteria of the fourth point in the four-point plan ask for lengthy questionnaires to be completed for each trip. Sometimes an inspector from the local authority calls as well to ensure that the documentation has been correctly completed. It is rather as if each passenger who gets on a bus has to ask the driver whether he has a PSV licence and the bus has an MOT certificate.

Only by compulsory accreditation of all centres will we restore confidence in the outdoor activities industry, relieve good centres of all unnecessary bureaucracy and form-filling and ensure that teachers and parents will know which centres are working to high safety standards and which are not. At the end of the Lyme bay trial Mr. Justice Ognall said:

"The potential for injuries and death is too obvious to be left to the inadequate vagaries of self-regulation."

Hardly a parent in the country would disagree with that assertion.

I shall now outline the Bill's main provisions. It sets out to raise standards of safety for providers of facilities for adventure centres in total or part for young people under the age of 18. Centres that cater exclusively for those of 18 years or over are excluded from the Bill. The facility would have to include some form of leadership or instruction and I do not intend the Bill to cover providers of equipment such as boats on a boating lake where there is no instruction or leadership.

When the regulations are drawn after consultation it is most important that family outings and some social and voluntary groups are excluded. We shall need to take great care when drawing up regulations to ensure that the line is drawn in the correct place.

The Bill contains four main elements. First, it sets up a licensing authority which will oversee the accreditation and licensing of activity centres. In particular, centres will have to agree to follow a code of safety practice which will include the suitability of equipment and the qualifications and experience of instructors. The code of practice that is currently being finalised by the Activity Centres Advisory Committee will, I am sure, form an excellent basis for that.

Secondly, the Bill establishes an inspectorate to ensure that centres abide by the code of practice. When the inspectorate encounters activities that are causing immediate danger to children it will have powers to stop that activity at that point. If it encounters sloppy or potentially hazardous activities and practice, it could issue notices of improvement to give centres a period of time to improve standards. I hope that over time that would lift the standards of centres that are currently not operating to proper safety standards and allow them to continue trading, but, of course, to higher safety standards.

The ultimate sanction on a recalcitrant centre that continued to ignore high standards of safety and put children at risk would be the removal of its licence, after which it would be an offence for the centre to continue trading. If it did, the result could be a heavy fine or imprisonment.

Thirdly, the Bill sets up a complaints procedure for consumers or others who have reservations about the safety of activities at a particular centre. Such complaints could be followed up by competent independent inspectors. If that procedure had been in place in 1992, Joy Cawthorne, the former instructor at the St. Alban's centre, who warned the managing director that unless his safety standards improved he would have to explain one day to parents why their child was not coming home, would have had somewhere to take her complaints and a competent authoritative body could have acted on them. Had such a remedy been available we might not have needed this debate, four children might not have lost their lives and Mr. Kite could still be trading.

Fourthly, following some Government pump-priming funds the scheme should be largely self-financing with centres paying for their accreditation. I liken that to car owners who currently pay for MOT certificates.

The Bill is a piece of enabling legislation which sets out the framework for safety in outdoor centres. If it becomes law, following a period of consultation with the industry and other legitimate interests, statutory instruments will have to be laid before the House for the detailed legislation. I hope that the Minister will assure the House that if the Bill becomes law he will act without delay to ensure that the secondary legislation is introduced. I hope that that can be completed before Christmas to allow the legislation to take effect early in 1996. I ask the Minister to make it plain that he agrees with my desired timetable.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I am listening with great interest to the hon. Gentleman because, as he knows, Lyme bay is partly in my constituency. Could he expand a little on his ideas about financing? Does he accept that the fees paid by local authorities and persons may be variable? How does he see that operating? Obviously, it is important that we do not make these activities so expensive that parents cannot afford to have their children carry them out. There is considerable concern about that and, although I support the Bill, that issue needs greater explanation.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question, which has a good motivation. No one who supports the Bill wants centres to go out of business. However, in the current unregulated environment, many are going out of business because people do not have the confidence to use them. The right hon. Gentleman will understand that it would have been wrong of me to present the Bill today and try to put precise detail on a charging scheme for centres. The Bill provides for consultation with the industry and other interested parties before decisions are taken on such matters.

It is my intention to follow the ACAC's guidelines. It has already costed the voluntary programme of accreditation that the Government had in mind. It suggested a scheme that initially was pump-primed to set

[Mr. Jamieson]

up a small licensing body, which could then charge fees, at differential rates, depending on the size of the centre. We must remember that some centres are multi-million-pound organisations. They have said they would be willing to pay a small fee to become accredited so that people would have the confidence to use their centres. The hon. Gentleman will understand why, although I am telling him my thoughts, I am not putting any detail on the costings. That must be part of the consultations.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although there may be a case for differential charging based on the size and volume of a business, that must never be allowed to lead to differential standards between centres?

Mr. Jamieson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. The thrust of the Bill is that there should not be differential standards at centres. They must all follow high standards of safety for children. However, we must not financially penalise small centres or people who want to set up small organisations to the extent that we put them off. When we reach the secondary stage of the legislation, we must carefully consider that point to ensure that those who want to come into the industry and start a small business can do so.

In drawing up the Bill, I was anxious to ensure that it covered only aspects of safety for children. It does not cover other aspects such as hotel arrangements and other general provisions at centres. Those are matters on which sensible teachers and parents can make decisions. If a teacher or parent who visits a centre before the proposed holiday does not like the look of the hotel arrangements or the cleanliness of the premises, he can quite properly make a decision about that, acting as a sensible adult. However, what a teacher or parent cannot sensibly do when he arrives at the centre is to make an assessment of whether the instructors are competent to carry out the activities and whether the equipment is suitable for the task.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): As a fellow Plymouth Member, I greatly support the Bill. I can recall what the hon. Gentleman referred to as the sense of shock and trauma in Plymouth when the tragedy occurred. I commend him for the way in which he has introduced the Bill, which is a balanced and sensible response to what was obviously a gaping hole in our law. He has my entire support.

Mr. Jamieson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support.

I make no apology for having been deeply critical of the Government over the past 22 months for not taking action in this important matter. The campaign for a change in the law has been a long, hard fight with many harrowing experiences on the way for the bereaved parents, especially the three-week trial of those accused of the manslaughter of their children.

It is difficult for an Opposition Back Bencher to get a Government to change their mind. Therefore, I come here today in some humility to welcome the Government's recent change of heart. I thank the Minister for his co-operation and the guidance that I have received from his Department in recent days. I also thank him for making a statement on Tuesday not only showing his support for the Bill, but positively welcoming it. I hope that we can work together in the coming months to get the Bill through Parliament to Royal Assent and then, as urgently as is prudent, to get the statutory instruments through the House.

I am also grateful for the support of many other hon. Members who have encouraged and assisted me, in particular the hon. Members for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) and for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks), both of whom share my concerns. I am also grateful to many of the teaching unions, in particular the National Union of Teachers and its leader Doug McAvoy and his staff. They have worked behind the scenes talking to teachers and others.

The hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East may not know this, but Doug McAvoy and I went abseiling at Kit Hill in his constituency last year. I leave him to surmise why it was me who went down the rope while Doug stood by and watched.

If the Bill reaches the statute book, it will be a fine testimony to the many who have campiagned for it, in particular the bereaved parents who lost their children in Lyme bay and who have selflessly turned their grief into action—not for their children, but for other people's children. Their courageous determination has inspired me and, I am sure, many others who have a cause in which they fervently believe, that, through people power, Governments can be moved.

Most of all, if the Bill becomes law the names of those young people who died at Lyme Bay—Rachel, Simon, Claire and Dean—will be engraved upon it.

The House is perceived to be at its worst when we appear to be in constant disagreement. The Bill is an opportunity for it to be seen at its very best—putting aside the usual differences on a matter that transcends the party political divide: the safety of children.

10.7 am

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): I pay the warmest of tributes to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson). He has been at the forefront of the campaign, and it has been his determination and his will that something could, should and must be done which have brought us to this point today.

My interest lies in the fact that the St. Alban's centre is in my constituency. On that tragic day I shared the thoughts and feelings of so many people—how could it possibly have happened? Everything that has followed, including the trial, has emphasised more and more the need for positive action to be taken, and such action not to be left to a self-regulatory body but to be imposed upon centres so that they have no choice.

The ACAC's report clearly shows that there is no way forward other than by statutory legislation, and I accept that. However, it is important that we bear it in mind that any such control must relate, first and foremost, to the training and the capability of staff. We certainly should not—and here I look to my hon. Friend the Minister—over-legislate or write out what I would term the "acceptable risk". There is such a thing as acceptable risk. If we take it away from young people, they will say, "I don't want to do this; I'd rather stay at home playing a video game than go to a so-called activity centre only to be cossetted and mollycoddled." Can we bear in mind, therefore, the need to legislate but not to over-legislate?

The Lyme bay tragedy illustrates only too clearly the opposite ends of what is acceptable. On the day of the accident, two groups of young people were involved in waterborne training in the Lyme bay area—one group at the "so-called" St. Alban's challenge and activity centre.

I feel a slight sense of guilt over this matter. Of course, I knew about the St. Alban's centre and its general role, but I had always seen it as a residential centre. I had not been told or informed in any way that it was moving into this wider field of activity. Had I known about that, because of my background, I would have visited the centre and taken an interest. I would not say that I could have avoided problems, but I would certainly have looked at the centre with a keen eye, knowing what should and could happen in such a place.

All hon. Members know what happened at the St. Alban's centre on that day. Just down the road on the Cob at Lyme Regis, an adventure, training and education centre was still open, although sadly it has now closed. It was run by Dorset county council. Two groups of youngsters, those at the centres at St. Alban's and at the Cob, were involved in waterborne activity on that day.

The Cob centre was run by totally competent staff. On that morning, the manager did not allow the youngsters to go outside the harbour. Capsize drill in the harbour was the only activity undertaken. That was because the manager had looked out, was a local person, knew the sea conditions and had been properly trained. He looked after the children who were in his charge, as he had done for the last 25 years.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Could the hon. Member advise us whether the centre is still open and who managed and ran it?

Sir Jim Spicer: As I said, sadly, the county council has closed the centre. That is a tragedy. The centre should still be open. One of the reasons for the closure is that Lyme bay and all activity centres have seen a downturn in usage. The influence brought to bear to keep that centre open might have worked, had it not been for the fact that so much bad publicity surrounds activity centres in general. Any centres associated with Lyme Regis, however, will have an uphill battle in restoring the confidence of schools and individuals. That is sadly the case.

The problem was the difference between the way in which the two centres were run. That highlights the need for action to be taken and the need for action by the Government.

I was driving from London to my constituency listening to the radio and I heard this remark by Mrs. Langley:

"My daughter Claire will not have died in vain if ways can be found of stopping such a tragedy ever occurring again".

As Mrs. Langley and the other parents are in the Gallery, it would be right to say that those words would be echoed by all parents and by every hon. Member in the House.

The hon. Member for Devonport made it clear that he wanted the legislation to move ahead quickly. I hope and expect that, when he comes to reply, my hon. Friend the Minister will stress that fact. Let us be clear that, as from today, no centre in the country can neglect the measures that they know will be imposed on them shortly. As from today, any centre that has not already set in train all the measures that are outlined in the Bill and that will follow in the next two or three months, can take it for granted that they are out of business. A warning should go out to all centres that, as from today, they cannot afford to ignore the need for safety allied with qualifications.

On what happened in Lyme bay on that day, I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has already received the file on the coastguards and on the investigation that followed. I have an assurance from him that he will consider closely the internal coastguard investigation and the evidence at the trial.

All my points are made with hindsight and always with the thought, "If only". On that day and every day, we have around our coastline harbourmasters who are capable and competent of playing a part when waterborne activity takes place at sea. If there were a requirement for any group of young people, or anyone in charge of a group of young people, to book in with the harbourmaster and to say, "We are going to do X today," two things could happen. First, the harbourmaster could say, "In my view and with my local knowledge, you can do that, but make sure that you telephone back to me the moment your exercise is completed"; or he could say, as could have occurred on the day of the tragedy, "I do not think it is a right and proper for you to engage in that activity today. My advice is don't do it."

I hope that we will make better use of harbourmasters' skills because they are on the spot. Those in Lyme bay have far more local knowledge than the coastguards, who are based at Portland—far removed from the scene. If the harbourmaster had known, much could have been different.

The world is full of "if onlys", but all hon. Members and everyone in the country will applaud the Bill and will be delighted that the Government have seen fit to endorse it. We hope that it will be on the statute book in short order.

10.17 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer). I am sure that his comments, and those that many other hon. Members will make today, will be warmly appreciated and accepted by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on his luck in the ballot, and on his choice of subject for his Bill. My hon. Friend referred to the shambles that often exists in the Chamber. We know what our constituents feel about that. Thankfully, this is one of the good days for Parliament. It is a pity that there are not more good days, when Bills, such as those that my hon. Friend and, indeed, Conservative Members introduce, have the cross-party support that I am sure exists today.

I offer the deepest sympathy, not only to the parents of the four young people who died in the canoeing accident, but to all the people who suffered in the tragedy. Their lives have been spared, but we all know that the suffering caused by that event will long continue. One often hears of accidents and loss of life. One often asks what one could have done to avoid such occurrences. In this case, clear evidence exists that standards and the lack of positive supervision were a major factor. I am sure that my hon. Friend's proposals will be strongly supported by parents and all those involved with activity centres.

[Mr. Tom Cox]

I have here a copy of Wednesday's *Daily Express* which contains the headline

"One in 10 activity centres still a risk".

The article states:

"The new report, by the Government's Health and Safety Executive, found that 8 per cent. of outdoor centres have no plans for dealing with emergencies."

It continues:

"Criticising the delay in introducing controls, he"—

Mr. Denis Walker, whose daughter Rachel was killed in the tragedy—

"said: 'I find it unbelievable that the Government has waited 22 months to act.'"

This press comment reveals that problems still exist. I do not wish to make this a party political issue as it is far too serious for that but I wonder whether the Government would really have acted if my hon. Friend had not introduced the Bill. Twenty-two months is a very long time for no action to be taken, which is why it is so important that my hon. Friend's Bill is supported not only today but in Committee.

The press report makes it clear that, after tragedies of various kinds, it can take an enormous length of time to get the relevant authorities to take meaningful action that will save lives and avoid any recurrence of such events.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): I am following closely what the hon. Gentleman says and, like all hon. Members, I was moved and impressed by the way in which the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) presented his Bill, which I am sure we shall all support. The hon. Gentleman speaks of the need for speedy action but I advise an element of caution, having some years ago been involved in a knee-jerk reaction on the issue of playground safety.

There are times when, as it were, the best can be the enemy of the good. The important thing is that we know that we cannot live in a risk-free world and that what we are trying to establish is a minimum standard to ensure that such tragedies do not occur. The widest consultation will be essential to ensure that we increase the activities available and do not reduce them by hasty over-reaction and the introduction of instant bureaucracy to solve a crisis that does not exist everywhere.

Mr. Cox: That is a fair point but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Devonport said, there are some very well run activity centres and it is their standards that we seek to establish everywhere. There are already superb guidelines.

Young people can be extremely keen and full of enthusiasm. Our experience with our own children tells us that they often have no fear or fail to see potential dangers. As my hon. Friend said, it is important that parents, teachers and youth workers are aware of that fact and know that there are clear guidelines on safety and supervision at all activity centres.

The Minister has yet to speak but I hope that he will give a commitment that the Government will support my hon. Friend's Bill. It is in Committee that matters of genuine concern can be ironed out and I hope that that will be so in this case but what concerns me in this instance is the phrase "in principle". We know that it can mean anything to the Government of the day. Anyone can say that he supports the Bill "in principle", but we need the Minister to say what that really means.

Since I have been a Member of Parliament I have heard several comments such as, "Yes, it is a good idea and we shall support it but someone else must do it and take the responsibility"; "Yes, these proposals are needed, but we must not force them on authorities"; or, "Oh yes, it is an excellent idea but we must consider the costs involved." We hear such things all the time, from Government's of all parties.

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr. Eric Forth): Perhaps I could save the hon. Gentleman's time and that of the House by drawing attention to clause 1, which states:

"The Secretary of State shall by order designate a person . . . to exercise such functions as may be prescribed by regulations relating to the licensing of persons providing facilities for adventure activities."

That could not be clearer. So that the hon. Gentleman does not get hung up on the phrase "in principle", I repeat what I have said outside and foreshadow what I hope to say later—the Government support the Bill. If we support the Bill and the Bill contains such a notion, there can be no doubt about what will happen.

Mr. Cox: I am delighted, and hope that that clear commitment is imprinted on hon. Members' minds, but I must point out that another measure—the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill—was also supported by hon. Members of all parties, and we all know what happened to that. However, I heard what the Minister said and will listen with interest to his forthcoming speech.

Mr. O'Hara: Further to my hon. Friend's point about the phrase "in principle" and any safeguard that it may offer, has he read clause 1(4), which states:

"In exercising their functions under regulations made under this section the licensing authority shall have regard to any guidance given to them from time to time by the Secretary of State"?

Should it not be made clear that that would in no way compromise the independence of the person charged with carrying out the functions outlined in the first line of the long title of the Bill?

Mr. Cox: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, but we shall have to wait for the Minister's comments and until the Bill reaches Committee where, as we know, the nuts and bolts will be sorted out. I am sure that my hon. Friend's point will be examined at that stage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devonport said that we may well get complaints from activity centres once the Bill has been passed. They might say that too much pressure is being placed on them or that the costs involved are too great but if any activity centre does not support the principle of the Bill it should not be in business. It is as simple as that. I am sure that hon. Members, parents and those who work with young people would warmly welcome the demise of any such organisation.

I may well be the only London Opposition Member to speak in this debate so I must stress that activity centres are of great benefit to young people living in London. Many young Londoners visit the centres to enjoy a wide range of facilities and that is to be welcomed. I am sure that hon. Members who represent constituencies in other large cities would make the same comment. The centres are, however, often a long way from the areas where the

young people live and go to school. The Bill is important in dealing with the problem of the distances involved. It is often impossible for teachers to make visits to the centres to convince themselves and, in turn, to convince the youngsters' parents of their safety. Teachers cannot say, "I have been to see the centre. It is good, it is in pleasant surroundings, the equipment is superb and the supervision is superb. I am happy to take your youngsters there." That is why there must be tougher standards for the centres.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devonport touched on this next point. We know that many centres have in recent years been run by local authorities. I am sure that we welcome that. There has, however, been a change in policy and many centres are now commercially run. Local authority and Government involvement has diminished in many aspects of life. Sadly, the previous standards no longer exist.

One of the largest hospitals in south London is in my area. I can come to the House to put questions to Ministers about standards at the hospital. I am now told, "The hospital is nothing to do with me. The hon. Gentleman should take the matter up with the hospital trust." That is a weakness. I am not prepared to accept voluntary codes of conduct; they are just not good enough for the safety of young people.

The Bill may not meet the wishes of some people who operate activity centres; that is too bad. As the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) pointed out, we are dealing with the safety of young people. It is our duty as Members of Parliament to ensure that suitable legislation is passed. Governments have the power to introduce legislation over night, if they wish to. Those of us who have been in the House a while have often seen that when, sadly, something has gone wrong, legislation is introduced over night which seeks to overcome the weakness identified. That is why I am somewhat concerned to hear that it may be another 12 months before the legislation comes into force.

Money is involved in all legislation. I hope that the Minister will outline how local authorities should deal with the legislation. We assume that local authorities will be the local watchdogs on standards at local activity centres. We know that organisation will be needed. Few local authorities have spare cash. In view of the importance of the proposals, local authorities should not be requested to have in place someone whose job it is to check standards and supervision without being given sufficient money. The supervision of residential homes for the elderly, for example, sometimes leaves a great deal to be desired. That is my concern about this Bill.

Mr. Forth: Again, I shall spare the hon. Gentleman his obvious misery and discomfort. With the permission of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), may I say that I think that I understand the way in which the Bill is intended to work. We must not presume that local authorities will have the responsibility for enforcing standards. As the hon. Member for Devonport said, we shall have consultation. We want to study the question of who should have that responsibility.

As the hon. Member for Devonport also made clear, the intention is to make the system self-financing. I hope that the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) will not worry excessively about additional burdens or additional financial burdens on local authorities. We have not settled matters; that is precisely why there will be extensive consultation. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not prejudge the matter.

Mr. Cox: I have followed the Minister's point with interest. He says that the system will be self-financing—okay. I hope that it will not push up charges—

Mr. Forth: It may do.

Mr. Cox: The Minister says that it may do. That may mean that, sadly, the very people whom we would wish to use the centres will not, for a range of reasons, be able to do so. We have the right to consider that point. The Minister made an interesting intervention; all of us will follow his further comments with great interest. He says that the system will be, in the main, self-financing. Presumably, a lot of additional responsibility will be put on the centres. Supervisors will need to be trained and that is—

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Costly.

Mr. Cox: Yes, it is costly. Trained people are entitled to expect a reasonable salary for their work, their training and their responsibilities. Charges could be substantially higher. I shall follow that matter with great interest.

I realise that this is a crucial debate. I realise that some hon. Members were, sadly, deeply involved in the tragedy in the west country. I welcome the Bill, but I believe that, as with all Bills, hon. Members who welcome legislation have a right to put questions on matters about which they are concerned. That is our duty. I remember that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland)—I will not get too involved with this matter—made that point during the passage of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

I fully support the Bill, but I point out to the Minister and to my hon. Friend the Member for Devonport, who will pilot the Bill through Committee, that there are things that we need to be told now. We cannot wait until the Bill becomes law because all the problems may then start to come to the fore. Things may happen that we never thought would happen.

I wish the Bill a speedy passage through the House. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides support it. Even more importantly, people outside, especially those with children, support it.

10.37 am

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I join colleagues on both sides of the House in welcoming the Bill. It has support from both sides and we all wish it to be speedily enacted into effective legislation. That is especially true of those who, like me and the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), come from the south-west of England and who have been especially affected by the tragedy that helped to create the impetus for the Bill.

The hon. Member for Devonport may be surprised to see me speaking in support of the Bill. The Bill provides for increased regulation and the hon. Gentleman would normally expect me to oppose such a Bill, as I normally look for less regulation from this place rather than more. On this matter, however, the hon. Gentleman has convinced hon. Members on both sides that the existing code of practice applied, especially by schools, in overseeing standards in activity centres is not sufficient.

[Mr. Michael Stern]

Indeed, I shall refer later to comments made by one of my local schools on that very subject. However, the hon. Gentleman has certainly made a case for the need for statutory regulation of some form and I congratulate him on doing so.

Like the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), I shall make a number of detailed comments on the Bill. The hon. Member for Devonport has rightly and sensibly drafted his Bill so that much of the detail will be provided in regulations. Clearly, we are dealing with many different activities, set up in many ways in different parts of the country and we must ensure that the regulations eventually passed by the licensing authority, which have the force of law, can be applied to a wide variety of circumstances.

I hope that in a number of areas, which I shall detail, the hon. Gentleman will ensure that he gets some idea from the Minister in Committee of the way in which the Government believe that the regulations should be drafted and applied. It is easy for too much to be left to subsequent regulation without the principles at least being defined in Committee. The hon. Gentleman will need to pin the Government down on those regulations; until the Minister is

"pinned and wriggling on the wall"

in Committee, the hon. Gentleman should not be satisfied that he has got the Bill that he wants.

The hon. Gentleman will have to be careful to ensure in several detailed areas that he gets what he wants. In the Bill there is a lack of definition of providers of facilities. We all know, from accidents that have occurred, what we think of as activity centres, but, in fact, the term can be used in a much wider context than special residential centres designed to provide a wide range of facilities.

I shall give the hon. Gentleman an example of that range of facilities. In that example, and in others to follow, it will be apparent that my limited experience in the area is at least partly based on my involvement many years ago in climbing. Indeed, I am still involved in mountain walking. It certainly used to be the case that a climbing party, of whatever age, which hired its equipment, would take a great deal of advice and assistance from the climbing shop. It would often organise a day's climbing on the advice of the specialist in the climbing shop on such matters as the equipment required.

As I interpret the thrust of the Bill, that shop would not be considered as a centre. However, the hon. Gentleman may explore in Committee the possibility that some subsidiary levels of regulation may be necessary for those who give specialist advice to schools and teachers who are organising parties of young people, especially for climbing and other mountain activities. Mountains are no strangers to accidents involving young people, whether supervised or not. We need to establish the extent to which the Bill should cover that area in detail.

In clause 1(2)(b), the hon. Gentleman defines the facilities to be covered as those which

"include some element of, instruction or leadership."

I hope that he will define that further to ensure that activities include some element of instruction and leadership.

Again, in climbing, only a few years ago it became necessary for teachers leading parties in mountains to have a mountain leadership certificate. Previously, parties were taken out, often with the best of motives and entirely safely, by wholly unqualified leaders and often on the basis that the party relied on common sense rather than an element of leadership. When an activity requires leadership, I hope that the regulations in the Bill cover it regardless of the existence of leadership at the time.

Clause 1(3)(f) has already been referred to in a little detail in the debate. However, it is important to consider the levels charged for licences because the licensing authority may deem it entirely appropriate to charge a different level for a large, organised activity centre, which caters for a substantial number of parties from schools from all over the country, to that charged a small centre which takes only three or four people at a time and provides a limited range of activities, often involving only limited danger.

I am thinking especially of centres which provide facilities for adults and for young people. There are many such centres. The hon. Gentleman will need to explore in Committee whether the same fee should be applicable to centres which are exclusively for young people and centres that may take young people almost by chance. For example, a number of activity centres in the home counties, designed exclusively for rock climbing training, take adults and young people. The majority of people on those courses at any time is more likely to comprise adults, but people under 18 may well be included. There will need to be differential fees.

I hope that the regulations in clause 1(3)(h) which cover

"the investigation by the licensing authority for complaints concerning licence-holders;"

will be explored in Committee and, most important—I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on including it—the provision in paragraph (k) of

"the bringing of appeals to the Secretary of State against such decisions of the licensing authority".

We are dealing with an area in which there is frequently a difference of opinion. Reference was made earlier to abseiling. The hon. Gentleman may be aware that there have been considerable advances and considerable differences of opinion among climbers in recent years on the extent to which particular types of equipment are appropriate and are applicable to types of abseiling. Those differences can often be crucial.

I remember being on a climbing course in the Alps when we were using very simple abseiling equipment. But, in a moment's inattention, combined with a gust of wind and an especially difficult ice face down which a friend was abseiling, the abseiling rope turned in seconds into a garrotte. Only the frantic efforts of those near the climber saved my friend from serious injury.

Differences of opinion will be drawn to the attention of the licensing authority and since it will be staffed by specialists in particular sports and in particular aspects of safety, there will always be differences of opinions, for which an outside body may be needed for the right of appeal. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on ensuring that that outside body is involved from the start.

The date of the commencement of the Act has already been referred to. Like the hon. Member for Tooting I am sorry that the Act cannot be introduced more quickly than

the hon. Member for Devonport has provided for. His time limits are sensible. They are not even unnecessarily lenient. However, if the hon. Member can press the Minister in Committee about the content of some of the regulations which will eventually be laid under the Act, I hope that he will be able to publicise that detail sufficiently to enable activity centres to apply those standards in advance. I want to see as much as possible of what will eventually be provided under the Act available this summer and not next, and available this winter and not next.

Mr. Jamieson: The Activity Centres Advisory Committee has almost completed its work and it has now drawn up a code of practice for centres. I believe that that code of practice should form the core of what the activity centres have to agree to. That code is in place. If my Bill becomes law, activity centres will know that the code will be legally obligatory for them in 12 months, time rather than voluntary.

Mr. Stern: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention, which was most helpful. I hope that what is said in our debate today, and what is said in Committee, will encourage the advisory committee to tell activity centres, "Look, this is what is likely to be the law: apply it now. Don't wait for it to become law." If that were to happen, I should be delighted.

I return to my opening point: the burden which, under the existing code of conduct, has been placed on schools and staff to enforce standards for their pupils which may well be inappropriate for the school or the education authority—not all education authorities have experts available to them in respect of all forms of outdoor activity—to impose. That code is to be replaced—unusually for me, I welcome that—by legal regulations.

I represent a city constituency and an area where school staff are particularly reliant on outside advice in terms of the activities in which pupils are engaged. With the indulgence of the hon. Member for Devonport, I want to quote from a letter that I have received from Henbury school in my constituency:

"Staff, even those with great expertise, have great difficulty assessing the quality of the many centres throughout Britain and find that much information published by individual centres is confusing or inaccurate.

When involved in the organisation of a new course, we have to write to the centre and obtain assurances from the centre about the residential accommodation, the equipment and the qualifications of the staff. Although the centre can give their current details, they cannot guarantee that they will not have staff changes in the average 14 months that elapses between organisation and actually visiting the centre. Many teachers do not have the training to interpret the reply received from the centre, eg whether a T.I.(B.C.U.) is a sufficiently high qualification for a group of 8 pupils on Grade 2 Water for Canoeing. (It isn't!)

A centre may be suitable for a trip one year but lose the qualified staff and become unsuitable the next. However, the responsibility for the trip is at present on the school and the teachers taking it."

I congratulate the hon. Member for Devonport on introducing a Bill that will relieve that school and many others from the heavy responsibility they currently carry and which they are probably not capable of carrying.

10.53 am

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I desire not only to congratulate the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on coming first in the ballot—

Mr. Jamieson: Second.

Mr. Campbell: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. I congratulate him on coming second in the ballot and on the most measured and informed way in which he introduced his Bill. If I may respectfully say so, it was a model of how a Second Reading debate should be introduced in a case of this kind.

Some hon. Members have already mentioned—I would like to take this opportunity to mention it again—the fact that, in the activities that we are considering, there can never be a total elimination of risk. It is the risk itself that is often the element that provides the challenge for young people. If we chose to, we could wrap our children in cotton wool and expose them to no risks, or to as few risks as we could possibly imagine. However, for many young people, the opportunity to take part in outdoor activities provides a welcome challenge, which often assists them in the development of their personalities and, out of achievement, gives them a far greater sense of their own abilities and, in a sense, of their own dignity.

My interest in these matters springs from my former membership of the United Kingdom Sports Council and of the Scottish Sports Council, in the course of which I had a very tenuous responsibility for such outdoor centres run by the sports councils as Glenmore lodge in Scotland and Plas-y-Brenin in Wales. Those two centres are interesting examples to cite in this debate because they are illustrations of the highest possible standards of equipment, training and tuition.

While I do not for a moment suggest that all centres for outdoor activity should meet the high standards that those two centres have demonstrated over a long period, those centres show that, in the furtherance of outdoor activities and facilities for adventure activities, it is important to realise that the standards of equipment and of training and supervision are extremely important. However, we cannot escape the conclusion that, if we are to lay down standards about the quality of equipment and training and hence the ratio of supervision, that will have financial consequences, which may substantial.

All hon. Members would regret it if, as a consequence of what the Bill quite sensibly proposes, access to the opportunity for adventure activities for young people was inhibited. This is not the occasion to discuss the way in which that access can be maintained. However, I believe that investment in the opportunity for such outdoor activity is extremely important.

If hon. Members had ever, as I have, seen the look on the face of someone from a city who, in normal life, would probably not have the energy or will to walk from one end of a street to another but who, by means of cajoling, bullying and, perhaps at the very end, pushing, one had managed to get to the top of a mountain of more than 3,000 ft in Scotland, they would have seen on the face of that person a sense of personal achievement. If they had heard the way he had boasted about it afterwards, it would be clear to anyone with a connection with that activity that one can do a remarkable amount for the sense of achievement and for the personality development of young people.

[Mr. Campbell]

If, as a consequence of this highly desirable measure, we have to find funds to ensure that people who would otherwise be debarred from these activities can participate in them, that is a cause with which I would wish to be associated and which I believe deserves the support of the whole House as much as the Bill deserves our support.

Clause 1(2) refers to certain exceptions. The hon. Member for Devonport referred to them when he introduced the Bill, but he did not explain the reasoning behind them. For example,

"facilities for adventure activities . . . does not include—

(a) facilities which are provided exclusively for persons who have attained the age of 18".

I understand the hon. Gentleman's thrust to deal with the position of children. However, a poorly run adventure activities facility open only to people above the age of 18 could put those people at great risk. Perhaps there has been an exchange between the hon. Gentleman and the Minister of which I know not, and indeed, could not know, but there is a question which, if the hon. Gentleman catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he might answer.

I have always inclined to the view that, even when public opinion presses, it is important that consideration is given and time is taken before legislation is introduced. I say that as one who, in a professional capacity, has had to wrestle with what apparently was the expressed intention of Parliament in a statute, but which, even to a legal mind, has proved to be somewhat ambiguous or even difficult to understand.

We can think of many examples of legislation, hastily introduced in response to legitimate public opinion, which has subsequently proved to be inadequate, to have inherent ambiguities, or indeed, to be unable to meet the very mischief with which it was designed to deal. We still have the legitimate support of public opinion for a measure such as this. We know also that the measure has had the benefit of exchanges between the hon. Gentleman and the Government, that consultation has already taken place and that more is to be instituted.

On that basis, it is highly desirable legislation, which has been introduced in a measured and considered way and which carries public opinion with it. It deserves the support of the whole House. From the speeches that we have heard, I deduce that it is bound to receive it.

11.1 am

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on his success in the ballot. His choice of subject is most appropriate and timely, given his involvement as a constituency Member in the events that followed the tragic accident in Lyme bay a couple of years ago. As the hon. Gentleman's parliamentary neighbour, and one who shares the same media, I pay tribute to the restrained, responsible and objective manner in which not only he but the parents of those who lost their lives, and all those associated with the Southway school have conducted themselves since the tragedy. It has been an object lesson in how to campaign for a certain set of measures in a tenacious but constructive way. No doubt that process was frustrating at times.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) mentioned his reservation not about the Bill but about too-hasty action in response to public pressure. There is great validity in his argument. When he made it, I said, "The Dangerous Dogs Act." We must not allow ourselves to fall into that trap. On this occasion, I do not think that we are.

I say to those who have borne frustration and annoyance at times that, provided that we get it right, the Bill is what is required of us today. Provided that we get it right, the most pertinent tribute that the House could pay to those who lost their lives would be putting on the statute book the necessary provisions to at least minimise the chances of such a tragedy recurring.

One reason why the Bill commends support is that, at the time of the tragedy, we all knew in our heart of hearts that it could have been our children, the children of relatives or the children of friends who were so tragically affected. After all, they were involved in a normal school activity, an outward bound adventure activity—something that is repeated every day by schools throughout the United Kingdom.

Given the experience of that occasion, we owe it to all pupils to prove that the House of Commons is prepared to provide the necessary support and security in future. Of course we cannot totally eliminate risk, nor would it be desirable to try to do so. The element of challenge attracts young people to participate in such activities in the first place, and rightly so. It is part of the growing-up experience. It provides opportunities to participate that people would not normally have.

As a sponsor of the Bill, I shall make a couple of general points and one specific point. One or two people have said to me that they are somewhat surprised that a Government who have opted for deregulation in recent years should now support the Bill. My response to that is that we are dealing with young people, schools, local education authorities and so on. We wish to encourage parents to allow their children to participate in that way. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to provide the statutory support when required. I do not believe that a voluntary system would work.

I am always reminded of the comparison that I noted when I first moved to my constituency in 1970. My daughter was then six, and she went to the village primary school. After a couple of months, I said to the head teacher, "You don't have a parent-teacher association here." He said, "No, I don't need one. I can always raise the necessary additional funds and so on by direct means. One of the disadvantages of a parent-teacher association is that you see only the parents of the children whom there is no need to see and you never see the parents of the children whom you would most like to see." That argument applies to these circumstances. Of course responsible establishments would sign up readily, but the more dubious ones might be reluctant to be forthcoming.

Like the hon. Member for Devonport, I wish to draw attention to the recent report of the Health and Safety Executive. I appreciate that it was damaging in respect of a minority of cases. A minority do not meet the required standards. As has been said, hon. Members are always tempted to respond too quickly on the basis of the particular rather than the generality. In this case, which involves young people, the circumstances justify the need for a positive response from the House.

My specific point relates to adventure centres, outdoor centres or activity centres—call them what we will—which provide for all ages and for a variety of functions. The hon. Member for Devonport knows that my

constituency contains the Lanlivery field studies centre, a residential centre providing outdoor activities for handicapped people. It is a first-class, well-run centre, which provides excellent facilities. Courses there vary considerably, from ones which people of my generation might describe as a geographical field trip, to music courses.

The centre also provides for adventure and recreation, such as climbing on Bodmin moor and sailing on the River Fowey. How will the provisions contained in the Bill affect well-run centres such as Lanlivery? I am not questioning the standards of the Lanlivery field studies centre, but how will it fit into the provisions in the Bill?

As one of the sponsors of the Bill, I whole-heartedly support the provisions contained in it. I know that, in due course, we shall obtain a positive response from my hon. Friend the Minister.

11.10 am

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): I am aware that many hon. Members want to speak in the debate, and I am conscious of the pressure of time. I shall try to be the model of brevity in the comments which I shall make. Much of what has been said has been self-evidently true, and has been supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

As the Opposition spokesman and as a sponsor of the Bill, I must say that this is a time for both congratulation and sad reflection. It is welcome news that the Government are meeting the demands of parents, teachers and the general population. We must consider, however, that we have wasted many years, and that a whole succession of Governments—Labour and Conservative—have failed to act on the matter.

From the tragedy in the Cairngorms 24 years ago through the loss of four boys at Land's End to the tragic loss of the children at Lyme bay which brought about the Bill today—not forgetting the other four children who died in the same year in outdoor pursuits—young lives have been needlessly and thoughtlessly lost for years, while the most basic measures would have prevented most of those untimely deaths.

Mr. Steen: Does the hon. Gentleman have any statistics or figures—I have not been able find any—showing how many fatalities there have been in the past 20 years in activity centres? I know that there have been accidents, but am I right in thinking that fatalities have been virtually confined to the regrettable Lyme bay disaster?

Mr. Kilfoyle: That is certainly not true, but as far I can ascertain no statistics have been collated in this area, and we need to address that. I can recall the Cairngorms tragedy, and there was a incident in the Alps some 10 or 12 years ago when children were lost. Children's lives have without doubt been needlessly lost, and the Minister can perhaps tell us later how we can find the statistics.

Mr. O'Hara: Does my hon. Friend agree that we should not confine ourselves to considering fatalities? Should not we be equally concerned about the unacceptable risk of serious accident—a child may be maimed for life, for example—in activity centres?

Mr. Kilfoyle: It is certainly true that we must address the question of injuries—both serious and relatively minor—but it is a sad fact of life that it is a fatality which grabs the public's attention.

May I echo the sentiments that have been expressed from both sides of the Chamber regarding the credit that must be given to my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson)? He has conducted a long, persistent and dignified campaign on behalf of the families who were caught up in the Lyme bay tragedy. He has acted on behalf of all youngsters who attend activity centres, and his industry and compassion have been creditable. All of us—not just as Members, but as parents—appreciate very much the work that has led to the Bill coming before Parliament today.

The result of that work is a short enabling Bill of six clauses. The Opposition welcome the Bill, but with some reservations. We are particularly concerned about the lack of clarity concerning instructors' individual qualifications, as opposed to those of the centre. We are concerned also about the scope of the Bill concerning centres which can be perhaps defined as field study centres. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) commented on centres for those who are over 18, but are still in full-time educational institutions. It is a fine distinction for a teacher who is organising a sixth form trip to check up on whether people are 18 or 19. The teacher would do it, but it complicates—perhaps unnecessarily—the task of the organiser of a trip.

I appreciate that these matters are still to be explored and refined, but it is important to note that there are dangers therein. While there is no need to nanny people or introduce over-zealous regulation, we believe that there is still a responsibility on the Government to ensure the fullest protection for all our young people. Attempts in the past to regulate through the Activity Centres Advisory Committee and the British Activity Holiday Association were not successful. The latter, which was formed in 1986 and represents private operators, inspected the St Alban's centre from where the ill-fated canoe trip on Lyme bay originated.

That centre is only one of approximately 3,000 such centres operating in this country. One of the first major difficulties which my hon. Friend the Member for Devonport encountered in trying to organise the research behind the Bill was to ascertain exactly how many centres there were. That should be one of the first objectives to be set in drawing up the legislation of the centres.

I say that there are approximately 3,000 centres, because all attempts to count them have failed and the figures are constantly changing. That is particularly the case with regard to local education authority centres. A Sports Council survey found that, between the Education Reform Acts of 1988 and 1994, nearly 12 per cent. of LEA centres had closed, while another 22 per cent. were under serious threat. I am fortunate that my local LEA has a fine, well-equipped centre in north Wales. Nevertheless, that centre is—like many others—under threat.

A consequence of that is that the slack in provision is increasingly being taken up by the private sector, especially since—quite rightly and understandably—the

[Mr. Kilfoyle]

national curriculum encouraged outdoor activity. Ironically, in doing so, the national curriculum stressed that safety features should be maintained.

Centres are subject to the Health and Safety Executive and relevant legislation, but, given the reduction in the number of Health and Safety Executive inspectors and the limitations of their remit, it has clearly been the case for many years that their function has been insufficient for the proper inspection of outdoor activity centres. Meanwhile, the responsibilities of LEAs, governors and teachers remain. However, there are too many gaps in their legal position to provide effective monitoring where it really matters—at the activity centres themselves and with those people who are directly charged with youngsters' safety.

One matter which the Minister may be able to clarify is that governors of grant-maintained schools are particularly vulnerable in law. Whereas governors of county schools are personally liable in extremis, the governors of grant-maintained schools do not have the financial support of a local authority behind them. Will the Minister enlighten me at some point—not necessarily this morning—as it seems peculiar that a governor of a grant-maintained school should be more exposed than a governor in the county sector? It has been suggested that that is the case.

It is gratifying that we have reached the stage of considering a Bill in the House. The Opposition have maintained that to ensure effective safety in activity centres five requirements must be fulfilled. A licensing authority must be created, with registration of centres. Conditions must be clearly set out for the granting of such licences. Acceptable standards of premises, equipment and management must be laid down. Staff must be properly qualified. Regular and thorough inspections must be made. Today's Bill is a major step in that direction, but we must recognise that time is of the essence in following up the Bill with the necessary secondary legislation. That should enable centres to meet the prescribed higher standards where those standards do not currently obtain.

I cannot conclude without referring to some comments made by the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) which confused me greatly. He spoke about the mountain leadership certificate. Whether he was confused or I am confused, I know not.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East referred to the Plas-y-Brenin centre in north Wales. I attended a residential course at that centre 24 years ago when I was obviously younger and certainly much slimmer.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): How long ago?

Mr. Kilfoyle: My memory fails me on that point. I remember going to the centre on a residential course to obtain the mountain leadership certificate. I went under the aegis of Christ college, which the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) was later to represent.

I remember the thoroughness with which the Central Council of Physical Recreation ran the centre and the effectiveness with which the instructors ran the course. It was not just a matter of taking that particular course. We went on an introductory course then went away and filled in our log books for a couple of years with the various activities that we led. Then we went back for our assessment. While we were there, we followed not only the basic rules of safety in the mountains but fundamental rules on checking equipment, the type of equipment that should be used, how a party should be organised and all the safety precautions that should be taken. The training was very effective.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East said that we could not expect every centre to attain tomorrow the same very high standards. While I appreciate that, it is a salutary reminder that, 24 years ago, courses were run of such a high standard in Britain. The shame is that in that time we have not encouraged other centres to aim at least halfway up that particular ladder.

I hope that in his reply the Minister will deal with inspection. I appreciate that some hon. Members on both sides of the House would have grave misgivings about, for example, local education authorities being the inspection or licensing authority. I know that, out there in centres such as the CCPR centres, there is a huge reservoir of expertise which should be used if we are to deal with the question of safety, particularly in mountainous areas.

11.22 am

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on introducing this most important Bill. The Bill is at least one good thing to result from the terrible agony and avoidable disaster of the Lyme bay tragedy. For more than 30 years, I have been intimately connected with the work of the Brathay Hall Trust in Cumbria. The organisation uses the outdoors to develop people young and old. I was there as a 28-year-old as warden and I am now chairman of the trustees.

The centre was founded 50 years ago through the philanthropy of a generous family, the Scotts. The trust has continued to fund the centre through those 50 years, although now to a lesser degree. Our work was originally with young adults. It is now with all ages, from 12-year-old schoolchildren to senior managers. It is from that experience that I speak in the debate.

Safety must be balanced against the importance of adventure and, therefore, as others have said in the debate, of some risk. There is a real possibility that safety could become so dominant a theme that the thrill, excitement and challenge of the activities could be squeezed out. Safety standards must be high, exacting and sensible, but an acceptable risk is and should remain part of the activity. It is probably right to say that those brave and splendid children who died in Lyme bay, their companions, of whom we have read much and for whom I feel greatly, and their parents were attracted to that opportunity because of the very adventure that it provided.

I hope that the specific points that I have to make will be useful markers as further work on the Bill progresses. These views in general terms represent the thinking of many of the activity centres of the highest quality and the longest established members of the outdoor training industry. The first point is the need to put the matter into perspective. It is a very safe industry. I do not in any way wish to lessen the importance of the Bill, so I hope that I will not be misunderstood. The Bill is a necessary sledgehammer to crack a nut, the nut being those very

few cowboy centres. They must go. Therefore, the Bill is justified. They must either go or their standards must be dramatically raised.

Mr. Steen: Does my hon. Friend agree that, unfortunately, more and more legislation is for the minority rather than the majority? I had the privilege to pilot the Dartmoor commons legislation through the House. It was necessary only because a few cowboys were exploiting the natural facilities of the moor. The vast majority of farmers were behaving responsibly.

Mr. Wolfson: That is a perfectly proper point to make. I hope that my hon. Friend will have the opportunity to develop it if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I make it clear that my remarks are intended to put the matter into perspective. The Bill is an enabling measure. The way in which the safety improvement is made will be important. It is important that it is not done in too heavy-handed a manner. Let us look at the perspective. More children are killed or injured on the roads on the way to and from activity centres than at the centres themselves. A survey by the Outward Bound Trust showed that more children were hurt by falling downstairs at the centres than ever were hurt by the activities. Where drama was part of the activities, as it often is, it was the most dangerous activity. As children fenced in drama classes, they hurt each other with the sticks.

None of what I am saying should be taken as an attempt to lessen the tragedy of Lyme bay, which has led to our debate today, but let us examine the safety pattern in primary schools. Apparently, 25 per cent. of primary schools have a serious accident involving children each term. In 25 per cent. of primary schools no clear safety or first aid policy is laid down. I do not excuse that. I do not say that it is right. I am simply trying to put the outdoor activity industry and its safety record in proper perspective.

Mr. Brandreth: When putting the matter in perspective, it is worth remembering the contribution that it makes to children's overall well-being. Notwithstanding the tragedy, about 300 children are killed on our roads each year—many because they are playing in streets that are not safe for them. It is important for them to have the opportunity to go to adventure centres, as it helps them to play and grow in safety. We want that safety to be enhanced. Far from reducing the number of activity centres, we hope that this legislation will increase it, because more people will have confidence in them.

Mr. Wolfson: I would not have been involved in a voluntary capacity in such work for 30 years if I did not agree with my hon. Friend.

The title of the Bill may need to be reconsidered. A better description might be "activity providers", because other organisations undertake such activities, but not necessarily from centres. They may use tents, huts, hotels or barns, or carry out the work at a Butlins or similar holiday camp.

Mr. Jamieson: Perhaps I may assist the hon. Gentleman. Providers of the activities are covered in clause 1(3)(a) of the Bill.

Mr. Wolfson: I am grateful for the intervention, which is helpful, but it is not helpful if the title of the Bill is misleading.

All the major players that have been in the business for many years support the Bill, albeit a little reluctantly, because they do not believe that the legislation will change anything that they do, but it will add additional costs to their operations, as many hon. Members have said. Those costs must be kept low to encourage the maximum number of young people to make use of the opportunities that they provide.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Does my hon. Friend agree that established activity centres will undoubtedly benefit from the Bill? Without it, they might suffer—we heard this week that the Outward Bound Trust has been losing customers because of the lack of confidence. Everyone will benefit from the Bill—the cowboy outfits will be brought back into the mainstream, or closed, and successful centres can only gain public confidence.

Mr. Wolfson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I was about to say that high-quality providers welcome the Bill because it will establish a level playing field. The difficulties that the Outward Bound Trust has recently experienced are well known.

It is important that we consider the criteria necessary for safety. It would not be sensible for the Health and Safety Executive to be the main promoter of those criteria in these circumstances, because its job is to remove all hazard in industry. As has been said, the code of practice that the United Kingdom Activity Centres Advisory Committee has drawn up is the benchmark on which I hope that the regulations will be based. The group established to ensure that those standards continue should include representatives from the Council for Outdoor Recreation, or a subsidiary, the Ministry, the Health and Safety Executive and possibly Ofsted and the Consumers Association.

I do not want to take up too much more time, but I must mention qualifications. The national governing bodies of sport have a certification system, but it may not always be sufficient to measure the competence of staff. Four key ingredients are necessary for competence—technical qualifications, experience, cultural attitudes towards safety, as that has to be in the bloodstream of those working at such centres, and the need for judgment or good common sense. Judgment will be built up from technical qualifications, experience and having safety in one's bloodstream. In capable people, those ingredients can be balanced so that they still provide the chance for adventure and acceptable risk.

It is important to include organisations such as the scouts, guides and the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme in the framework in some way. They should not be left out. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) will comment on that from a scouting point of view, if he has an opportunity to speak. It would not necessarily seem sensible for each troop to have a licence, but the key centres and headquarters of those voluntary organisations should be brought into the licensing system as they set parameters for training and leadership.

We must not forget the enormously important work that unpaid people have voluntarily undertaken, and will continue to undertake, in outdoor activity training and opportunities. It would be utterly wrong if the Bill squeezed them out, or made it more difficult for them to contribute.

[Mr. Wolfson]

Finally, it will obviously be necessary at some stage to include appropriate provisions of the Bill in legislation for Northern Ireland, so that the same criteria can apply there.

11.36 am

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): As a co-sponsor of the Bill, I am pleased to be able to speak. I was delighted when my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) asked me to sponsor the Bill, as I had been involved in discussions with him about the Lyme bay incident from the very day that it occurred.

I became involved because, for many years, I have had experience of deep-sea canoeing. As soon as I heard the first press reports of the terrible tragedy, I knew that something had gone drastically wrong. It was not an accident—I encourage hon. Members to use that word cautiously—and it was avoidable, because some crass errors were made, which have been described at length during the debate and in the court proceedings.

Of course risks exist in deep-sea canoeing. They are due to a range of factors—the elements, the physical fitness of the canoeists, the quality of their equipment, training and their knowledge of other vessels, especially large vessels that cannot see small ones in high seas. There are many risks, but steps can be taken to minimise them. People, particularly young people, engaged in outdoor activities should be encouraged to think along those lines. They should be encouraged to develop a culture of safety—to use the words of the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson), who made a wise point. They should be encouraged to develop a culture of safety so that they analyse the risks and take the necessary steps.

But young people cannot do that off their own bat; they need the expert training of instructors and teachers around them. That is exactly the philosophy that underlies the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. Of course, people at their workplace are expected to work safely, but the culture of safety must start from the top of the organisation and flow down to every level. That is precisely what did not happen in the Lyme bay incident.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devonport said that 24 per cent. of activity centres had no safety policy statement. In its report, the Health and Safety Executive, in typically exact and fairly cold language, states positively:

"76 per cent. of the 158 centres with 5 or more employees had a written safety policy."

However, in the appendix to the report, the HSE said that the principal health and safety legislation relevant to outdoor services—the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974—required that such centres should have a written statement of policy.

It is extraordinary that, 19 years after the Act came into force, 26 per cent. of such centres were in direct breach of a statute of this land. It is outrageous that centres should have taken that cavalier view towards the law of the land. Against that background, we cannot treat the Bill as a sledgehammer to crack a nut. It is an important piece of legislation targeted at the large number of centres that have failed miserably over the years to carry out their statutory functions. That is not to say that the greatest percentage of centres have not done a splendid job. In the 1960s I attended such centres and joined in activities such as learning to canoe and abseil which were character forming and taught me important lessons about team work. I know that there are centres of great excellence throughout the country, but a significant number fail.

On the whole, centres work well, but one needs to consider who should provide regulation. One could have argued, in the context of the Lyme bay centre, that the local education authority was the appropriate inspector. Perhaps the HSE would have been appropriate, or a private organisation such as the British Canoe Union.

To respond to the point made by the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), who is not in his place now, we need to make it quite clear, as the HSE said in its conclusion, that

"there is no room for complacency."

The HSE continued:

"Most providers will still be keenly aware of the Lyme Bay tragedy, but it could be easy with the passage of time for vigilance to fall."

We must identify the appropriate regulator and inspector of the facilities and ensure that all steps are taken to maintain vigilance.

Mr. O'Hara: Does my hon. Friend agree that, grateful though we are to the Activity Centres Advisory Committee for its code of practice—which will serve as an interim code and may be the basis of future regulations—the regulatory body should not be entirely composed of people within the industry?

Mr. Miller: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention and agree with him. Working out exactly what the appropriate body should be will form an important part of the debate. I firmly believe that inspection must include a significant element from outside the industry.

It is encouraging that there is now such widespread agreement on what we are trying to achieve this morning. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will be slightly amused at the unanimity between themselves and the National Union of Teachers, which has had a fair amount of stick from Conservatives recently. A parliamentary briefing from the NUT dated 24 January states:

"The Bill is the result of a long campaign, with the support of teachers, parents, local authorities and others. Given the support of the Government and the industry itself, we urge all Mps to support the Bill and ensure its passage through Parliament. There must never be a repeat of the incidents that led to the Lyme Bay canoeing tragedy when young teenagers were killed and injured."

Clearly that must be the case.

In its briefing, the Consumers Association touched on a number of matters—which have been mentioned in the debate—relating to the specific need to identify some of the regulatory practices. In Committee we must consider most carefully the advice that has been received and the points that have been made on the Floor of the House today.

It would be inappropriate not to congratulate the Minister of State and a number of his colleagues on their eventual conversion on the road to Damascus. On 21 March 1994, the Minister of State said:

"There are existing general statutes imposing duties with respect to health and safety and especially, as has been referred to more than once, the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. Within

the general framework, there are specific regulations such as the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 and others which apply to activity centres as well as to other premises . . . Given the range of existing provisions, there might be a serious danger that additional requirements—even of the kind outlined by the hon. Gentleman"—

my hon. Friend the Member for Devonport—

"would add burdens on both suppliers and customers of services, including the schools themselves, increasing costs and possibly, therefore, acting as a deterrent to the provision of activities which the hon. Gentleman conceded at the outset form such a valuable educational contribution to the curriculum of schools."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1994; Vol. 240, c. 116.]

Statements by the Minister outside the House show that the Government have changed their position. That is most welcome, as are the comments of the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) who in that same debate could not see why regulation was necessary. He said:

"if statutory rules and regulations had been laid down the accident would have happened."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1994; Vol.240, c. 113-14.]

I do not accept that. If regulations had been in place and enforced the incident would never have happened.

Mr. Steen: I do not want to enter into an argument during this poignant and sad debate. I understand that there were two highly qualified canoeing instructors in the St. Alban's centre. However, they were not leading these young people on that particular trip. If they had been, the accident might not have happened, but if there had been statutory rules and regulations I cannot believe that they would have stated that those two instructors had to lead those young people.

Mr. Miller: That is just the point. The Bill requires that persons with appropriate qualifications should lead. It would not allow people with minimum experience, even if they had the best will in the world, to lead such an expedition.

The Bill would also do what the hon. Member for Sevenoaks suggested, in that it would engender a culture of safety. The Bill is part of that vital process. I do not want to pursue the point. I shall only underline the fact that I am pleased that the Government have changed their position dramatically.

The issue now is where do we go from here. Statutory instruments relating to the Bill will be important and perhaps we should look at equipment and training issues in those instruments in conjunction with the language contained in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. It would be helpful for the Government to acknowledge and give a commitment that issues covering training and the inspection of equipment and so on will be specifically exempted from the provisions of that Act. Clause 27 of that Bill gave rise to controversy in Committee last year and should be seen to apply to matters that are different from those covered by the Bill.

I pay tribute to the bravery of the parents who were involved in the Lyme bay tragedy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Devonport said, their persistence was about the lives of other children and I hope that we can all learn from past mistakes. Without their persistence and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Devonport and the knowledge of some of the important issues that came out in the subsequent court action, there would not be such agreement throughout the House.

As the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) said, the House should reflect not just on the safety of young people but should examine other issues. Perhaps that topic is outside the scope of the Bill, but those issues involve the improvement of safety for other people in other environments. The House has an important responsibility to ensure that at every possible stage for every group of people in society a safe and healthy environment is provided in all respects. Vulnerable young people need the protection that is outlined in the Bill, but that must be within the context of support by the House for the continuation of the important work that goes on in the many successful outdoor activity centres throughout Britain.

11.55 am

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I join other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on achieving the objective of the campaign that he has waged since the disastrous Lyme bay tragedy in March 1993, in which four young people from Plymouth lost their lives. I pay tribute to his determination, dedication and commitment. The House owes him a debt of gratitude. The death of the children in Lyme bay aroused the emotions of the nation, and the hon. Gentleman was right to use the opportunity of winning the ballot to introduce his Bill.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson), who has an illustrious track, record in a variety of charitable work. He spoke from experience, and I hope that the Minister will read his measured speech and take it into account when drafting the rules and regulations.

The House is concerned to ensure that, when parents send their children to activity centres which are miles from their homes and schools, they can rely on the standards of safety. They must be sure that children will not be placed at additional risk because of inadequacy at the centre. However, outdoor activity centres and the like are involved in pitting young people against the elements of nature. That is the essence of such centres. Activities such as canoeing on rivers, sailing on the high seas or abseiling are inherently dangerous and one must be extremely careful as to how far one nannies children and prevents them utilising the activities to develop strength and character and to obtain the skills which the centres aim to develop.

As far as I know, over the past 10 years there were comparatively few fatalities in activity centres. I have managed to dig out some research on the issue which I am sure that the House would like to hear. In May 1985, I am afraid that there was a drowning at Land's End, when four children were swept off the rocks. In April 1988 in Austria—of course, the Bill and the rules and regulations will not cover activities there—four children slid over a precipice. In August 1989, there was an abseiling fatality of an instructor in Wales, and in August 1990, in Scotland, a school teacher slid over a precipice. In May 1992, a child fell during a night walk. An instructor was drowned in a cave in June 1992, as was another in October 1992. In May 1993, there was the dreadful disaster at Lyme bay.

My point is that, other than the eight to 10 children who should not have died, but did die during the past 10 years, the only other deaths at activity centres have been instructors and schoolteachers. We need to put the matter

[Mr. Anthony Steen]

in perspective when considering the 3,000 activity centres that operate most days of the year, where no tragedy occurs.

I want to reinforce the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks about the number of children who, unfortunately, are killed on the roads going to and from activity centres. We must add to that figure the 180 children under the age of 16 who each year die in accidents in their homes, despite all the legislation.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Is the hon. Gentleman giving a comprehensive list of those who have died at activity centres during his specified time span, or is he merely giving examples?

Mr. Steen: I have cited the figures that I have been able to find. There may have been one or two accidents in other countries visited by school parties. The Cairngorms accident, which has been mentioned, happened some 20 years ago. I understand that there have been accidents in Switzerland and Austria, but unfortunately the Bill would not deal with such incidents.

We have only to look at the numbers of hon. Members in the Chamber on a Friday to realise how successful the hon. Member for Devonport has been in turning the spotlight on the safety of activity centres. Largely because of his good fortune in coming second in the ballot, he has persuaded the Government to pay further attention to the safety of activity centres. Last summer the Government, like me, doubted whether there was a need for further rules and regulations, but he has persuaded us that a voluntary code of conduct may not be enough. I pay tribute to him for his measured speech and for the way in which he has handled the introduction of the Bill.

We all want to do everything possible to prevent a similar tragedy from occurring again. I, the hon. Gentleman and others have all said that in the debate. It is the least that we can do for the children's families, who are here to listen to our debate. We want them to feel that their children's lives were not lost in vain. That is why I believe that what the hon. Gentleman has done with his Bill is of such great importance. The nation remembers the children.

Before Christmas, it was reported in the media—which cannot always be believed—that while I was obviously in favour of doing everything possible to prevent accidents in activity centres, I had serious reservations about whether setting up statutory registers and passing Acts of Parliament would do much to help. We must remember that very few serious accidents have occurred at the 3,000 centres during the past 10 years, so I doubted whether passing another Act of Parliament would be the best way forward. I had doubts about the Bill then and I have doubts about it now. As the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) said, the purpose of a debate such as this is to air doubts and express reservations.

I was a youth leader for 10 years. One of the interesting points about this debate is the range of experience on both sides of the House in the subjects under discussion. The hon. Member for Devonport was a distinguished schoolteacher. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) is well known for his scouting activities. It is therefore right that hon. Members with such a range of experience should be called to speak in this debate.

As I said, I have certain reservations. I have worked with young people and I have launched and worked with two national charities. Therefore, I hope that the House appreciates that what I am about to say does not mean that I lack any compassion or concern. I simply believe that they are fair points to make at this time.

The key to the future safety of activity centres is the quality of training, the experience of the instructors and the development of the instruction. The instructors are the people to whom ultimately we trust our children's safety. The aim must be to raise standards at the point of delivery. Unfortunately, I fear that not enough thought has been given to that aspect of the Bill. When registering with a central body, each activity centre will have to state which activities it intends to offer and what level of qualification the instructors in each activity have reached. The Bill states that the body will have the power to refuse accreditation to centres that are not working to adequate standards.

That is all well and good, but is it not attacking the symptom rather than the cause? As I have said, the activity centre at Lyme bay had two highly qualified members of staff, so possibly it would have been accredited under the Bill. The question is whether those two members of staff would have been out with the children or whether the management could have made other arrangements.

How will the new body, through its inspectors, do anything different from the existing inspectorates? The Island Cruising Club in Salcombe in my constituency is nationally known as one of the best yachting, sailing and canoeing clubs in Britain. It tells me that, even without the Bill, it is already monitored by seven agencies. It receives visits from officials who look at all aspects of its activities. I shall tell the House which bodies monitor that club.

First, the club plays host to the Department of Transport Marine Safety Agency. It is always knocking around Salcombe; I think it likes my constituency. It visits the club fairly regularly. Not content with that, along comes the Royal Yachting Association. It seems to like the air in Salcombe. It looks around the club and satisfies itself that it is doing an effective, interesting and valuable job. The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) mentioned the British Canoe Union. It does not want to be left out, and it comes to Salcombe probably twice a year to check that the canoeing aspects of the club are safe.

Mr. Jamieson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steen: I will do so once I have finished my list.

There is the Salcombe harbour authority—a distinguished and august body. It is paid for and supported by the South Hams district council. Then there is the Health and Safety Executive. My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks was not too enthusiastic about that body

masterminding the Bill's rules and regulations. It is already at it, coming down to the club to look around and satisfy itself that all is well.

Mr. Jamieson *rose—*

Mr. Steen: I have not yet finished my list.

In the summer months, Salcombe gets very full. The hotels are packed with officials visiting the Island Cruising Club. The South Hams district council's environmental health department also comes to look at the club—

Mr. Hicks: It does not have to come very far.

Mr. Steen: My hon. Friend is right; he knows his geography well. It is only a 20-mile drive from the council offices to Salcombe.

Last but not least, the Devon fire and rescue services visit the club. That is seven organisations with seven lots of officials all visiting just one activity centre year in and year out. Why does the hon. Member for Devonport believe that an eighth organisation will make things better?

Mr. Jamieson: I wish that the hon. Gentleman had given way in the middle of his list because I could have spared him finishing it. He has successfully made the point about why we need the Bill. At the moment, centres suffer a great deal of bureaucracy and unnecessary inspection by various bodies because no statutory framework for their operation exists. If one set of people undertake accreditation and one set of competent people inspect, we may cut the number of organisations going to the centres. On that basis, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support the Bill.

Mr. Steen: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting observation. I have an office in Dean's yard. A new card entry system has been installed there. I asked the Serjeant at Arms whether, as the card had been introduced, he would do away with the two security guys that were inside the building—who do marvellous work—and an administrative guy. He said, "Of course, once we have the entry card, we will be able to reduce the number of officials who stand there." I have received the entry card, but the number of staff inside the building has nearly doubled and another entry service is being installed.

Lady Olga Maitland: I agree with my hon. Friend for today, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on the point about multiple agencies checking out activity centres. They all have different benchmarks for the standards required. The Bill proposes that we have one rigorous benchmark that no one could misunderstand.

Mr. Steen: The example that I gave of Dean's yard entry system made my point very well. When one introduces a new system that one believes to be safer, one does not do away with the other systems—one has them as well. If the hon. Member for Devonport can tell me for certain that the seven inspections of the Island Cruising Club by all the different agencies will stop, I will support him 100 per cent. My fear is that the Bill will add to the seven inspections. That is why I am concerned.

Mr. O'Hara: Will the hon. Gentleman please accept that he is unnecessarily burdening the House? He must accept the simple fact that, if after A, B sometimes occurs, that does not imply that after A, B always occurs. That is at the centre of the Bill. Unsatisfactory procedures are in place and the Bill simply sets out to put adequate and satisfactory procedures in place. I urge the hon. Gentleman not to burden the House further with such irrelevant trivia.

Mr. Steen: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, I cannot agree with him. If he were part of the Island Cruising Club management, and were visited by seven organisations throughout the year, asking about safety and various other regulations, he would question whether an eighth organisation would do away with the other seven. I would give the measure whole-hearted support if that were the case. If it means, however, that an eight organisations will undertake inspection, the bureaucracy, rules and regulations will become considerably worse. Many well-run organisations will find that the amount of paper and bureaucracy will increase.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme) *rose—*

Mr. Steen: I shall not give way for the moment. I must make progress. I am being chastised. I would always give way to the hon. Lady, but I ask her to let me make a little progress.

Our aim is to ensure not only that activity centres are as safe as possible, but that as many children from as many walks of life as possible are able to enjoy them. I fear that the enterprise of the hon. Member for Devonport will result in an elite, and in far fewer activity centres. Perhaps 20 per cent. of the existing 3,000 centres may go out of business because they will not be able to afford, not just the cost of accreditation, which we know will not be too expensive, but the cost of recruiting and employing higher qualified instructors, who will have to go on longer courses.

The Government will have to provide more grants and staff will have to gain more and more skills, which will cost centres more and more money. One must think through the consequences of the arrangements. Although one welcomes higher qualifications and higher skills, one must also recognise the on-going cost. One may say, "Well and good. It is worth doing."

Mr. Wolfson: I support the Bill, but I believe that my hon. Friend's point about increased costs is a key factor. I know that the best-run and safest centres have heavy expenses. That is an important point to consider in the progress of the Bill.

Mr. Steen: I welcome that intervention. I am not pursuing my argument to be frivolous. I am concerned that children from all walks of life, from the inner city of Plymouth, as well as from the rural areas around it, have the opportunity to go to the best activity centres and to find that they can afford them. We must be concerned about the on-going cost to the public purse of longer training courses and higher pay for instructors. If it will be self-financing, we must consider the consequences. I was chastised by Opposition Members, but I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks for putting the matter in perspective.

Mrs. Golding: What cost does the hon. Gentleman put on a young person's life? Surely that is what we must consider and that is what the Bill considers.

Mr. Steen: Of course one puts an enormous cost on a young person's life. Indeed, no real price can be put on

[Mr. Steen]

it. The 10-year track record of activity centres is not appalling. Nor can one say that there has not been supervision. As I said, one activity centre has been inspected by seven organisations. I support what the Bill proposes, but such on-going cost may prevent the very young people from the poorest homes who should enjoy such activities from enjoying them. I am sure that the hon. Member for Devonport would not like to have elitist activity centres as a result of the Bill.

I must bring my speech to an end, even though I have some other useful points to make; they can be made later. I am sure that all hon. Members support the spirit and aim of the Bill—who would not? I have some doubts about the statutory commitments and serious doubts about the consequence of more rules and regulations. The track record is very good as it stands. I wish the Bill well. I hope that it will do what we all hope that it will do.

12.17 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): It gives me great pleasure to support my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) in co-sponsoring his Bill, although we can take no pleasure in the circumstances surrounding it. Almost every hon. Member who has spoken this morning has referred to the distress and agony experienced by the parents who lost children in the Lyme bay tragedy.

I follow the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), who, although he expressed his support in principle for the Bill, unfortunately introduced a slightly discordant element by implying that excessive cost will arise if one introduces a statutory framework that seeks to eliminate, as far as possible, the errors that led to the Lyme bay tragedy. There is no doubt that, had the Bill been enacted a few years ago, the operators of the centre would have been outside the law and unable to take the risks that they took in sending instructors on the particular course. They could have argued—and did—that they were acting reasonably.

In paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Devonport, I suggest that had he not introduced this Bill we should probably not have had a debate in Government time on the safety of children at activity centres. In this case, fortune has favoured the brave and the persistent in that my hon. Friend won the No. 2 slot in the ballot. It is salutary for us to remember that this debate would not be taking place without that good fortune.

Until my hon. Friend came second in the ballot, the Government's position was that there was already enough guidance and legislation to ensure a satisfactory framework for activity centres. Of course, we know that that was not the case. As the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) made clear, there is a debate among the deregulation maniacs and those who put profit before safety and the lives of children. Fortunately, thanks to the tremendous campaign waged by the parents of the children involved in the Lyme bay tragedy, we have been able to persuade the Government to reconsider safety at outdoor activity centres.

There may be concern about the cost of regulation but it should not have been that which was outlined to the House today; the real concern about cost is simply to ensure that any system of regulation is run as cost effectively as possible. It should have nothing to do with scare stories about 20 per cent. of centres having to close because regulation will be too costly. If the system that we introduce proves too costly for some centres, it is probably just as well that those centres close; we shall then know that children will not be put at risk.

Not only in connection with activity centres but in many other circumstances we are all too often told that, if a death has not occurred or nothing serious has happened in the past 20 years, extra regulation is not needed. When, all of a sudden, a tragedy such as that at Lyme bay occurs, our minds turn to the issue of safety. I am, therefore, pleased that my hon. Friend has introduced the Bill.

As many hon. Members have said, there is a voluntary system, and various centres offer accreditation—such as the English tourist board, the Activity Centres Advisory Committee and the Welsh tourist board. The British Activity Holiday Association also has a code of practice. But, as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) said, representatives had visited the St. Alban's centre but presumably felt that its standards were satisfactory.

Under the Welsh tourist board's scheme, a centre that does not want to be included is simply not inspected. If it is inspected and does not meet the board's standards, it does not have to close; it can carry on with its activities but is not included in the board's promotional literature.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Before my hon. Friend concludes his remarks, may I ask if he is aware that a garage that rented out surf boards was considered to be an accredited centre under the Welsh scheme?

Mr. Griffiths: No, I was not aware of that particular case but it reveals the need for a proper regulatory framework.

I conclude by drawing attention to the Health and Safety Executive's interim report, to which a number hon. Members have referred, and by pinpointing one or two issues that have not been dealt with. Of the centres that did provide training, 25 per cent. did not do so under the auspices of the national governing body of the activities involved. In addition, 8 per cent. of the centres did not record accidents and 45 per cent. of the centres examined were not aware of their legal responsibility to do so. The HSE found that only 50 of the 107 accidents that occurred and which should have been reported were, in fact, reported, so the seriousness of the problem is clear. It also found that 10 per cent. of activity centres gave cause for concern.

In a survey conducted in Wales by the Institute of Higher Education in Swansea, the results of which are contained in a report entitled, "Managing a Safer Product", published in July 1993, it was found that 25 per cent. of centres in Wales did not have satisfactory safety standards.

I deal now with the points raised by the hon. Member for South Hams and others about centres abroad. Schools usually book such centres abroad through British agents. Will the Government consider placing a duty on those agents to ensure that overseas centres operate to the standards applied in Britain? In any event, I look forward to the Bill rapidly completing all its stages and being enacted and working within the year.

12.27 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on his extremely good fortune in obtaining second place in the ballot for private Members' Bills. It is very much to his credit that he has devoted his Bill to this important subject which was, of course, brought to our attention by the tragedy in Lyme bay.

It is right for the House to review the arrangements and regulations that apply to such activities. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of activity centres and providers of facilities; some are clearly cowboy operations. It is right for these matters to be looked at carefully. I counsel the House, however, to be extremely careful about what it brings to the statute book because it is only too easy to throw out the baby with the bath water.

I have the honour to be secretary of the all-party parliamentary Scout Association group. About one third of hon. Members have passed through the Scout Association during their young lives. The association is one of the greatest providers of outdoor activities, including canoeing, sailing, mountaineering, abseiling, potholing or orienteering. All those activities are potentially dangerous. Just as we have benefited from them, however, so today many boys and girls, many from deprived or inner-city areas, are enjoying those activities in which otherwise they would not be able to take part.

The Scout Association has developed thorough systems of training, qualification, regulation and authorisation to do its best to avoid tragic accidents. It has harnessed the work of unpaid volunteers and provides a wonderful programme of activities. In all those activities, it has to strike a careful balance between the provision of exciting adventure and the needs of stringent safety controls. My hon. Friends the Members for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) and for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) were right to refer to the balance of risk. Young people can be very safe if they never venture from their homes and if they get their only thrills in life out of computer games and the like.

The Scout Association, through regulations and care, has an extremely safe record. It has standards on which parents can rely. That comment does not, of course, apply only to the Scout Association, but to others such as the Girl Guides Association, the Boys Brigade, the Sea Cadet Corps and many others that are properly regulated and have safety very much in mind. The challenge of the Bill is to extend the scope of safety arrangements to all, but not to jeopardise good-quality activities provided by responsible organisations.

It is a sad fact that bad accidents can lead to bad law; firearms legislation provides one example. The Bill provides for a licensing authority to settle regulations, for inspection and for licence fees, all of which inevitably involves bureaucracy. The ensuing bureaucracy could add terrific costs which would be a practical and financial disincentive for organisations that already have excellent safety records. It could cause a switch from the youth organisations that I have mentioned to others that have far less tried-and-tested structures; indeed, it could lead to no activities at all for our young people.

My plea, therefore, is that there should be close consultation with organisations that have a track record, such as the Scout Association. In clause 3(3), there is a requirement that

> "Before making an order or regulations . . . the Secretary of State shall consult the Health and Safety Commission and such other persons (if any) as he considers it appropriate to consult."

I suggest strongly that the Secretary of State and the Health and Safety Commission should consult the Scout Association and similar organisations. The Standing Committee might like to consider an amendment to require consultation specifically with appropriate youth service interests.

In terms of setting standards and regulations, the Committee should consider delegating licensing to responsible, accredited organisations that already enforce standards. It is worth considering the point that the Lyme bay tragedy could not have happened at a scout centre. The requirements imposed by the Scout Association about the qualifications of the personnel involved, the standard of equipment and the weather conditions would have prevented that expedition.

The idea of delegating licensing to qualified voluntary organisations is not new. Licensing for the driving of minibuses by volunteers is covered under the Minibus Act 1977, which gives the authority for issuing section 19 permits to organisations. The responsibility was delegated to designated bodies, including the Scout Association. There are precedents and we should consider the possibility of delegating licensing.

I support the Bill. There is a solemn responsibility on the Standing Committee and, subsequently, on the licensing authority to raise safety standards at the bottom to the highest that prevail in highly respected organisations and to keep a close eye on the costs which might divert funds away from these wonderful activities for young people.

12.33 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr. Eric Forth): May I, as is traditional but nevertheless heartfelt, congratulate the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on winning the No. 2 spot in the ballot for private Member's Bills? Such success always throws the limelight on any hon. Member and I am sure that we all agree that the hon. Gentleman has used his privilege and good fortune in the ballot to the best possible effect in introducing this Bill. What I hope will be the extreme brevity of my remarks should in no way be construed as reflecting any lack of interest, concern or support for the Bill or, indeed, be any reflection on the quality of the debate. However, I am very conscious of time.

As so many hon. Members have said, this debate reflects the concern of the House for the families of young people who lost their lives, not only the deaths at Lyme bay of Claire Langley, Rachel Walker, Simon Dunne and Dean Sayer but Hayley Hadfield, who tragically died in a previous accident at an activity centre, Mrs. Trotter, whose son was also affected, albeit in a slightly different way, and others before that. The memories of those people are very much in our minds when we debate the aims and effects of the Bill.

I was going to rehearse at little length the background to the Bill and the Government's attitude to it, but I shall say only that I believed at the time, and would say so

[Mr. Eric Forth]

now, that our response as Government and as a Department, certainly to the Lyme bay tragedy, was, by Government standards, rapid and appropriate. Surveys on activity centres, the publication of results of inspections, guidance issued by my Department to schools and so on were put in place and were having an effect. In fact, many hon. Members have said that there was every sign that centres had been made aware, through those measures, of their responsibilities and had sought to improve their standards. That was very welcome.

A number of things have happened to cause us to want to look at this subject again and to lead us to support the Bill, not least the fact that the Activity Centre Advisory Committee, which we hoped would introduce a voluntary scheme of accreditation for centres, has considered matters for some time and has concluded that a statutory scheme would be preferable. That obviously carried a lot of weight with my colleagues and me.

The words of the judge at the trial of the Lyme bay incident, which have already been quoted, not least by the hon. Member for Devonport, included comments on the centres, among other things. He said:

"I believe that authoritative control, supervision and, if necessary, intervention, is called for."

His views were reinforced by Dorset police, who provided us with key extracts from the proceedings. Some very weighty words were added to the argument for statutory measures.

Mr. Wolfson: My hon. Friend is dealing with the judgment. As I understand it, the managing director of the company was found guilty and punished, but the local manager was exonerated on a technicality. If I am right, would my hon. Friend consider that point as appropriate? It should not be able to happen again—we now hope that it never will—if a similar situation ever arose.

Mr. Forth: The point of which I want my hon. Friend and the House to take account is the fact that the judge, having presided over the trial and taken into account all the circumstances, gave his view that further measures were required. That is the important context in which I quote the judge's words.

The Health and Safety Executive report, which has rightly been frequently quoted in the House today, said that although standards were generally fairly good, serious shortcomings had emerged from its surveys that required attention. That therefore led my colleagues in government and me very readily to extend the support, which I gladly repeat to the House, for the Bill and its thrust.

Although I fear that I may be treading slightly on the territory of the hon. Member for Devonport—I hope that he will forgive me for doing so—it may help the House if I give a preliminary Government response to some of the questions that have been asked in the debate. That may help hon. Members to reach their conclusions about the Bill.

Much has been said about the time scale. I am clear that we want to have the regulations that will flow from the Bill in place as soon as is properly possible. However, we must bear in mind that we have to deal first with the Committee stage. It will then have to pass its further stages and receive Royal Assent. During some of that period, we may be able to embark on the extensive and detailed consultation that everyone wants, not least because of the many points that have been made in this debate, before introducing regulations, for which we hope to obtain the approval of the House.

With the best will in the world, I believe that that will take most of the rest of this calendar year. However, I hope that all the regulations will be in place in time for the 1996 season—if I can put it that way. That is a reasonable timetable, to which I hope we can adhere. I am sure that there will be co-operation from hon. Members on both sides of the House.

My hon. Friends the Members for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) and for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) and the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) referred to the balance that we must strike in seeking not to over-regulate and remove every conceivable risk and, in other words, seriously damage this very important activity, which adds so much to the pleasure and character development of young people.

That balance must be in our minds as we progress through the Committee stage and the consultations that will give rise to regulations. I am sure that we are all conscious of that point. We must balance safety and risk and cost and accessibility. Those issues must be in our minds as we proceed with the later stages of the Bill.

Several questions were asked about the definition and detail that will arise should the Bill receive its Second Reading today. My hon. Friends the Members for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern), for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) and for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) made important points of detail about the definition of activity centres and the kind of organisations that may be affected.

It was vital for those points to be raised in this debate. They will be picked up further, perhaps in Committee but more probably during the consultation process, when it will be very important that we try, as far as possible, to ask all the appropriate questions of all the appropriate and interested organisations in order to frame the regulations better to make them as effective as possible, but with that balance of lightness of touch and effect that has been maintained throughout. I envisage that that will be of the greatest importance during the consultation process.

I believe that many of the points will be covered by exemptions being incorporated in the regulations that will seek to define the bodies that will not necessarily have to comply with the requirements of the Bill and of the regulations.

Mr. Jamieson *indicated assent.*

Mr. Forth: I see that the hon. Member for Devonport agrees with that.

I want now to deal with an important point that was made by the hon. Members for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle). They wanted to know whether local authorities would be the licensing authority. The answer is that local authority inspectors could not be designated as licensing authorities simply because clause 1(1) provides for a person to be designated. That could be a body—and, in my view, very probably would be—but not individual inspectorates from more than one authority. The way in which the Bill is framed at present precludes the possibility of local authorities picking up the very important responsibility that is so central to the Bill.

Mr. Steen: Will my hon. Friend assure me that the seven organisations that I mentioned, including the

Department of Transport Marine Safety Agency, will, as a result of the passage of the Bill, no longer have to burden existing activity centres with further inspections? Will he assure me that the Bill will set up a new arrangement that will remove the existing arrangements so that only one body—and not seven, eight or nine—will carry out inspections?

Mr. Forth: Much as I would like to give my hon. Friend that assurance, in all conscience I cannot do so, mainly because we have not settled the important detail of how the legislation would operate under regulations. Equally important, having heard what my hon. Friend said, I suspect that many of the functions carried out by those bodies may overlap with the functions envisaged for the Bill but would not entirely replace them.

Therefore, although I hope that some organisations would take cognisance of the responsibilities flowing from the Bill and may see fit not to continue inspections, I could not give that guarantee. They would have to be responsible for assessing how far that overlap was complete or partial. If it were complete, I hope that an arrangement could be made to eliminate duplication. If it were only partial, I should have thought that an element of duplication may regrettably have to continue.

I have been brief. That does not mean that I under-estimate the importance or value of the Bill—I do neither. However, the debate has been wide ranging and informative, and it will help the hon. Member for Devonport during the Committee stage, which I hope will follow soon after Second Reading. The debate will enable my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and others to take responsibility for seeing the Bill through into effective regulations, which will do everything possible to ensure that, wherever possible, such tragedies never occur again.

12.45 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): The Bill is prompted by a terrible tragedy. As parents, our hearts go out to the parents of those concerned. I congratulate the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on his care in bringing forward the Bill. However, we are entitled to ask whether it is the right approach. We are entitled to ask the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Minister for further and better particulars before the Bill reaches the statute book.

We all want activity centres and we want them to be safe, but we do not want them to be confined to the better-off because of costs loaded on to activity centres. The Government must consider their response very carefully, if the Bill becomes an Act, when drawing up the regulations. The Government have a duty to consider their response carefully and not to be over-influenced by crisis, tragedy or public pressure. Important as those matters are, the Government have a duty to ensure that we do not always legislate for the minority. We must legislate for the majority.

The overwhelming majority of activity centres have ensured safe and successful activity and projects for young people for a long time. Therefore, we want legislation and regulations that do not drive up costs or drive too many people out of business. We must remember that many such operations are very small. They are naturally independent organisations, run by people who are dedicated to climbing or sailing, for instance, and we must not over-nanny them or those who attend their activity centres. We must not over-regulate for a risk that might be very small. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) said, more youngsters are killed on the roads on their way to activity centres than are killed as a result of the activities.

I remind the Government of their own documentation on the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill. Many statements made it absolutely clear that the Government were committed not to more regulation but to less regulation. For instance, they insisted that there should be a compliance cost assessment—a new regulation—and that there should be risk assessment and management. The Government said:

"Those responsible for drawing up new regulations to protect from some perceived risk must assess whether that risk is so grave or is likely to occur with sufficient frequency to justify the burden imposed by the new regulation. They must consider whether there is a better way in which the risk can be managed."

I could speak for longer, but there is no time. Many Government statements have made it absolutely clear that the Government are conscious that new regulations can drive up costs and force people out of business. As has been made clear many times this morning, my hon. Friend the Minister is aware that activity centres are already regulated by the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992. Section 3 of the 1974 Act places a general duty on employers and the self-employed to ensure

"so far as is reasonably practicable"

that the activities do not expose to risk people not in their employ. Under section 7 of the Act, an employee has a duty

"to take reasonable care for the health and safety of himself and of other persons who may be affected by his acts or omissions at work".

Activity centres are already regulated. I took the liberty today of ringing the British Activity Holidays Association, because we have not heard a great deal from it today and because the association's members are the people who are in the business. It is concerned that qualifications are required to suit the circumstances. For instance, much canoeing is conducted in safe conditions in swimming pools or small ponds, and not necessarily in the sea.

We want to ensure that the right standards are applied in the right circumstances. That will be a difficult task for my hon. Friend the Minister in drawing up the regulations if the Bill becomes an Act. We also want to ensure that the regulations do not discriminate against private operators in favour of local authority operators. I very much hope that the British Activity Holidays Association will be closely consulted during the course of the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) made some pertinent points, and it was unfortunate that he was derided by some Members when he was doing so. My hon. Friend is a caring and effective legislator who wants to ensure that we have safe activity centres, but he does not want to impose costs on centres which will simply drive them out of business or ensure that they become elitist.

I shall end with a quote from Christina Hardy, writing in the *Daily Telegraph*. She herself was quoting Cardinal Newman, who said more than 100 years ago:

"We are so constituted that if we insist upon being as sure as is conceivable in every step of our course, we must be content to creep along the ground, and can never soar."

12.51 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I shall be very brief, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on grasping the initiative? I am naturally and instinctively reticent about supporting extra regulation and legislation, but the hon. Gentleman's restrained and thoughtful approach has convinced me that, in this case, it is necessary, and I can support the Bill.

I have spoken to parents in my constituency who send their children to activity centres and who want to be able to do so because of the benefit that their children derive from the centres. They also want to do so in the knowledge that the safety requirements at the centres are adequate to protect their children. They support the Bill.

I have spoken to the director of education at the local authority which serves my constituency, Bromley. The director of education and the authority are strongly in favour of the Bill because they want to continue to send children from the borough to activity centres. They too want to do so in the knowledge that proper protection is being afforded.

I have spoken to a teacher who leads children to such centres, and who has considerable experience in doing so. She too is strongly in favour of the legislation. She has seen improvements in standards during the past two years—I wonder why—and she realises that, in the very nature of activity centres, there is bound to be risk. She realises that teachers have responsibilities, and she does not in any sense want to duck that. Bearing in mind the culture of the centres, the characteristics of the people who run them and the feelings of children when they are there, it is difficult for a teacher to step in and say, "No, you cannot do that." That teacher needs to be backed up by legislation, and that is why teachers almost universally support the Bill.

I am worried about the nature of some of the people who have been employed in the past by activity centres. I do not want in any sense to suggest that this is the norm or the rule, and I hope that the practice has diminished. However, there are cases on which I have been given information where outdoor activity centres have in the past employed as guides and leaders people who have no qualifications. In some cases, people who have come from abroad—Australia and South Africa, for example—and are illegally working in this country have been employed, and back-packers and rough boys have also been employed.

These people have probably been entirely well motivated, but when it comes to a crisis they simply do not have the training or the skill to deal with it. That sort of thing must not be allowed to continue. One cannot allow chance or good hopes to prevent repetitions of such occurrences. Legislation is necessary to ensure that qualifications and the standards of operators and their personnel are adequate and can provide absolute safety in the application of their skills.

The tragic events of Lyme bay and the publicity and concern that have followed from them have achieved a good deal in improving standards, but there is always a danger that time will pass and complacency will return. Legislation is necessary to prevent that. We cannot legislate completely against risk in human activity—it is impossible—but we can legislate to prevent complacency. That is why I support the Bill.

12.54 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): It is with great pleasure that I warmly congratulate at the end of the debate the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on introducing this most important Bill. I share his concern that far too much emphasis has been placed in today's debate on the costs of introducing regulations, proper organisation and monitoring of activity centres. When a child's life is at risk, we cannot put money before that child's life. Although we should have a sense of proportion and common sense, when a child's life is at stake we have an obligation to go to the ends of the earth to get a Bill that is right and appropriate in terms of safety.

Anyone who has read the Health and Safety Executive report will agree that it makes sobering reading. Two Opposition Members have pointed out some of the factors that came up in the report. I should like to point out a couple more. The report made it clear that 8 per cent. of the activity centres visited had no procedures or equipment in place to deal with emergencies. For example, they had no arrangements for communication with remote locations or emergency evacuation from them. Six per cent. had no system to ensure that equipment was well maintained and safely used. That is plain scandalous. Any activity centre that fails to come up to scratch should have the activity brought to an end or simply the whole show closed down. I take a robust view of the matter.

I am a member of the Education Select Committee, which is looking into activity centres. We have received 86 submissions in all. The vast majority are in favour of some compulsory scheme of registration, accreditation and inspection of outdoor activities. Anyone who has read some of the submissions and contacted some of the people who have made them, as I have done, will realise the importance of regulation. I spoke to Mr. and Mrs. Peter Hadfield of Salford, who told me the distressing story of their 11-year-old daughter, Hayley. She died in May 1992 after attending the Manor adventure centre in Shropshire. What Mrs. Hadfield told me was hair-raising. It was a story of blinding incompetence on a scale which leaves us speechless. I hope that those experiences will never be forgotten.

In that context, I am worried when I hear my hon. Friends say that we should worry about the costs of implementing the Bill. If they listened to Mrs. Hadfield, they would think again. This is an enormously important Bill. I have spoken to head teachers of schools in my constituency. They have recently stopped sending their young to activity centres because of the lack of confidence and the breakdown in safety measures. We want to get those children back out to the centres to experience those enriching life styles. I wish the Bill greatest speed. It deserves it. It is not before time. I wish to see the Bill implemented so that my children in Sutton will be able to enjoy the experiences that can only enhance their lives.

12.58 pm

Mr. Jamieson: This has been a useful debate, with many helpful contributions and I pay special tribute to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) for her impassioned cry on behalf of children.

I do not want to delay the House for more than a few moments, but I must answer some of the questions posed during the debate. The hon. and learned Member for Fife,

North-East (Mr. Campbell) asked why the provisions in the Bill were restricted to people under the age of 18. I feel that that group of people is the most vulnerable. Children are the least able to assess the risks involved in an activity and the immature and inexperienced need to gain experience knowing that there is a framework that guarantees them a certain level of safety. Also, most centres provide for a variety of ages—for those over as well as under 18. If we find that those that provide exclusively for the over-18s are giving cause for concern, the Liberal Democrats might introduce another Bill, if they win the ballot.

The hon. Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) mentioned the excellent centre in his area, which deals with people who have various disabilities. By and large, the Bill might not cover the sort of activities that it provides. If they are covered, the centre would have to accredit once. Such centres not only provide activities themselves, but often go to other centres for different activities. They would therefore have the assurance that when they booked into another centre it would be accredited under the law. The Bill will therefore help such organisations.

The hon. Members for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) and for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) rightly mentioned the scouts and guides. May I add the Youth Hostels Association, with which I have had some discussions. I envisage that those organisations will have to accredit once, if they have centres or undertake activities that fall within the remit of the Act, if the Bill is enacted.

Each and every brownie and guide pack or scout group would not have to accredit separately—that would be ridiculous and, when we draw up the finer points of the regulations, we want to be sure that that would not happen. The Bill will help the scout and guide movements considerably, because, when they employ another centre to provide activities, they will know that it is working within a legal framework—they buy in most of the more hazardous activities from outside sources.

I am pleased at the widespread support for the Bill from the House today. I hope that with cross-party support we can develop a new safety culture for our children. I hope that, when the Bill becomes an Act, it will reassure parents, teachers and governors and, most of all, that it will create a new environment of safety within which activities can grow and flourish.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Insurance Companies (Reserves) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.3 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I introduced the Bill on 14 December, to amend the law relating to insurance companies and, in particular, the Insurance Companies Act 1982. The Bill could not be more topical. The worst earthquake for 70 years struck Japan last week and the industrial port and city of Kobe was devastated, with many injuries, deaths and damage to 50,000 buildings. It was a tragic event, which highlighted the sudden and volatile nature of property catastrophes.

This country suffered smaller property catastrophes in 1987 and 1990. On those occasions, United Kingdom insurers were called on to pay out claims for storm damage and flooding that were four times the annual average. When such losses occur, policyholders look to London, because it is the world's insurance and reinsurance market, with a third of the world's business. Our institutions bear the loss when such events occur. The Bill would provide added security for policyholders and smooth premiums for certain classes of insurance.

The general insurance market is competitive. In Japan, property catastrophe reinsurance renews on 1 April this year. British companies will be competing for business at a disadvantage. Insurers elsewhere have better tax treatment. The Bill is a step on the road to remedying that.

I am grateful for the support of the industry—the Association of British Insurers and the London Insurance and Reinsurance Market Association—and all the main parties. I particularly welcome the support of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) and, I believe, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), who is in his place on the Opposition Front Bench, and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

The Bill's main purpose is to confer on the Secretary of State the power to make regulations requiring the maintenance of reserves by insurance companies. I have introduced the Bill in order to pave the way for a system of reserves known as equalisation reserves, to be held by insurance companies. There are good potential grounds for the Secretary of State to require such reserves.

The purpose of equalisation reserves would be to recognise the inherent instability of certain types of insurance business which means that, if the company is to meet its obligations to its policyholders on time, it needs to set aside a reserve from profitable years to finance exceptional claims when they occur. Equalisation reserves are a recognised technique already used in other countries, including Japan and Germany.

The Secretary of State, using powers derived from European legislation, already requires insurance companies writing credit insurance business to keep such reserves but, unfortunately, he cannot use those powers to require equalisation reserves to be maintained by all United Kingdom insurance companies or for any other description of business.

Clause 1(1) is the Bill's main provision. It inserts in the Insurance Companies Act 1982 a new section 34A, which requires certain insurance companies to maintain reserves

[Mr. Oliver Heald]

in accordance with rules that will be prescribed in regulations to be made by the Secretary of State. The regulations may make provision, among other things, for the circumstances in which, and the times at which, the amounts must be placed into, or taken from, reserves. They may also cover other matters incidental to the maintenance of such reserves.

The new obligation does not apply to all insurance companies. Most insurers with head offices in member states other than the United Kingdom are excluded because, since 1 July last year, such companies have been subject to regulation in their home state only. In addition, the Secretary of State may provide in the regulations that the obligation to maintain the reserves should not apply to companies of a prescribed description.

The provisions would not apply to Lloyd's of London because Lloyd's has its own powers to introduce the provision for such reserves. I have been in contact with Lloyd's of London. It assures me that, although the Bill will have no direct effect on it, it takes an interest in the developments in the context of its corporate capital providers. In future, Lloyd's will seek to assess how any arrangement ultimately adopted by insurance companies may be adapted to ensure parity for its corporate vehicles.

Clause 1(2) inserts a new provision in the 1982 Act providing that any such reserves should be treated as if they were liabilities for the purpose of the calculation by an insurance company of its solvency margin. That requirement was inserted to reflect our obligations under the EC insurance directive, and it follows the same formulation as that adopted for credit insurance equalisation reserves. Under European law, those reserves should be treated as liabilities.

Clause 2 amends and inserts a new provision in section 68 of the 1982 Act dealing with solvency margins. Section 68 enables the Secretary of State by order to modify the application of various sections of the 1982 Act and regulations made pursuant to those sections in their application to insurance companies.

The new provision inserted by clause 2 enables the Secretary of State to provide in regulations that section 68 should apply to new section 34A and corresponding regulations. At the moment, no clear need for this power in relation to the new requirement to maintain reserves is foreseen, and it is not thought appropriate to include it. However, the power to attract section 68 is included should the Secretary of State think it necessary to bring the matter back to the House in due course.

Clause 3 covers the short title, commencement and extent of the Bill. Clause 1 will be brought into force by commencement order, which it is intended should be made at the same time as regulations. Clearly, new section 34A can have effect only when such regulations are in place.

For some time, the industry has sought the introduction of a scheme for the maintenance of equalisation reserves on the basis that such reserves would qualify for tax relief. It argues that, at present, companies need to reserve part of the profit on which they have paid tax in good years to pay for losses in bad years, and that it is not right that they should have to set up such reserves from taxed profits.

The industry points to examples in some European countries, notably Germany, where companies are allowed to set up reserves for such business while deferring tax payments. When I discussed that with the Association of British Insurers, I was told that that is a competitive disadvantage and that, if the change could be made, companies would be able to compete more effectively, particularly with the large German reinsurers and insurers.

There is a clear case for insurance companies to be treated differently from other companies in respect of their reserving requirements. The factor that distinguishes an insurance business from almost any other is that the price to be charged for the product has to be determined before the cost of delivering it is known. By far the most important element of cost is claims. There is therefore a strong case for the ability to make both provision and reserves against uncertain future claims from untaxed income.

As the provisions of the third directive are implemented in European Union member states, the single market for insurance products becomes an increasing reality. The UK industry points out that it is at a competitive disadvantage because others are allowed to reserve on a basis which receives more favourable tax treatment. Insurance is an international business in which the UK has an excellent record, and the Bill makes a change that will continue that success.

I have already spoken about the windstorms in the United Kingdom in 1987 and 1990, which caused significant losses to companies underwriting property business. Many hon. Members will be aware that forecasters are predicting an increasing number of catastrophes as a result of changes to the climate in the UK and worldwide.

Another benefit of an equalisation reserve scheme is that, as a company's equalisation reserve builds up, it will have the opportunity to retain a greater proportion of risk for itself and will be able to reduce the costs and the risks of buying reinsurance. Companies will always need some reinsurance, but reductions reduce the commission and the profit that is paid away.

If tax relief is granted it would mean that, for the first time, a company could decide between reinsurance and internal reserving without having its choice distorted in any way by the fact that the first gets tax relief as an expense whereas the second does not. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) is in his place, and I know that he and members of his committee have been fully briefed on the Bill by Lloyd's and by the insurance industry.

The Bill is the first essential step in setting up an equalisation reserve scheme which could qualify for tax relief. It does not prescribe the details of such as scheme nor does it provide tax relief, which will be a matter for Treasury Ministers. I hope that, when the Bill is passed, the Department of Trade and Industry will be able to implement by regulations a detailed scheme. I have spoken to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury, who has assured me that he and his Treasury colleagues would be prepared to consider providing tax relief for an acceptable scheme. I believe that such a scheme can be developed.

The Association of British Insurers has led a working party which has included representatives from the Department of Trade and Industry and from the Inland Revenue. It has devised proposals that could form the basis of regulations and that have already been the subject

of widespread consultation with members of the ABI and with bodies representing the company sector of the London market.

After considering the pattern of claims experience in this country for a period of 12 years, the working party has recommended that equalisation reserves would be suitable for a number of volatile classes of business. It has looked at the experience peaks of claims. I have already mentioned property, but others include marine, aviation, nuclear and certain reinsurance business. Reinsurers have borne much of the brunt of recent catastrophes and they need equalisation reserves just as much as direct insurers. It is thought that, following Kobe, much of the reinsurance loss will be incurred in the London market.

The ABI's proposals envisage that payment into the reserve would be based on a proportion of premiums. Withdrawals would be triggered where there were exceptional levels of claims. Maximum levels would be laid down for the reserves as it would be neither reasonable to expect companies to hold excessive reserves nor, if tax relief is granted, for the Treasury to allow unlimited amounts of deferred tax. I know that that is an issue on which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) has written and spoken at some length.

It is proposed that the rules should be varied according to the different classes of business, with those of a less volatile nature having smaller reserving requirements than those that are more volatile. The details of the scheme are not yet finalised. The DTI and the Inland Revenue are reviewing the working party's proposals. It is proposed to issue a consultative document in the spring, setting out the detailed proposals for comment by the industry. Once again, those could become the subject of regulations.

If the results of the consultation are looked upon favourably by the Chancellor, there would be an opportunity to announce tax relief in the November 1995 Budget, with the scheme coming into operation at the beginning of next year. The urgency of the Bill is that, without it, no scheme could be established before 1997 at the earliest.

The House has fully supported the single market generally and, by approving the regulations implementing the third directives for both life and general insurance business, it has supported the single market for insurance in particular. It has also supported a regime of prudential regulation for insurance companies, in the interests of policyholders.

The Bill is good for consumers, for policyholders and for the industry. It is good for Britain because it will enable it to hold its place in the world insurance market. The Bill would further the cause of UK companies in the single market and their prudential supervision. I commend it to the House.

1.18 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): The House is grateful to the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) not only for presenting the Bill, but for the way in which he did it. He mentioned added security, smooth premiums and, interestingly, Japan and our insurance companies that are competing there. In all my briefings we have talked about Europe, especially France and Germany, but we have never talked about Japan. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned Lloyd's—I shall return to that in a moment—and he referred to competitive disadvantage. He has given us not only the outline of his Bill, but the reasons why he feels it should be passed by the House today.

As I said earlier to the Minister, victory has a thousand fathers and so, too, does a successful private Member's Bill. The Bill has the support of the Government and of the Opposition. The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North referred to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling). The Bill has the support of the Department of Trade and Industry, and of the Association of British Insurers, notwithstanding Lloyd's lukewarm approach, which is less vigorous than I would appreciate and would wish. It calls itself an innocent bystander, but says that, if the Bill is passed, it will take advantage of it. Does the Bill, however, have the support of the Treasury? That is the key to the debate and to the questions involved. Does it have the support of the Inland Revenue?

I imagine that the Bill is a framework. It will give powers to the DTI, but the big question is: how will the Inland Revenue and the Treasury view the Bill? I stand to be corrected, but I think that I am right in saying that, if the Bill passes into law and regulations are created by the DTI, they will be as dust if the Revenue and the Chancellor of the Exchequer are not satisfied with the scheme. I do not say for a moment that they will not encourage or approve the scheme, but they will need to be convinced that tax relief should be given on the claims equalisation reserves.

As I said, the Inland Revenue has its own rules in the United Kingdom. They allow carry-back of losses over a three-year period. That is not felt, however, to give insurance companies the same ability to deal with fluctuating results as our European competitors. As the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North said, the single market legislation that was passed was widely accepted in the House. There is general agreement that Europe should at least be a free trade area. If that is the view of many of our Euro-sceptic and Euro-rebel friends, they too would welcome today's legislation. We are all Europeans now, and we hear often enough that there should be a level playing field in relation to insurance, taxation and competition.

Only a few weeks ago, I stood in the centre circle at St. James' Park and looked down to one goal and then to the other goal. There was no sight of Eric Cantona on that occasion. I take credit for that. I had a look around but he was not there. There is no such thing as a level playing field. No football pitch is straight and the level playing field is a metaphorical myth that we like to perpetuate in the furtherance of any argument that we advance.

The insurance industry is telling us that, if the European insurance industry has claims equalisation reserves, this country should have them too. If they are good enough for the French and the Germans, they are good enough for us, and they are certainly good enough for our insurance industry.

Last July, the third non-life directive came into effect. United Kingdom companies are now in more direct competition with European insurance companies. The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North talked about competitive disadvantage. I am glad to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has joined us.

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

I always treat the idea of competitiveness with a certain dose of scepticism. Often in the past, competitiveness has been synonymous with unemployment, with jobs lost and with cuts. The burden of work then increases for people who stay in work on short-term contracts, so I am always a little worried when we talk about competitiveness.

I am not sure that we are in a position to compete with the French and Germans in the world of insurance at this stage. It is early for us to be in competition with them. I noted that Commercial Union recently bought out a French insurance company. It wishes to implant itself in that sector simply by buying a company, rather than by selling insurance.

Competitiveness is rather like a level playing field. We have to consider it and agree on it, but it is not necessarily the big argument, although I understand why the insurance industry pushes that view with the Inland Revenue and the Treasury in seeking to persuade them that it needs tax relief to become competitive. It is the buzz word at the moment. That is the buzz word of the moment and I hope that the Treasury and the Inland Revenue will accept it as such.

In his book "The View from No. 11", Lord Lawson said that Parliament—the same goes for the Executive—can do two things: it can legislate and it can create a fiscal framework. It can introduce tax relief and make tax adjustments. The Bill seeks to establish the necessary legislative framework and the fiscal framework will have to follow. The adjustment to the latter has been a long time coming and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) raised the matter in the Committees examining previous Finance Bills.

In his 1993 Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer accepted that there could be a case for claims equalisation reserves with tax reliefs. As has been said, there was a consultation document in July 1993; there have been consultations with the Inland Revenue, and certainly with the Department of Trade and Industry; and there will be a further consultation document in spring.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I have been listening carefully to my hon. Friend. If tax relief is being granted to insurance companies, the Exchequer will lose some revenue. Someone will have to make up for the lost tax, so the suggested intervention will result in the ordinary taxpayer paying more. As is the case with debt relief given to banks which write off irrecoverable debts, someone has to pick up the tab. How much money are we talking about? Has my hon. Friend got any figures?

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Of course, that also works in reverse, in that, if the Government are saying, as the Prime Minister did the other day, that they want to reduce income tax to 20 per cent., they might not accept this scheme which takes money from the Revenue. As my hon. Friend said, the crux of the matter is how much it will cost. It is why the Inland Revenue and the Treasury have not so far said that they will support the scheme. We shall have to sit down and discuss the pounds, shillings and pence, as we used to say before decimalisation, but we shall not do so in Committee because, if the Bill is granted a Second Reading today, its Committee stage will be short.

There have been various consultation exercises and new regulations are coming to provide a final opportunity for the industry and Parliament to examine all the issues. At the end of the day, we shall want to know the views of the Inland Revenue and the Treasury. It may be said:

"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small",

but certainly not as slowly as the mills of Whitehall. It has taken two years to get this far, and we are not yet out of the thicket of Whitehall legislation, procedures and bureaucracy. After a statutory framework, we are hoping for the smack of decisiveness and firm government. We hope that the Chancellor and the Inland Revenue will go along with these proposals.

Nevertheless, the Association of British Insurers is to be congratulated on taking the initiative and reviewing possible fiscal and other distortions in the industry arising from the creation of the single market. As the House may have perceived, the Inland Revenue has yet to be convinced. In an era when shareholders are avid for ever higher dividends, it might be helpful to insurance companies to create claims equalisation reserves. It might be helpful to take funds from the balance sheet where they appear as profits and transfer them across as reserves, thus reducing the amount that shareholders perceive as being available for their dividends.

Mr. Skinner: From the second part of what my hon. Friend has just said, can we assume that, if the Bill is passed, it will allow insurance companies to put large sums in their reserves to offset any hurricanes or whatever that result in large insurance claims? Is it the case that tax relief could not be introduced under the Bill, but could come later only if the Government decided to introduce it? The insurance companies, therefore, would be doing something of a technical nature. If the Government and the Inland Revenue agreed to tax relief, the insurance companies could benefit from it. In itself, the Bill is a mechanical exercise which enables insurance companies to be prepared if the Government and the Inland Revenue come to an agreement.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I almost said that this is the house that Jack built. It is actually the house that the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North has built. This is a small, three-clause Bill which will provide the framework within which the Department of Trade and Industry can put a house together. Whether that house is populated by claims equalisation reserves will then depend on the Treasury. This is not a finance Bill. In a sense, it is a harmonisation Bill which harmonises our legislation with that of France and Germany within the framework of the European Community where tax relief is allowed.

I was talking about shareholders and about their seeking ever higher dividends. I was talking about the advantage of taking what are now profits off the balance sheet and placing them into reserves. That would reduce the amount that shareholders perceived to be available for dividends, which would add to the stability of the industry.

The Bill may also help to reverse the trend in our business community for dividends to be the be all and end all of owning shares. Companies are destabilised and the amount available for research and development is reduced simply to keep the share price high and to keep the predator at bay. I am a great believer in the law of the

unforeseen consequence. If one of the unforeseen consequences of the Bill is that it reverses that trend, I welcome it.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend has referred three times to the fact that the Bill will bring us in line with the European Community. I am not a supporter of the Common Market. I know that many Labour Members have a different view; I am unreconstructed. I think that the Common Market is grinding to a halt. If anything stops in its tracks, the next movement is in reverse. That is what is happening to the Common Market.

Can the Bill stand on its own irrespective of what happens in France, Germany or any other country? In other words, it has nothing to do with the Community. Is my hon. Friend merely saying en passant that other countries in the Common Market have such legislation already? Can he assure me that the Bill has no European Community context?

Mr. Bell: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. I made a slight tactical error, because I sought to incite Euro-rebels and Euro-sceptics on the Conservative Benches. I signally failed to do that, although I managed to rouse a Euro-sceptic on my side. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend's point is right. The Bill is, in computer terms, stand-alone legislation. After completing its passage through the House, it will stand alone as a beneficial framework for the insurance industry.

I hate to go back to the weather forecaster who told us all that there would not be a hurricane, after which the hurricane came along and swept the roofs off our buildings. We sometimes have volatile weather conditions; we have hurricanes and unforeseen situations. The framework will enable insurance companies to set aside reserves for such situations. The technical details of the framework have been worked out by the Association of British Insurers, but are in line with what the Treasury perceives to be in the national interest.

I note, too, that the accumulated claims equalisation reserves will add to a company's solvency. I imagine—no doubt the Minister will be able to confirm it today—that any claim equalisation reserves would be in addition to the present solvency margin requirements, which are regularly scrutinised by the Department of Trade and Industry's division of insurance overseers.

In my opening remarks, I said that the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North mentioned Lloyd's and that the Bill had the support of Lloyd's, even though Lloyd's is not affected by its provisions. Lloyd's has its own special reserve fund available only to individual names. My slight criticism of Lloyd's earlier, which I wish to repeat, is that it should bestir itself somewhat to ensure that, in the event of there being a claims equalisation reserve framework, it is a part of that framework for its corporate capital providers. If the future of Lloyd's is to be underpinned by such corporations, it is essential that it has the same claims equalisation reserve framework with the same tax relief as insurance companies.

We should all be conscious of the contribution that Lloyd's has made to our national economy—some £16,000 million to the United Kingdom's invisible earnings since 1984. If we are back to level playing fields, to mythological metaphors, the level playing field should also cover Lloyd's corporate providers as well as the rest of the insurance industry.

I hope that I have convinced Conservative Members of our great support for this Bill and I hope that I have satisfied my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover that my heart and mind are in the right place.

1.36 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I shall begin by trying to give the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) some reassurances because he has raised one or two pertinent points, on which we need to comment. As I understand it, the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry, in consulting the Association of British Insurers about the provision of equalisation reserves, have made it clear—it was in the consultation document—that any tax relief would have to be financed by compensating charges elsewhere.

In other words, the Treasury is not looking at this issue in the light of giving away revenue to the insurance industry. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman that we are not talking about the corporate boardrooms of the City of London being wealthier as a consequence of the Bill and that there would be certain tax neutrality.

In addition, in any event, the Finance Act 1994 provided for the introduction of insurance premium tax in October. Now, all policyholders effectively have to pay 2.5 per cent. tax on their premiums. So the insurance industry is already contributing about £800 million of additional revenue to the Exchequer from that mechanism alone.

The only thing that my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) could have mentioned, in what I thought was a excellent presentation of the proposals—I do not say that disparagingly—was that policyholders will benefit if the Bill is passed. We are talking not so much about the ability of United Kingdom insurance companies, especially in the domestic market, to compete in international markets, although that is important in respect of international business, as I shall say in a moment, as about whether our insurance companies have the financial strength that they need to continue to provide insurance for our domestic market.

When we debated insurance premium tax, I well remember right hon. and hon. Members on the Labour Benches expressing concern that some cherry picking by insurers was already making it difficult for some people to get the insurance that they needed. The cost of insurance was undoubtedly a factor. If companies do not have the reserves that they require to continue to underwrite business, with the experience of bad losses, there is only one way in which they can recover money—to put up the premiums.

If companies have the reserves to meet their claims—and that is what the Bill is about—they do not have to raise their premiums by quite so much. I hope that that will help the hon. Member for Bolsover. I am glad that he is here and is taking an interest in the debate. If he were not here, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) would be the only Opposition Member present. The hon. Member for Middlesbrough has to be present, as he is the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman. He has a very clear understanding of these matters and much of what he said today made a lot of sense.

Mr. Skinner: The thing that intrigues me is that, every day of the week since this Tory Government came to power, I have been told—as the rest of the country has

[Mr. Skinner]

been told—that the only way to make things happen in the world of economics and finance is to allow the market to be totally unrestrained. We are told that the market will settle everything and that the Government cannot intervene. They can shut pits and do all sorts of things like that. The Government must not intervene.

However, here we have a gang of Tories in the House on a Friday who want the Government to intervene, on a fairly substantial scale, in the insurance market because the unrestrained market forces cannot resolve the problem for the Tories' insurance companies, many of which have Tory Members on their boards. The Tories are saying that they want the Government to intervene and to back them up. That is roughly why I find this whole thing very intriguing. From Monday to Thursday, the Government tell us that we should not intervene—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order.

Mr. Skinner: And now Madam Deputy Speaker is intervening.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker is intervening because interventions should, by their nature, be short. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was making a speech.

Mr. Greenway: It is not Back-Bench Tory Members who are seeking to intervene: it involves all parties. The Bill has all-party support. It certainly has the support of many people who no doubt will vote for the Labour party, as they have done in the past, who work in the insurance industry. Not everyone in the insurance industry votes for the Conservative party. Those people would be disappointed if they thought an important measure for the future of the industry in which they work did not have the support of all Opposition Members.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North on his success in the ballot and on choosing this important issue. The all-party insurance and financial services group, which I chair, has for almost five years taken a very close interest in this matter.

As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs is aware, we have made many representations to Ministers about the issue and that is partly why the working party was established and why the matter has been brought to the first hurdle of introducing the enabling legislation to allow the Department of Trade and Industry to require companies to make the reserves so that the scheme can be up and running.

The issue was seen initially as, and, as the hon. Member for Middlesbrough pointed out, remains essentially, a single market issue. However, that does not mean that we should underestimate the international dimension. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North referred to Japan. The international market based in London is extremely important and it will benefit greatly from the Bill.

However, as I have already said, there is a very important secondary objective, which is the need to preserve the strength of the insurance industry which, despite recent setbacks, is one of the United Kingdom's greatest success stories. It is very important in terms of jobs and invisible earnings.

London remains the world's pre-eminent insurance marketplace. United Kingdom invisible earnings from insurance were £4.6 billion in 1993. A very large part of that was accounted for by international business transacted in the London market. That is quite distinct from our domestic market, to which I have already alluded in trying to reassure the hon. Member for Bolsover.

It is important to recognise that about 60 per cent. of that market is accounted for by insurance and reinsurance companies, not Lloyd's. Lloyd's has about 40 per cent. I agree with the hon. Member for Middlesbrough that, if the Bill becomes an Act and such a scheme, which we all want, is created, it must apply to Lloyd's corporate capital. It would find it difficult to compete for the capital that it would need for the corporate market unless the scheme applied to it. I shall certainly encourage it to take a healthy interest in the matter.

To be fair to Lloyd's, it did not raise the issue. It is the companies which need those reserves. It is inconceivable that the Conservative Government, of all Governments, should not seek to support that important industry.

A further point about taxation, which I hope again will help the hon. Member for Bolsover, is that such a provision would mean more business, not less business, being transacted. The insurance industry contributes significantly to the Treasury's coffers. It is the old law of diminishing returns: if we do not help the industry to obtain business, the volume of business will reduce and it will pay less tax. In every respect, the measure will at least be self-financing and it is more than likely to help to contribute more revenue, not less, to the Exchequer.

I have worked in the insurance industry for 25 years. I declare that general interest. I work closely with brokers, but this is not really a broker issue. We are not seeking special favours or the introduction of arrangements that would give the United Kingdom a competitive advantage. On the contrary, we are seeking to ensure that the United Kingdom is not disadvantaged.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough made the good point that there is no such thing as a level playing field. He is right. One can make sure that the rules and regulations are the same, but there is one reason above all why the hon. Gentleman is right and why London will benefit from the measure, and it is that pre-eminent skills are based in London. The world's leading actuaries, underwriters, brokers, loss adjusters and so on are based in London. If taxation arrangements in London are on a fair and equitable basis with the rest of the world—that is not easy; we are talking about Europe—the unique advantage of London, from all its experience, will come into play. That is why the United Kingdom can win an even bigger share of that important market.

London is unique, for the reasons that I have stated. However, in recent years it has become more apparent that it is nonsense to treat the insurance business, particularly aspects which can involve catastrophic losses, as an annual profit and loss exercise for taxation purposes. An annual profit and loss period does not embrace the cycle of profit and loss on insurance. Catastrophes do not occur every year—if they did, they would not be catastrophes. By their very nature, they occur once every three, four or five years. The best examples in modern times are the dreadful winds that hit the south-east of England, in particular in 1987 and again in 1990.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North referred also to the position in Japan, which highlights how, for example, marine and aviation losses can accumulate. All of a sudden, there are two or three incidents and then nothing on the same scale for three, four or five years. It is too soon to tell, I understand, the UK market's exposure to what happened in that dreadful earthquake in Japan except from the television pictures that I saw of that horrific incident.

How fortunate we are in the United Kingdom that we have never experienced anything like that. The television pictures of Kobe harbour showed marine cargoes, and I bet that many of them were insured through the London market. A fair bit will be insured through Lloyd's, but, as the hon. Member for Bolsover pointed out, Lloyd's is not affected by the Bill.

That example shows the importance of ensuring the financial strength of the insurance industry so that it is able to meet claims and not put up premiums with swingeing effects following a knee-jerk reaction. Setting aside premium income to reserve in good years to meet liabilities in bad years—it is as simple as that. That is what the Bill is about.

The key question is whether that reserve should attract tax relief. I believe that it should. It certainly has tax relief in France and Germany, and that provides the single market dimension. We need the same arrangements because, as the single market of domestic business develops, it will provide greater opportunity for UK domestic insurers to penetrate the market on the continent. The disadvantage of having no tax relief on equalisation reserves would become obvious very quickly. We would see business not being written here, but written on the continent. It is important that we avoid that.

Aside from the single market issue, it is a matter of basic prudence. The prudential supervision of insurance is the Department of Trade and Industry's priority in the industry. It is important that companies receive the encouragement and the incentives which they need to create those adequate reserves, and tax relief is crucial to that.

I pay tribute to work that has been undertaken by the working party, and to the principles that it has established that there should be a scheme for claims for equalisation reserves to be focused. We know which classes of business are affected. The scheme must be valuable for insurers and reinsurers alike, it must be simple to operate and certain as to its operation, and it must be extremely transparent in terms of the taxation arrangements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North gave the good news to the House this afternoon that the Treasury seems now committed to agreeing to tax relief, subject, of course—this is understandable—to a proper scheme being agreed between the industry and the Treasury. We should back our insurance industry—one of our great success stories of the past—in the way in which we are proposing today to ensure that the years ahead are as glorious as the years behind.

1.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Jonathan Evans): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) on bringing the Bill to the House and on the competence and clarity with which he outlined what can be a complex matter. Although he may not have achieved all that he would have wished in terms of the understanding of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), I thought that—in dealing with matters as complex as this—my hon. Friend showed the competence that he has demonstrated since he first came to the House. He deserves those congratulations.

In deciding to introduce the Insurance Companies (Reserves) Bill, my hon. Friend has taken on a measure of considerable importance to the insurance industry. It is a very worthwhile and welcome Bill, and one which I believe—from the flavour of the debate—enjoys wide-ranging support on both sides of the House.

During his initial remarks, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) suggested that victory has a thousand fathers. If we are discussing parentage, I suppose part of the parentage of the measure might be ascribed to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). I am also pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), who also takes a particular interest in insurance matters.

As we have heard, the insurance industry has for some time sought the introduction of a scheme for establishing equalisation reserves. Industry leaders have made it clear to me that they regard this as a matter of great importance to their future competitiveness. I also welcome the measure as an addition to the regulatory options available to us.

I must make it clear to the hon. Member for Bolsover that the Government do not take the view that no law or regulation is necessary. The difference in approach between the Government and the hon. Gentleman is that we believe that when a law is passed it should be proportionate and should address and improve the market, rather than legislate in just about every area of the economy.

Mr. Skinner: The truth is that the Government brag that, when industries go to the wall, it is not the Government's job to intervene and pick them up. They pride themselves on that. There have been countless examples in the past 15 years, and 4 million people on the scrap heap without a job are the casualties. Thousands of firms every year go to the wall as a result of the Government's refusal to help. So I do not want any lectures from the Minister about the Government intervening just because this is an old pals' Bill with their friends in the insurance companies.

I am of the opinion that, instead of making those charges, the Minister should tell us how much exactly will be needed from the Government—from the taxpayer—to implement not only the proposals in the Bill but the tax set-offs that would apply if the Bill became law and the Treasury agreed to them. How much money are we talking about?

Mr. Evans: It was obviously an error to give way to the hon. Gentleman. He demonstrated in that intervention how much he fails to understand the approach of the Government in the same way as he fails to understand anything about the Bill, as it was outlined so competently by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North.

The insurance reserves should assist insurance companies in settling exceptional levels of claims in bad years from funds put aside in good years. Therefore, we are not talking about giving tax relief. If a scheme is

[Mr. Evans]

ultimately approved by the Treasury, it will involve tax deferred rather than tax relief. The Bill is an important first step towards establishing such a scheme.

I wish to clarify the Government's position on two specific matters. Then I shall draw on some of the matters that have been raised by hon. Members in the debate. While the purpose of the Bill is to enable the Secretary of State to require insurance companies to keep reserves against exceptional levels of claims, I must make it clear that the Bill does not and is not intended to cover the details of how the system of reserves ultimately would be established and operated. It is important to recognise that that is a matter for secondary legislation. I hope that the hon. Member for Bolsover is paying attention. It may be helpful to hon. Members if I say a little about the work that has already been done and about the Government's plans.

Although no final decisions have yet been taken on the details of the regulations which will be introduced if my hon. Friend's Bill is successful, officials in my Department and the Inland Revenue have been involved, as we have heard, with a working group led by the Association of British Insurers in carrying out a considerable amount of the preparatory work on a proposed scheme. The working group has already made certain recommendations about the details of the scheme and a report has been sent to Government and circulated to a wide cross-section of ABI members. I am pleased to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the ABI and its members and to thank them for the work that they have undertaken.

The insurance industry has generally declared its support for the working group's recommendations and it is now the Government's intention to issue a second consultation paper. In this, we will give details of a proposed scheme which will incorporate many of the industry's recommendations. We hope to issue the paper for consultation in the spring. We look forward to the representations that may be forthcoming from all parties in the House, including perhaps both sides of the Labour party. The industry and other interested parties will also have the opportunity to comment on the regulations. It is our intention to publish them in draft form before they are laid before Parliament.

Secondly, as we have heard so much during the debate, there is the matter of the tax treatment of such reserves. That is for Treasury Ministers to consider and any legislation would have to be included in a Finance Bill. My right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary has said that the Treasury will be prepared to consider tax relief for an acceptable scheme. Before any such scheme was introduced, however, we would want to ensure that it was acceptable to the industry, Treasury Ministers and the President of the Board of Trade. The taxation aspects would subsequently be subject to an affirmative vote in the House.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) had the courtesy to warn me that he intended to express his concern about the way in which the Department assesses companies' solvency and whether that would be affected in any way by the passage of this measure. I am happy to be able to tell him that we do not expect that system to be altered in any way. He will be aware that the solvency of companies is the subject of a Europe-wide review and the report is expected by 1997. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be somewhat reassured by that.

Finally, I thank the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North once again for his work on the Bill and I am grateful for the cross-party support that he has received. The Government welcome the Bill and intend to assist the hon. Gentleman in securing its safe passage. I am grateful to him for introducing the Bill and to the hon. Members who have spoken in support.

2.2 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I wanted to speak in this debate and to ask some serious questions because I find it odd that this Government, who have prided themselves on saying that the market should do the business and that they should not intervene, have decided to support the Bill, which was introduced by a Tory Member, and will allow insurance companies to set up special reserve funds for hurricanes and other acts of God that create a massive drain on their resources.

According to the Minister, the Government will finance those reserves by allowing tax relief in subsequent legislation. The Minister is shaking his head, but that was what he said: He said that the Government and the Inland Revenue would agree to allow tax relief on the funds set aside for special purposes.

I do not quarrel with insurance companies setting aside large reserve funds for the times when they might have difficulties, such as the 1987 hurricane, which ripped up many of the trees in Kent, in Kew and elsewhere. If they want to set aside money, in this unrestrained market, I should have thought that a Tory Government would say, "Go ahead, but don't call on us to reduce taxation, for the Chancellor of the Exchequer's benefit, to use for other purposes."

Mr. Heald: I must apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not adequately explaining about the tax relief in my opening speech. Tax relief is granted when such losses occur, but the reserve funds will mean that such relief is granted year on year. There is no question of granting more tax relief overall. It will simply mean deferring the relief and planning it better. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept my reassurance on that matter.

In London, 60,000 jobs depend on the insurance industry. The people who speak for those employees are telling me that their jobs depend on the Bill being enacted. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will also accept that.

Mr. Skinner: I would like to accept that. However, the hon. Gentleman is looking at it from an angle that is different from that of the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs. I asked his hon. Friend, who is speaking on behalf of the Government—unlike the hon. Gentleman—a question. If the funds are rolled over, there may not be a call on them—there is no call at present on the funds of the Exchequer. The reason I asked the Minister the question was to discover whether he could satisfy me that no extra funds would be needed.

He has refused to answer my question, so it seems that the Government know that the scheme will result in more money being set aside. Consequently, tax relief will be

greater and the Chancellor of the Exchequer will have to call on funds from somebody else in order to make up the shortfall.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): My recollection is that my hon. Friend the Minister replied to the hon. Gentleman's inquiry, but at that time the hon. Gentleman was too busy talking to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) to hear my hon. Friend's reply. The hon. Gentleman is trying to make a crisis out of a drama.

Mr. Skinner: I am concerned about those people who have to pay taxes in Britain. Tory Members are always saying that they are the taxpayer's champion. I want the Minister to get up and tell us specifically, without equivocation, whether—whatever new Treasury proposals are introduced, following the Bill's passage—there will be any call on public funds. I invite the Minister to say that there will be no expenditure. I know that no expenditure results from the Bill, but I am talking about subsequent negotiations that will result in tax relief over a number of years.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I had already said to the hon. Gentleman—I despair of him ever listening—that the scheme involves the deferral of tax. If, ultimately, the catastrophes do not occur, the funds will become subject to tax. We are talking about introducing order into catastrophe insurance. The issue does not involve the political contention that the hon. Gentleman is desperately scratching around for.

Mr. Skinner: It is significant that the Minister has still not answered the question. My question was simply whether there would be a call on public funds. He answers questions that I am not asking. People will note his refusal to answer a simple question.

In some years—perhaps not all—there will be a call on public funds that there would not otherwise be. The Government are intervening in the market so as to bail out insurance companies because they form part of the group that finances the Tory party. The Government probably want to cosset those companies in the run-up to the next general election because some of them have decided not to give the Tory party any money.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): My hon. Friend is making a valid point. He asks a clear question of the Minister. Earlier today, when we were discussing the Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Bill—a crucial measure that was supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House—we were told by the Minister of State that no Government help would be given towards setting up such centres and the salaries for supervisors. The Minister of State clearly told us that there would be no Government help and that the schemes would have to be self-financing. We were talking about the safety of young people. We all know of the tragedy of the four youngsters who lost their lives—we were told that the schemes, in that case, were to be self-financing. Now, my hon. Friend is simply asking the Minister to give the Government's position and state whether taxpayers' money will be involved.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend has demonstrated once again that, when it comes to helping good causes and people like those covered under the Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Bill—a measure designed to take account of the tragedies that can occur—the Government are not prepared to come up with the money.

By his refusal to tell us about the drain on public funds, the Minister has twice made the position clear. I am absolutely convinced that the Government know that, in future years, the amount held centrally by the Exchequer will be reduced as a result of negotiations which would take place after the Bill is passed. The net result of that would be that Joe Soap, the taxpayer, whom the Government are always talking about and asking for support, would finish up having to put his hand in his pocket to pay these insurance companies.

If insurance companies want to set up a reserve scheme, they should go ahead. I do not mind them saying, "Look here, there were hurricanes in 1987 and 1990 and we need to make sure that we can roll these over in an orderly fashion year on year instead of getting hit in one year." However, it is not right and proper that a Government who are constantly ramming it down our throats that companies have to stand on their own two feet without Government assistance are now doing this because of their friends in the insurance companies.

We should bear in mind that many Tory Members are connected with the boards of insurance companies, making money on the side. They have now introduced a different ethic. In other words, it is double standards. It is all right for their friends but not for anyone else.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Is not the clearest indication that there will be a call on public funds already provided in information supplied to us by the Government, although not by the Minister? With the Bill, there is a business compliance cost assessment. That is available in the Library, and it is published by the insurance department of the Department of Trade and Industry. The assessment states:

> "The insurance industry is of the opinion, provided the Inland Revenue permit tax relief on equalisation reserves, there should be considerable benefit UK competitiveness."

Knock-on arrangements by the Treasury are built into the cost compliance provision.

Mr. Skinner: There it is in a nutshell. My hon. Friend has been to the Library, which serves us well, and has found out part of the answer that the Minister refused to give us—that is, that the Inland Revenue is worried about the consequences of the Bill. It knows that it would cost money. That money should come from the insurance companies. They make large profits, so why are they calling upon the Inland Revenue, the taxpayer, to foot the bill when they are truly responsible for this new arrangement?

Mr. Cox: I have a copy of the Bill. In an intervention, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) spoke about the industry employing 60,000 people. As a London Member, I can tell the House that London certainly has some of the highest unemployment in the country. Therefore, irrespective of party, I will support anything that safeguards jobs. I have great sympathy for anyone who has lost possessions or property, but people in my constituency rarely write to me about that. However, they write to me about holiday insurance.

Will the Bill cover the continuing problems of people who, for a range of reasons, did not have a good holiday and whose claims were totally rejected by the insurance

[Mr. Cox]

companies? That is the sort of complaint that I get, especially during the spring and summer. Perhaps the Minister or the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West will comment on that.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention was too long. Perhaps he was not in the Chamber when I gave a warning about such abuse.

Mr. Skinner: The Bill is not about the cases to which my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) referred; it is about the people who run the insurance companies. No one should get the impression, even if some Tory Members try to give it, that because I oppose the Bill and am asking some serious questions, my action will adversely affect people who are insured with companies in Britain. The Bill will not bail out any of the people to whom my hon. Friend referred. It will not bail out anybody who has insurance with British companies.

The Bill is all about insurance companies saying to Tory Members and the Government, "We want a nice cosy arrangement. Forget about market forces; operate double standards and allow us to roll over the reserve funds in an orderly way." Of course, that would mean regulation. I am not against regulation; I am a member of a party that believes in intervention in the market. However, it is a bit rich that the very Tories who ram down our throats every day the belief that we cannot intervene because the Government do not have the money to do so—it is taxpayers' money—are then prepared to pass a Bill that will enable insurance companies to operate a nice little fiddle.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): The hon. Gentleman is trying to wreck the Bill. Does he realise that, if he does so, he will have on his conscience the fact that he is putting at risk not only 60,000 jobs in London, but 350,000 nationwide? Is it not sheer hypocrisy to try to crack the Bill when he should be safeguarding jobs?

Mr. Skinner: That is a bit rich coming from the hon. Lady, who last year had to apologise to the House for her actions in almost single-handedly—of course, the Minister helped—stopping the progress of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. She came to the House with what she purported to be her own questions, which turned out to have been written by the Government. Yet she accuses me of wrecking a Bill when all that I am doing is pointing out that the Government have double standards.

As I said earlier, the Bill will not affect a single insurance job. It will not affect a single policy. It is all about arranging things in favour of the bosses of the insurance companies so that they can get increased directors' pay and all the rest of it. Tory Members on the boards of insurance companies might make a bob or two.

I can tell the hon. Lady something else—the Bill is not just about insurance companies; it is a trailer for Lloyd's. The Government do not fool me. The Bill might seem to be innocuous, but it is all about setting a pattern so that eventually the Government or another Tory Back Bencher will come to the House and say, "Let's have another equalisation scheme, not for the insurance companies but for Lloyd's." Then they will say, "We had all-party support for the previous insurance Bill, so as a precedent has been set, we will do it again for Lloyd's." The 30 Tory Members of Parliament, many of whom would be declared bankrupt in other circumstances, would then be let off the hook by the taxpayer.

If the Bill is passed today, the Government will be able to say that the next one will be for Lloyd's so that they can bail out their friends.

Mr. Heald *rose—*

Mr. Skinner: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman because I believe that the Lloyd's briefing gives the game away and I shall refer to it in a moment.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that his colleague, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) called for equalisation reserves in 1993 in the Committee that considered the Finance Bill. Early in 1994, in an article in *Post Magazine: The Insurance Weekly*, he again called for those reserves. His Front-Bench team support them, and 350,000 jobs are at stake. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is trying to talk the Bill out. I call on him to support the people of Britain and people in the insurance industry.

Mr. Skinner: Once again, to put it on the record, let me make it clear that, in relation to the Bill, no jobs are at stake for the people who work for insurance companies. What my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) said in Committee was his business. Everyone answers for themselves in here. This is a private Member's day.

The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North gave the impression that, somehow or other, he introduced the Bill at the Government's behest. This is a Friday. Has he forgotten that? This is a day when Back Benchers introduce their own legislation. The hon. Gentleman has introduced legislation to suit his Government.

Mr. Heald: And the Front-Bench spokesman of the Labour party.

Mr. Skinner *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It may be a private Member's day, but the rules still appertain.

Mr. Skinner: Absolutely right. If my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Central thought in Committee that it might be a decent idea to introduce equalisation reserves, that was his business. The Bill is a trailer for Lloyd's. Why has Lloyd's sent a document around that makes it clear it supports the Bill because it is

"thought likely a tax deduction will follow."

Those are not my words; they are the words of Lloyd's. It is clear that Lloyd's has an interest in the Bill.

Lloyd's says that the Bill has no direct effect on it but it takes an interest in the developments

"in the context of its corporate capital providers. In the future, Lloyd's will be seeking to assess how any arrangement ultimately adopted by the insurance companies might be adapted to ensure parity for its corporate vehicles."

There it is. The cat is out of the bag. It is not just about the insurance companies. It is about the fact that Lloyd's has realised that a hole in the fence exists which it can eventually go through to resolve some of its problems.

Everyone knows that Lloyd's has been badly hit over the years. The result is that many Tory Members and others have lost significant amounts of money. For many

years, there has been a campaign in the House to get the Government—the taxpayer—to foot the bill for the gamblers at Lloyd's.

Lloyd's is the posh gambling den—that is all it is. It is not like Ladbrokes, but the same principle is involved. People do not bet on horses at Lloyd's; they bet on disasters. Sometimes they have to pay out more than they expect. Many Conservative Members and many other people in Britain who are gamblers at Lloyd's lost large amounts of money. They are not like the people who go to Ladbrokes, who know that they have lost when they lose. The Lloyd's gamblers want the money back. They have decided to gamble.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Bill does not deal with Lloyd's. He must address himself more closely to the Bill.

Mr. Skinner: I tried to explain earlier that I did not think that the Bill was about Lloyd's until I got hold of the document. I then realised it had a big interest. It has decided to issue the briefing to Members of Parliament. It says that the Bill is not a bad idea, that it should be passed and that it will benefit Lloyd's if it is passed. It states:

> "In the future, Lloyd's will be seeking to assess how any arrangement ultimately adopted by the insurance companies might be adapted to ensure parity for its corporate vehicles."

It seems that Lloyd's has realised the opportunity of using the Bill to move in and to call on the Government to give it the same sort of treatment as other insurance companies that are affected by the Bill.

Mr. Barnes: Is there not a sense in which the briefing shows that Lloyd's is only one of the interests involved? The assessment compliance shows that it is the insurance industry in general—of which Lloyd's is only one example—which is pressing for these measures and which clearly has support from trade and industry in saying that there will be knock-on consequences in respect of tax relief.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Some years ago, the Government decided to write off the banks' bad debts but they do not write off the bad debts of millions of ordinary people in Britain. Nearly every family has debts, but they do not have the opportunity to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to write them off because Aunt Annie will not pay them. However, when the banks ask for their bad debts to be written off and set against tax relief, the Government say yes. It has cost the British taxpayer £5,000 million over 10 years to bail out the banks, and the same principle is at work here.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: This grotesque display of ignorance and prejudice would be amusing if it did not put so many jobs at risk. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will apologise to all my constituents who will be made redundant because of his blind stupidity this afternoon.

Mr. Skinner: I know that Tory Members do not like what I am saying—I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman might have to declare an interest—but no jobs are at risk. In any event, the Tories have a cheek talking about jobs being put at risk when they have closed the shipyards and nearly every pit in the country. There are 4 million people out of a job, even taking into account the fiddled figures, yet the Tories have the cheek to claim that they are worried that some insurance jobs might be put at risk.

The Bill has nothing to do with jobs. If anyone is stupid it is the hon. Gentleman, who does not understand what this is all about. The Bill is a trailer to enable Lloyd's to offset some of its debts and make taxpayers pick up the tab later. That is one reason why I oppose the Bill. I am not satisfied with the Government's answers. I have asked the Minister two or three times to stand up and say that under no circumstances will there be a call on public funds when the Inland Revenue and the Government decide to roll over the reserves in respect of tax relief. He has not answered.

I understand what the Bill is all about. It is not about jobs but about looking after the directors of insurance companies, many of which are represented on the Tory Benches. I have not heard any Tories declare an interest—perhaps they do not have any—but it is odd that the Government are always looking after insurance companies and banks and now want to look after Lloyd's. Why? Because Lloyd's is their friend. The Government then accuse us of standing up for the workers, the real creators of wealth in Britain.

Mr. Barnes: It is doubtful whether the Bill is an attempt to deal with catastrophes. Catastrophes, some caused by the weather, occur regularly in this country—for example, recently in Bradford. If there were a genuine attempt to help in this respect, would not the Bill be linked to, for example, the Bellwin rules and at what point they are triggered so as to provide money to local authorities and others to help in such cases?

Mr. Skinner: Millions of people are affected by tragedies and not bailed out. In the past two days, some of my constituents have had their electricity supply cut because of the snow, but the Government are not concerned about them. They are concerned only about looking after their friends. I call again on the Minister to stand up and to tell us whether the Bill will involve a call on public funds. Will he answer yes or no?

Mr. Heald: I do not think that I need to say anything further at this stage.

2.29 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): A number of questions need to be answered. There are some peculiarities in the document to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) referred which should be fully pursued. It is interesting that, although there are so many private Members' Bills on the Order Paper today, some of which have not been reached, this Bill is the only one that applies to Northern Ireland. Generally, I am all for measures being applied to Northern Ireland. I should like to know, however, why in this case—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 3 February.

Mr. John Greenway: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) said that no Conservative Member had declared his interest. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, were in the Chair when I declared my interest. I also declare that what

[Mr. John Greenway]

we have just seen is the true face of the Labour party. The Leader of the Opposition should not be in Leeds trying to persuade people that the Labour party has really changed.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members will be aware that it is the responsibility of the individual Member concerned to declare an interest, if there is one. In the absence of such a declaration, one must suppose that no such interest exists.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have been in the Chamber since 9.30 am so that I could support the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald)—not because I have any involvement in the insurance industry, but because I want to protect the jobs of my constituents who work in the insurance industry. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) deliberately to talk out a Bill that is supported by his own Front-Bench spokesman and by everyone else in the House today?

Madam Deputy Speaker: If the hon. Member for Bolsover had not been in order, I would have intervened.

CHARITIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 February.

HOME RULE (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 17 February.

WATER CHARGES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): On behalf of the hon. Member concerned, Friday 3 February.

CHANNEL TUNNEL RAIL LINK BILL

Ordered,

That Mr. Jamie Cann, Mr. Den Dover, Sir Anthony Durant, Glenda Jackson and Mr. David Tredinnick be members of the Select Committee on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 1st February, the Speaker shall not later than Ten o'clock put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Gummer relating to Local Government Finance; and those Questions may be decided after the expiry of the time for opposed business.

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 2nd February, the Speaker shall not later than Seven o'clock put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Lilley relating to the draft Social Security (Incapacity Benefit) (Transitional) and (Incapacity for Work) (General) Regulations 1994.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

SPECIAL STANDING COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That, during its consideration of the Children (Scotland) Bill, the Special Standing Committee may meet between the hours of one o'clock and half-past three o'clock in the afternoon.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

A13

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

2.32 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to discuss in the House the fate of the A13, a major highway. I declare an interest. I have the dubious pleasure of driving up and down this very congested road every time I visit my constituency.

I apologise for the absence of my hon. Friends the Members for Basildon (Mr. Amess), for Rochford (Dr. Clark), for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), all of whom would have loved to be here this afternoon because their constituencies are equally affected by this important road. They had prior engagements in their constituencies, but they are, of course, here with us in spirit. They all agreed that, with my competence and the Minister's tolerance, we would be able to sort the matter out amicably between us.

I seem to have spent half my life in Parliament talking about transport problems in south Essex. There is the infamous London, Tilbury and Southend railway, which we nominated as the misery line. In the winter, other railways are held up by leaves on the line. The LTS is the only line that used to get held up by dead sheep on the line, which frequently caused enormous inconvenience to constituents in the area, enormous numbers of whom come up to London to work. That line, of course, has been well taken care of by the Government, who generously put £50 million into the signalling, as I recall. We very much hope that the line will soon be taken on by the private sector as one of the first of the new privatised railway lines.

There is an awful stretch of the Mile End road where the A13 comes into central London, especially between the Blind Beggar and the Brown Bear; two famous, or infamous, pubs. Again, the Minister heard our cry. Whereas before it was reduced to two narrow lanes with a street market on either side and parking and double parking at all times of the rush hour, the Minister has sensibly instituted legislation, or whatever the proceedings are, to put double red lines along that road, which will enormously improve the journey out of London for people making for the M11 and the M25, as well as the A12 and the A13. We are looking forward to those improvements.

Now to the A13 itself. I was very dismayed indeed to see that the Department of Transport, which had raised all our hopes to believing that this stretch of road was about to be put right, has now told us that it is to put on hold a part of that work—the bit between Wennington and Mar Dyke, which would link the road to the M25.

This new stretch of the A13 is being constructed in three parts. Incredibly enough, the middle part of that road is being built now, but the two bits which connect it to London at one end and to the M25 at the other are likely to be delayed, as I understand it. That is why I have taken the opportunity to bring the Minister to the House to explain that to my constituents, who are extremely annoyed and upset. That little bit of road in the middle will be like one of those old Essex barges that we used to put the criminals in, but without moorings. It will be bobbing about in the middle of the marshes where nobody can get at it or use it. I cannot think of anything more foolish.

So, like Pip, here I am with my great expectations. For many years, we have felt that it was time that Mr. Magwich, our benefactor, told us how he would improve matters for the people who live in the vicinity of the Essex marshes and want that road improved.

We are all aware and I know that the Department is aware that the present A13 is totally incapable of coping with the demands of the traffic using it. For a large stretch, it is nothing more than a country road, with two lanes of traffic—one up, one down—yet it carries one of the most enormous amounts of traffic in the country.

Ford motor company at Dagenham uses it. Ford's is an enormous organisation, as we know. It employs about 35,000 people, and those people rely on Ford's having good access to transport in and out of its area. I know that Ford's has talked from time to time about whether there is a need to relocate its premises simply because of the problem of getting its great trailer lorries, full of new vehicles, out on to the road and around the country.

The Tilbury docks, which are close to the A13, feed an enormous number of trailer lorries, carrying great big containers full of products all over the country. They are huge lorries and there they are, trailing along behind the Ford trailers. Also in that part of the world, there are many tips for rubbish from London, so there are great big lorries with skips on their backs on the road too.

Those lorries, which incidentally distribute quite a lot of rubbish along the side of the road and make it one of the least attractive areas, are on their way to an area I have discussed in this House before: Mucking Flats, a name many motorists can be heard muttering as they are stuck behind those lorries. The journey into and out of London is made almost impossible because, almost from one end to the other, there are trails of gigantic lorries up and down that stretch of the motorway.

I have yet to mention Shell Haven, the location of the two largest oil refineries—for Mobil and Shell—in the country, which are both in my constituency. Those companies send huge oil tankers up the road. One can see the picture in one's mind's eye—a gigantic lorry with a container from Tilbury docks, followed by a Ford trailer with ten motor cars, followed by an enormous lorry carrying skips full or rubbish on its way from London, followed by a gigantic lorry carrying petrol or oil. There are processions of these lorries along the A13. I have sometimes followed a line of 50 lorries along that road. No other road in Britain is as heavily congested as that.

In addition to that, many people in Southend, Billericay and Thurrock use the road because the railway line has been so poor in the past. Many coaches carry commuters out in the mornings and back at night. If I am painting an horrendous picture of that road, I promise the House that I am not exaggerating in the slightest.

Lakeside is one of the most widely used shopping areas in the country and Lakeside is just off the A13. On Sundays, the world and his wife come to Lakeside. They come from Kent in great hordes across the bridge and they cross the river through the tunnel. They come from London and they come from Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridge and Oxford. It seems that the whole country comes down to Billericay and Thurrock to use Lakeside. On Sundays, when we might expect a rest from the traffic on the A13

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

so that we can nip around quickly, we run into all that traffic. The traffic is almost worse on a Sunday now than it is in the week.

The A13 is a crucial link and a crucial part of the economy of our country and it handles enormous volumes of traffic. If ever a roadway needed to be built in a hurry, this is it. I hesitate to suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London that he might get a bit of money from the European Community for all this.

I take my holidays in the south of Portugal. In the past two years, the Portuguese have built a road from Faro practically to the end of the west point in Portugal, Cape St. Vincent. They built that huge stretch of road in two years with European money. We have been waiting since 1964 for our piece of road. Although it goes against everything I believe in, if the Minister is short of money, perhaps he should go to Europe cap in hand and see what he can get out of them; anything to get the road built.

The population of Essex has increased enormously in the past few years. As it is such a vibrant area with lots of jobs, thanks to the Government's economic policies which keep Essex in very good heart, we need to increase road provision generally in Essex, because an awful lot more people have moved in. In the past two decades, the population has increased by about 50 per cent. To illustrate that point, after the war there was only one Member of Parliament for the whole of the area, but there are now nine. That shows how much the population has increased. However, we still have this old two-lane-wide country road to service those people and their needs.

We do not need to persuade the Department of Transport because it carried out a study in 1990. It said:

"traffic flows, between 25,000 and 50,000 vehicles per day, and a very high commercial vehicle content"

used that road. It stated that, unless work begins soon, there is little doubt that the increase in traffic wishing to use this piece of roadway will cause grave deterioration in conditions, not only along the trunk road, but also on those routes which are perceived by drivers as a way of avoiding the A13. That involves drivers nipping around the back streets and disturbing residential areas. The people of Essex have had to cope with the problem for much too long.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister because the existing improvements incorporate plans to minimise the impact on the environment. In fact, the new piece of road goes through land which is not used for anything because it is reckoned to be industrially polluted. We are not disturbing the environment by building the road. There are practically no objectors to it. That must be a miracle in this country because, if one wants to build a new road, one can reckon on 10 years of people sitting in trees to try to stop the road being built. There are no trees in Essex, so no problem. The Minister has carte blanche from the environmental lobby. Even the greens are on our side for a change.

By moving the road into that part of the world, we are improving the air quality. All those horrid exhaust pipes, which I hope we will clean up one day, will squirt out their noxious gases down in the Essex marshes, where there are probably a few wild birds to disturb, but apart from that they will cause no disturbance. There will be no cyclists to get in the way, and so on. It is a very important road.

My hon. Friend the Minister will be aware of all those arguments. I know that he is enormously sympathetic. I have the greatest admiration for the way in which he has taken on board other complaints that we have made, particularly, as I have said, about the Mile End road and other parts of the area. The improvements that we need, which have been on the drawing board since 1964, are absolutely essential.

The Department report asserts:

"The benefits of the proposals . . . reflect the Government's policies"

for the improvement of the economy as well as taking vehicles off congested roads. I could not possibly have said it better. I might have more sympathy with the Department if the plans had come up against obstinate local resistance, but, as I have said, there is none. No resistance exists; the road is essential; the plans have been laid; and we were looking forward to the second part of the road starting this year. We then received the awful news that the project was being put back.

In February, the Department announced that, despite cuts in work on the Wennington to Mar Dyke improvement, which is the piece that will link it to the M25, it would begin in 1994-95. I much regret to say that that urgent work, which has brought me here today to discuss the matter, is absolutely vital. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to give all those involved in making the decision a good talking to and a flea in their ear, because there is not a more deserving section of the country or of our roadways that needs his attention. I look forward to his having an opportunity to reassure me that, after all, my plea has made him change his mind and that that bit of roadway will be started straight away.

2.46 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) for introducing the debate, because it gives me a chance to record the present position with regard to the A13 between Dagenham and Mar Dyke.

I am not terribly good on Dickens, but I am probably right in saying that Mr. Magwich possessed a substantial criminal record. I hope that my hon. Friend will not mind, therefore, if I am less than enthusiastic about the appellation. However, this is not the first time that that has happened to me. Not long ago, I launched a vessel on the Thames called the Ebenezer Scrooge. There were those who were unkind enough to interpret that as a description of the Government's economic policy. I pointed out to them, of course, that Scrooge saw the light at Christmas and turned out to be a very nice chap after all.

Who knows, if we can use Dickens as our base, there may be hope for us all in what I agree with my hon. Friend it is an important matter. Its importance is reflected in the representations that I have also had from my hon. Friends the Members for Rochford (Dr. Clark), for Basildon (Mr. Amess), for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) and for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire). All of them have spoken to me about that road.

I hope that my hon. Friend, therefore, will allow me to address one or two points about transport needs in south Essex generally. She rightly said that it is of great interest to all of us. I say "us" because I have the honour to represent an Essex constituency. Incidentally, my hon.

Friend is right about the London, Tilbury and Southend line. It is no longer a misery line. It has been hugely improved. I look forward to the challenges and opportunities of privatisation, a matter on which my hon. Friend and I strongly agree.

In that context, one of the things that my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford said to me only yesterday was that we always seem to have been the poor cousins. He made the point—my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay also mentioned it—that, whereas from every other point of the compass the roads into London tend to be substantial dual carriageways, for an awful lot of its length the A13 is a single carriageway. I know that myself because my excellent constituency secretary Tricia Gurnett lives in Grays, and therefore I frequently have cause to sit behind Ford trucks, waste trucks and so on in the endless line which my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay described. I have every sympathy with her predicament.

Therefore, I shall make some things clear and put them on the record. In her letter to the Secretary of State immediately she learned of the settlement my hon. Friend started by saying that the Government "absolutely cannot" abandon the extension of the A13. That was in her usual graphic style. Let us be quite clear—the A13 is not being abandoned. The schemes are there, and they are important. We are talking about the phasing of the schemes, and that is a point to which I shall return.

Bluntly, there is no easy answer. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be the first to recognise—she has constantly preached the message herself—that government is often a process of making some hard choices. She and I would agree that, in terms of the Government's macro-economic policy, the most important thing is to make sure that we reduce the burden of taxation on business. In attempting to do that, the most important thing is to control Government spending. From the little experience which I have of Government, I have to say that controlling Government spending is never going to be easy.

Churchill talked about everyone believing in reductions in general, and expenditure in particular. The transport analogy to that is, in my experience, that every hon. Member believes in abandoning the roads programme except in his own constituency, where there always happens to be a scheme of absolutely superlative quality.

I shall not disguise from my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay that none of the decisions that the Secretary of State was obliged to make around the time of the annual settlement was easy. The A13 was not the only scheme that we were not able to take forward at a pace that we would have liked. I say genuinely to my hon. Friend that the A13 is a scheme to which we attach a great deal of importance.

I shall say a word on the other schemes in Essex which concern my hon. Friend and her colleagues. The A130 is one such scheme, and again many people in south Essex are extremely concerned about it. The council has put in bids in each of its last three transport policy and programme submissions for the A130—a route that crosses the A13, linking Canvey island with Chelmsford and the A12. It is a very large scheme. Stage 1 is estimated to cost some £44 million and the whole project amounts to more than £100 million.

That makes it a daunting scheme and, bluntly, one which—in terms of financing a new project of this size from the local transport resource—is very difficult to see happening in the immediate future. It might be better to consider the A130 as a potential trunk road, in view of the strategic importance that Essex rightly bestows on it. I have asked for that proposition to be pursued. We must not get caught in a bureaucratic bind in which it is said that the A130 is not a trunk road, so it must be financed from the local settlement, but as it costs more than £100 million, it is too much for the local settlement, so it is constantly deferred out of the local settlement itself. We must break that administrative log-jam, and I am certainly keen to ensure that we do what we can, although the project still represents a great deal of money.

The A120 is a scheme which is of considerable importance to hon. Members in that area. That is the road that copes with the pressure from Stansted and brings relief to local communities. It is being developed by Essex with the aid of a 100 per cent. grant from my Department. We hope to republish the orders after they are reviewed later this year. Once the statutory procedures are completed, construction can begin as soon as funds are available. We understand how disappointed people are about the delay, but the county council—as the developing authority—will have to decide how best to proceed.

My hon. Friend mentioned Lakeside. As she knows, the Highways Agency has let a commission to look at the improvement of capacity of the M25 junction 30 with the A13 and the M25 junction 31. This includes the second stage of the Lakeside development A13 link roads funded by the developers, who have entered into a formal agreement with the Department for this purpose. That would have the effect of increasing the capacity of the A13 to improve access from the shopping centre and from the M25. Various options will be investigated before the proposals are published at a public consultation in about 12 months.

I shall not narrate the points that my hon. Friend made about the importance of the A13 trunk road except to say that it is, indeed, a corridor which provides one of the main opportunity areas around London for expansion and new jobs. The draft Thames gateway planning framework, which was published last September, identified a number of major development sites on the north bank of the Thames. As well as the Royal docks, they include the former Beckton gasworks, Barking reach, Rainham marshes and the Grays waterfront. Accessibility is one of the major constraints in attracting investment into these large sites. So we see the A13 improvement as important in that context.

It is also simply one of the most important radial routes into London from the east. It will provide a fast, safe road from docklands to the M25. It is a vital transport link to the developments which have already taken place or are in hand. My hon. Friend and I are familiar with some of them, but there will be benefits to the communities of Dagenham, Rainham, Purfleet, Mar Dyke and others further to the east.

So the issue is how the scheme is being taken forward. The history of it so far is, as my hon. Friend suggests, that there are three sections. They are Thames avenue to Heathway, Heathway to Wennington and Wennington to Mar Dyke, running from west to east. The schemes for the improvement of the Heathway to Wennington to Mar Dyke section of the A13 were first published in 1988. New orders for dual three-lane carriageways were published in March-April 1990. The proposals were then

[Mr. Steve Norris]

complicated by the need to take into account development proposals at Rainham marshes, but the developer has since withdrawn the plans. However, the local urban development plan retains the same intention for the area.

The effect of the new road on the marshes was fully discussed at the public inquiry and the decision to proceed was made in the light of the information arising from that discussion. A public exhibition took place in June 1994, to which the local Members of Parliament and local councillors were invited. The exhibition explained to local people how the construction activities would progress.

My hon. Friend was right to say that the proposals had generally been supported throughout the statutory procedures. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) was consistent in reminding me of the need for the scheme and its importance to the national and local economy. Local authorities are generally in favour of the proposals, as are the majority of local residents and residents' associations.

The scheme presents an opportunity for environmental improvements. Ecologically, the marshes are changing in character since the construction of the sea defences along the Thames estuary. Salt water no longer floods the marshes, and fresh water draining into the river is gradually flushing out the remaining saline water. In the absence of salt water, the salt marsh will continue to dry out. That will have some effect on nature conservation interests, but there will be considerable opportunity for creating habitats for birds, plants and so on. Our proposed mitigation measures will, in the long term, be beneficial to the ecology of the area.

As to the scheme, and the points that my hon. Friend has raised, we have made a good start and construction is in hand on two contracts. I want to make this point clear, because my hon. Friend might have been under a misapprehension. Without meaning to sound patronising, the schemes are almost impenetrably complex to those who do not have to live with them every day.

In fact, two schemes are up and running now. The first is being undertaken by AMEC Civil Engineering Ltd. It is an £11.8 million scheme for work including the relocation of warehouse and storage facilities at Ford's, the construction of a new water treatment plant by the River Beam and the construction of access roads and two trial embankments. Work started in February 1994 and will be completed in the spring.

The second contract was awarded in February 1994—it is a £106.9 million contract for the construction of 2.8 miles of new three-lane dual carriageway between Thames avenue, Dagenham and London road, Wennington, which will cross Rainham creek and Rainham and Wennington marshes. The work started in March 1994, is not affected by the recent settlement and is expected to be completed—just as the sign boards say—in 1997.

Two contracts remain, to which we are not committed in this year's settlement, but they remain very important to us. One is for 1.7 miles of main carriageway works between Heathway and Thames avenue, with an estimated cost of £86.9 million. The scheme will provide a full interchange at Choats Manor way and pass through the Ford motor works to connect with the interchange now being provided at Manor way. I should like to thank Ford's for its tremendous co-operation. The company has had to integrate with us in all of the preliminary works on this important project and has been exemplary.

The other remaining contract is for two miles of main carriageway works between a new interchange at London road, Wennington and the M25, at an estimated cost of £26.5 million. Both remaining contracts are priority 1 in the national road programme. They remain a high priority, and work will start on them as soon as funds are available. That is a form of words to which we are accustomed in the Department, but I hope that my hon. Friend and all those hon. Members who read this debate will gain some reassurance from them.

The scheme is up and running. More than £100 million is already committed to it, work is under way and none of it is affected by the difficult settlement that we have had to make this year—a difficult settlement in which many of the projects that people prized had to be put on hold, at least temporarily.

I hope that I have demonstrated to my hon. Friend that, despite that slight interruption in what might have been an ideal timetable for the scheme, the Department appreciates its importance for all the people of south-west Essex, including those whom my hon. Friend represents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 30 January 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Competitive Sports

1. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he is taking to encourage competitive sports among young people.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): A priority of my current proposals for restructuring the Sports Council is to ensure that sports governing bodies develop and implement structured programmes for young people. My Department and the Department for Education are also looking at a number of other initiatives to ensure that young people take part in competitive sports in schools, and an announcement will be made in due course.

Mr. Marshall: Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the English cricketers on their magnificent victory, and wish the English rugby players every luck on Saturday so that they can show that they are good Europeans by trouncing the French? Does he agree that the message would be even better if in primary schools a greater emphasis was placed on competitive sports instead of on sports such as aerobics?

Mr. Sproat: I certainly echo my hon. Friend's congratulations to the England team; it was a magnificent performance. On the question of competitive sports in schools, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education are currently working together to produce what I hope will be some happy proposals.

Mr. Maxton: Does the Minister agree that the best place to encourage sport of all sorts—whether competitive or not—is within the schools, and that that can be done only by mobilising the enthusiasm, expertise and time of teachers? Does he agree, however, that the time when teachers could be exploited to take part and do those things in their own time, without being paid, has long gone, and that therefore he must look at a structure that will ensure that they are properly paid for the work that they do?

Mr. Sproat: Yes, I certainly agree that the best place for young people to learn is in schools, and I certainly agree that the co-operation and enthusiasm of teachers is extremely important—in fact, it is absolutely essential. As far as payment is concerned, that is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education.

Mr. David Evans: The Minister knows very well that the lot opposite do not believe in competition in anything, whether it is public utilities or school sports days. Can the Minister assure me that we will not have competition in volleyball and other sports like that, but real competition in football, cricket and rugby, so that we might build on the success that we had in cricket this very day?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. It is quite interesting to consider that, of the schools attended by the England team, in Adelaide this week, half of them no longer play any cricket at all—it may be more; I will have to check that. My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the importance of proper competitive games in schools.

Disabled People (Arts)

2. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions he has had with the Yorkshire and Humberside regional arts board about improving arts opportunities and facilities for the disabled.

Mr. Sproat: The Government are committed to access to the arts for people with disabilities—as members of audiences, as performers and as employees. My Department works with the Arts Council in pursuit of that objective and the council liaises closely with individual regional arts boards.

Mr. Rooney: I thank the Minister for that reply, but does not he consider the work of Access for Disabled People to Arts Premises Today as extremely important and very good value for money? In those terms, does he agree that its grant of £43,000 last year was miserable?

Mr. Sproat: I agree that the work of the ADAPT trust is extremely important. Its grant last year went up by 10 per cent., which is something for which we should all be grateful.

Mr. Chris Smith: The Minister cannot be proud, however, of the fact that many arts facilities in Yorkshire, Humberside and elsewhere are not, as yet, fully accessible to disabled people. Nor can he be proud of the fact that the disability unit within the Arts Council was ended last year, as a direct result of Government cuts. Will he now give a guarantee that when the ADAPT grant comes up for renewal in June of this year, it will at the very least be kept at this year's level?

Mr. Sproat: I look forward to hearing what the various members of the trust have to say about the grant; we shall consider that on its merits. What the Arts Council did with its unit was entirely a matter for the council itself. It decided that, instead of one unit examining the issue of disability in the arts, all its departments should consider the issue. That is what is now happening, and I think it a very sensible way to proceed.

Press Regulation

3. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he proposes to publish his White Paper on the regulation of the press.

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The White Paper on privacy and media intrusion will be published when we have completed our consideration of the issues raised by the proposed criminal and civil remedies.

Sir David Knox: I commend my right hon. Friend's caution, but does he not think that the time has come for the White Paper to be published, especially in view of the low standards currently applied by many newspapers?

Mr. Dorrell: I certainly agree that the time for consideration must be drawing to a close. No purpose is served by indefinite delay, and I very much hope that we shall be able to present proposals in the not too distant future.

Mr. Soley: Is the Secretary of State saying that we really have reached the stage of drinking-up time in the last chance saloon?

Mr. Dorrell: No; I am saying that we are thinking about it.

Mr. Jessel: May I remind my right hon. Friend that, when the Select Committee on National Heritage considered privacy and the media two years ago, the Lord Chancellor personally gave evidence to the Committee and said that we should recommend the appointment of a press ombudsman?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend mentions one of many current proposals. As a member of the Select Committee, he will know that many ways of improving the performance of the press in respecting individuals' right to privacy have been suggested. It is not a matter of controversy in the media; indeed, it is written into the Press Complaints Commission code. The question is how that undertaking can be given more tangible form.

Disabled People (Access)

4. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to meet groups representing disabled people in the near future to discuss access to buildings.

Mr. Dorrell: Ministers in my Department meet groups representing disabled people regularly. The most recent such meeting was between my noble Friend Lord Astor and the Holiday Care Service on 25 January. The Government's White Paper, "Ending Discrimination against Disabled People", makes it clear that disabled people will be consulted on the detailed implementation of its proposals. My Department will play an active part in that consultation process.

Ms Lynne: Is the Minister aware that access means not only the provision of ramps but the availability of information in Braille, audio descriptions and allowing people to take guide dogs to arts venues? Is he aware that training and employment opportunities in the arts for disabled people are also important? Does he agree that the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill is woefully inadequate in all those contexts?

Mr. Dorrell: I agreed with everything that the hon. Lady said until the last sentence. I do not agree that the Government's Bill is inadequate in dealing with the issues that she has correctly raised. She is right to emphasise that a disability policy in the area for which I am responsible must consider the rights of both employees and potential audiences; it must consider all the ways in which disabled people come into contact with sport, the arts and the national heritage. That is my Department's commitment.

Mr. Corbett: Is the Secretary of State aware of what some theatres, galleries and museums in London have done to provide tape guides, Braille signs and audio aids? Does he accept that, none the less, access to buildings, performances and exhibitions remains inadequate? Does he know, for example, that six out of 10 drama schools have no physical access for people with disabilities, and that some 40-odd colleges are little better in that regard?

What will the Secretary of State do to help provide more cash for organisation such as ADAPT and the arts and sports councils to end discrimination against people with disabilities? Will he also monitor progress made on access with the money allocated to good causes from the national lottery?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman rightly mentioned progress made by the museums sector in London. He might also have mentioned progress made by the national museums sector in the north-west. Museums and galleries on Merseyside, which are part of that sector, have set up a disability access group to implement priorities there, and the museum of science and industry in Manchester—which I visited before Christmas—has taken a number of steps to improve access to exhibitions of artefacts and processes. The progress is not confined to London, nor should it be.

In terms of resources to improve facilities for disabled people, the Sports Council distributes substantial quantities of money to the British Paralympic Association, the British Sports Association for the Disabled and to the United Kingdom Sports Association for People with Learning Difficulties. Therefore money goes specifically to assist access for the disabled.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the lottery is potentially a further new source of cash. That is why in his guidance to lottery distributors my predecessor emphasised the importance of the access-for-the-disabled theme and why I fully intend to carry forward that commitment.

Astley Castle

5. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he will take to safeguard the future of Astley castle in Warwickshire.

Mr. Dorrell: Discussions on the future of Astley castle are taking place between the owner of the building, the local planning authority, English Heritage

and the Landmark Trust. My officials are monitoring developments but I see no reason to intervene at this stage.

Mr. O'Brien: While I accept that discussions are going on with a view to finding a private sector solution to the problem of Astley castle, which is falling into dilapidation and is of national historic importance, does the Minister agree that private sector solutions have failed in the past, that it would be wrong for the burden to fall on the council tax payers of north Warwickshire of a castle that is of national importance, and that the Government must consider whether it is appropriate, if the private sector solution fails, to exercise their statutory ability to intervene and save that castle?

Mr. Dorrell: As the hon. Gentleman knows there are powers in the hands of the local authority and there are reserve powers vested in me to ensure that listed buildings are maintained to an acceptable standard that reflects their national importance. Local authority powers and those vested in the Secretary of State are intended to be reserve enforcement powers because the law makes it quite clear that the primary responsibility for maintaining listed buildings rests on the owner. It is to secure that outcome that negotiations are proceeding between the district council and the owner of the castle.

Training Centres

6. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to establish further training centres for national sporting excellence in cricket and other sports, along the lines of the Australian Cricket Academy.

Mr. Sproat: I am concerned that sporting structures should exist to enable our young sports men and women to reach their potential and I shall certainly be sharing the results of my recent fact-finding visit to Australia with the appropriate sporting bodies, including the cricket authorities.

Mr. Hawkins: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Given that today we are all celebrating our team's wonderful fightback and victory, does my hon. Friend agree that, if we, like the Australians, had a cricket academy, we might have won the first three tests as well and not simply be celebrating a victory after the opportunity of winning the series has gone? I thank my hon. Friend for his encouragement to the team as reported in *The Daily Telegraph*, because it has obviously been successful.

Mr. Sproat: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. The way in which the England team has conducted itself after appalling injuries and the kind of vicious criticism to which it has been subjected is remarkable. I congratulate Mr. Atherton on his cool concentration and confidence. My hon. Friend asked about cricket academies. The cricket world is rather divided as to whether they help. There is already a cricket academy in Yorkshire and the MCC helps young cricketers in London. I shall certainly consider what Mr. Rod Marsh and others showed me in Adelaide to see whether we can use it to advantage.

Mr. Skinner: Why does not the Minister pay a special tribute to the two Derbyshire players, Malcolm and DeFreitas? Will he bear it in mind that there are training centres in every coalfield for competitive and individual sport? They are run by the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation, but with the privatisation of British Coal, every single village that has produced cricketers and footballers for England and for many clubs and counties throughout Great Britain has been placed in peril. I ask the Minister again whether he will guarantee that CISWO will be safe from the hands of those who have privatised the coal industry and whether he will ensure that those sporting areas are kept in our villages.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Member raises an extremely good and important point. With my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, I have done everything I can to protect those facilities, and I continue to do so. I hope that an announcement will be made shortly. I had the pleasure of sitting between Mr. Malcolm and Mr. DeFreitas at the test match in Adelaide. They said that the most important single thing that I could do would be to ensure that cricket was played in schools again, and I agreed.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is my hon. Friend aware that the sporting structures to which he refers already exist in Lancashire schools, which have produced players of the calibre of Atherton and Crawley? Will my hon. Friend please note and take heart from the fact that a number of young cricketers are coming up in those fine schools in the footsteps of Atherton and Crawley? Will my hon. Friend please urge other schools to take example from the excellent coaching that takes place in Manchester grammar school and Lancashire Royal grammar school, and to follow their example?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the success of Lancashire players and to the good things that happen in so many schools in Lancashire. We want even better things to come from schools everywhere.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Does the Minister agree that, in the pursuit of excellence in sport, we should not leave out football? Although the incident involving Mr. Eric Cantona last week may have been shameful, we should not forget that football is the national game of the United Kingdom, and that it gives a considerable amount of pleasure to many people Saturday upon Saturday throughout the season?

Mr. Sproat: Yes. The hon. and learned Gentleman makes an important point. Many people look up to footballers. I hope that the football authorities will deal in a proper manner with Mr. Cantona and others who are tempted to behave like him.

Mr. Pendry: Before the Minister proposes centres of sporting excellence along Australian lines, will he consider again the narrow focus that he proposes for the new sports councils of two or three dozen core sports? Surely centres of excellence can become effective only when set against the other Australian aim of sport for all—their aim should not, as he proposes, be sport for the few. Otherwise, he will marginalise many sporting groups, not least those for the disabled.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands what we are trying to achieve in the Sports Council. I

do not want the Sports Council to spread itself too thinly—I think that it recognises about 117 different governing bodies of sport—but to concentrate on sport for young people and on elite sport and excellence. That does not mean that we shall not do a lot about other matters as well, but a little concentration by the Sports Council on those matters should help everyone.

Mr. Cormack: Does my hon. Friend accept that many people, including those who have served in the teaching profession, believe that coaching and supervising competitive sports are an integral part of the job and do not deserve extra pay?

Mr. Sproat: I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education will consider that view closely.

Tourism, London

8. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on his plans to promote tourism to London.

Mr. Dorrell: London's performance in tourism is important both in itself and as the gateway to the rest of country. I therefore announced on 29 November increased funding for London, to be matched by the private sector.

Mr. Coombs: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it remains the general policy of the Government to promote and to encourage the dispersal of visitors to all parts of the United Kingdom? If that is still the case, will he use his best endeavours to encourage bodies that are charged with responsibility for the promotion of tourism in parts of the United Kingdom outside London, to advertise and promote what they have to offer to visitors when they are in London, on the basis that it is a great deal cheaper to tell Americans about the rest of Britain when they are in London than when they are dispersed in America and the rest of the world?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend has taken an interest in the subject for a long time and he has got the point precisely right. The biggest audience of overseas visitors to the rest of the UK is people who, as part of their visit—it may be their first visit or part of a visit to London and the provinces—are in London. London as a tourist destination is an essential part of the success of our tourist industry. That is why, as the first stage in the development of our tourist strategy, we are seeking to reinforce the marketing of London as a tourist destination.

Mr. Austin-Walker: Does the Minister share my view that it is important that visitors to London should be encouraged to see sights on the fringes of London? Is he aware that 100,000 people a year visit the Thames barrier, which has been described as one of the eight modern wonders of the world and which is a superb advertisement for British engineering skills? Is he further aware that the National Rivers Authority proposes to close the visitors centre? Will he ensure that resources are made available not only to refurbish the exhibition there—it is now 10 years old—but to ensure that the centre stays open?

Mr. Dorrell: If the hon. Gentleman cares to write to me about the visitors centre at the Thames barrier, I shall be glad to examine the matter. The hon. Gentleman is of course right about promoting the development of tourist destinations on the London rim. Places such as Hampton court and Greenwich are major tourist attractions which are outside the centre of London, and the more visitors we can attract to them, the better pleased the Government will be.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend do all he can to persuade visitors to London to stay on the outer rim rather than concentrating on hotels in Mayfair? They would be made welcome and comfortable in Northolt, Hanwell and other parts of the borough of Ealing and would find it easy to get into London during off-peak hours. Would not all involved benefit?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend raises an important point, which he makes in his own way. The key message for Londoners to take on board is the importance to London's economy of the tourist sector as a whole. Roughly 200,000 jobs in London depend directly on tourism, which contributes nearly £5 billion to the city's economy. It is therefore an important sector for us to develop.

Disabled People (Cinemas)

9. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he is taking to improve access by disabled people to cinemas.

Mr. Sproat: The Government's Disability Discrimination Bill was introduced to Parliament on 12 January 1995. It seeks to introduce a right of access for disabled people to goods, facilities and services, including cinemas.

Mr. Hanson: Is the Minister aware that, in a recent survey of 96 cinemas in London, only 22 were found to be accessible to disabled people, and that many disabled people now face the humiliation of being told that they are fire risks? Many of my hon. Friends share the view that the Disability Discrimination Bill does not go far enough. If the hon. Gentleman agrees with that assessment, what plans does he have to influence his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to ensure that the Bill allows disabled people to enter London cinemas in the near future?

Mr. Sproat: I was not aware of the exact statistics, but the hon. Gentleman is correct to say that the majority of cinemas do not have the facilities that we would like. In fact, only 25 per cent. of all cinemas around the country do, but a survey of facilities for disabled people is currently being updated by the Cinema Exhibitors Association and when we have the results, which we hope will be shortly, we hope that they can be fed in to consideration of the Bill.

National Lottery

10. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to impose an upper limit on the amount of money available to individual prize winners in the national lottery.

Mr. Dorrell: None.

Mrs. Campbell: Why is not the Secretary of State prepared to regulate winnings? Is it not better for 17

people to win £1 million than for one person to win £17 million? Does he not feel that it would be better to spread the benefits to give individuals a greater chance of winning?

Mr. Dorrell: No, I do not agree with that at all. The hon. Lady is focusing on the wrong issue. The key issue is what structure of lottery prizes will raise the largest sum of money for good causes. There is a wealth of evidence from around the world to suggest that the approach taken in our lottery is better targeted at raising money for good causes than that suggested by the hon. Lady or, it must be said, by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry).

Mr. Waterson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the dogma that people should be rich but not too rich is one of the many things that the new and old Labour parties have in common?

Mr. Dorrell: One of the entertaining things about listening to spokesmen from different parts of the Labour party is learning where different spokesmen draw the line on where true riches really begin—they cannot seem to agree.

Disabled Athletes

11. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has made to the Department of Health regarding provision for athletes with disabilities in the Disability Discrimination Bill.

Mr. Sproat: The Department of Social Security is in contact with all relevant Departments, including the Department of National Heritage, in taking forward the Government's policy in this sector. In addition, the Sports Council responded to the consultation document issued by the Department of Social Security in July 1994.

Ms Eagle: Is the Minister satisfied with the level of provision for disabled sport in the Bill? Will he reassure disabled sportsmen and women, in the light of his failure to mention them at all in his statement on the restructuring of the Sports Council, that his plans and the Government's plans, as presented in their Bill, include disabled sportsmen and women and do not marginalise them?

Mr. Sproat: We are strongly aware of the need for the Sports Council and other bodies in sport to take into full consideration the needs of people with disabilities. The Sports Council gives out more than £500,000 every year. In addition, the Foundation for Sports and the Arts, the Sports Aid Foundation and the sports match scheme all take fully into account the needs of people with disabilities. As my right hon. Friend said earlier, when the lottery letter went out last year from his predecessor, it specifically mentioned the need to take into account people with disabilities.

Mr. Lidington: Is my hon. Friend aware of the tremendous opportunities that are already being given to many disabled athletes by the Ludwig Guttman sports stadium at Stoke Mandeville in my constituency? Will he confirm that it will be open to the operators of that stadium, or any other sports body, to seek funds under the national lottery provisions to improve their facilities to help disabled athletes?

Mr. Sproat: It is a marvellous facility, and it would be eligible for lottery funding.

Disabled People (Arts)

16. **Mrs. Golding:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions he has had with the West Midlands regional arts board about improving arts facilities for the disabled.

Mr. Sproat: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney).

Mrs. Golding: The West Midlands regional arts board has an excellent record of promoting disability arts. Will the Minister study its policies, which not only give access to the disabled, but help the disabled to get jobs in the art world? Will he then promote those policies through his position in Government?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Lady is absolutely right in congratulating the West Midlands regional arts board on what it does. It spends something like £94,000 a year on improving the lot of persons with disabilities in the arts. I know that, in its latest corporate plan, it specifically put forward ways in which it could help further those with disabilities. It sets an example which could well be followed by many another.

Tourism

17. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what measures have been undertaken in recent years to attract more visitors to Britain; and how successful those measures have been.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department has provided funding of £33.2 million this year to the British Tourist Authority to conduct marketing campaigns through its 20 overseas offices to bring people here. Early estimates suggest that, during the first 10 months of 1994, 17.5 million visitors came to the United Kingdom, up 7 per cent. on the same period in 1993, which was itself a record year.

Mr. Spring: Can my hon. Friend assure the House that, in areas where British exports are booming, especially in the far east and Latin America, not only is knowledge of the excellence of British goods and services available, but the tourist potential of Britain in those expanding market places is fully known?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention to the opportunity for this country to extend its tourism marketing effort beyond some of the more mature markets towards some of the emerging markets. My hon. Friend identifies two promising candidates.

Departmental Staff (Disabled People)

18. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many of the staff in his Department are disabled; and what proportion this represents of the work force.

Mr. Sproat: The latest available figures show that 13 staff employed by my Department, excluding our two agencies, identify themselves as disabled. That represents 3.6 per cent. of all staff.

Mr. Pickthall: If 3.6 per cent. is the correct figure across the Ministry, at least the hon. Gentleman's Ministry is doing a proper job on the quota. Why,

therefore, are the Government to abolish the quota in advance of the provisions of the new Disability Discrimination Bill being bedded down?

Mr. Sproat: I am happy to accept the congratulations of the hon. Gentleman on what the Department of National Heritage has achieved. The second part of his question should be discussed as the Bill progresses through the House.

VE Day (Tourism)

19. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what benefit to the tourism industry he estimates will accrue from the Victory in Europe commemoration.

Mr. Dorrell: The tourist boards estimate that events to commemorate VE day may attract up to an additional 10,000 visitors from overseas and perhaps as many as 1 million additional domestic visitors.

Mr. Waterson: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he accept the view held by many people in this country, including ex-service men and women's organisations, that the difficult and delicate decision to include German representatives and exclude Japanese representatives at VE and VJ commemorations is absolutely right?

Mr. Dorrell: Yes. I can well understand that there is obvious sensitivity around those matters, and not everyone will feel wholly at home with the decision that has been taken. However, I believe that it is the right decision.

Mr. Maclennan: Will the Secretary of State accept that many people would regard it as an unattractive way to respond to the VE celebrations for the Conservative party to be divided about the future of our relationship with the European Union?

Mr. Dorrell: It is breathtaking that the hon. Gentleman should seek to make party political capital out of a VE day celebration. The argument about the future of the European Union is clearly an argument between different points of view about how the Union should develop. It has nothing to do with the act of national commemoration which will be at the heart of VE day.

Actors and Dancers

21. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he is taking to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of British actors and dancers to meet the needs of British theatre.

Mr. Sproat: My Department takes a close interest in the well-being of the performing arts in this country. We are aware of concerns over the funding of training for dance and drama students. That is an issue that is currently being considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education, in consultation with my Department and the Arts Council of England.

Mr. Luff: My hon. Friend will be aware of how welcome is the obvious priority that the Government are attaching to resolving the question of discretionary grants. May I urge him to press the matter with the utmost speed? I am aware of case after case in my constituency of young people who cannot use their skills to train for drama and for dance schools because the local authority does not have the money.

Mr. Sproat: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the persistence and knowledge with which he has pursued that important point. We are currently considering the findings of the Gulbenkian survey with the Department for Education, and I very much hope that we shall be able to fulfil my hon. Friend's request for a speedy answer.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The Minister will be aware that the matter is now urgent because practically no discretionary grant is handed out to people who want to study dance or drama. This country has a high quality of representation in both those arts. If we are not to lose them, it will require rather more vigour on the Minister's part than has been shown so far.

Mr. Sproat: That is primarily a matter for the local education authorities.

National Cricket Academy

22. **Mr. Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has for a national cricket academy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: The establishment of a national cricket academy is essentially a matter for the cricketing authorities. If a suitable project were put forward, I see no reason why it could not be considered as a candidate for lottery funding.

Mr. Hicks: Despite England's excellent victory in Adelaide yesterday, does my hon. Friend agree that there is a need for a cricket academy which could well be funded from the millennium fund or from national lottery funds, provided, of course, that there is the essential structural link between the existing game and any such academy?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. The fact that we won the latest test match does not mean that we should consider the matter any less closely. However, the cricketing world is sharply divided over whether we should have a central national cricket academy or whether the matter would be better handled by the individual counties.

Mr. Enright: I am sure that the Minister will agree that the excellent Yorkshire cricket academy, which produced Darren Gough, the great find of this tour, is a success. However, it will not continue to be a success unless the schools that feed into it have the funds to put into grounds on which they can play cricket. That is an extremely important point, and I urge the Minister to stress its importance to the Department for Education.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman is quite right about the great importance of having proper sports grounds. Of course, it would be open to schools and to those who wish to put forward a plan with them to apply for funds under the lottery for the acquisition of such playing fields, provided that the playing fields were open not just to schools but to the rest of the community. Just to show the hon. Gentleman that I do not merely echo glibly what he

says about the importance of the Yorkshire cricket academy, let me say that I shall see representatives of the Yorkshire cricket academy later this very week.

Mr. Elletson: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if there is to be a national cricket academy, the proper location for it would be Lancashire, which continues to provide the real backbone of English cricket?

Mr. Sproat: I had the pleasure of visiting Old Trafford recently, and I saw what was being done there by the Lancashire county authority. I certainly agree that its plan is splendid, but other counties might have different views.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Pension Fund

28. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what representations he has received on the viability of the pension fund.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Clergy pensions are currently funded from the Church Commissioners' investment income rather than from a separate pension fund. Following actuarial advice, a number of options for the future funding of pensions are being discussed with the dioceses. They focus on the collection of pension contributions for future service.

Mr. Corbyn: When does the right hon. Gentleman expect a statement to be made on the future funding of the pension fund, following the representations that he has received? What action is being taken concerning the serious losses incurred by the Church Commissioners pension fund on irresponsible investments in out-of-town shopping centres in the past? Will future pensions be increased in line with average earnings or in line with inflation, or can the right hon. Gentleman give no guarantee at all as to future pension payments both to clergy and to lay employees of the Church of England?

Mr. Alison: The specific question of when a definitive statement is likely to emerge about future pension arrangements—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will approve of this—will depend to some extent on when the Social Services Select Committee's report on the issue comes out and when the various diocesan consultations have taken place. There cannot in any case be a fundamental change without legislation, so I doubt whether any new arrangements will be in place before 1998.

As for the underlying value of the assets, the hon. Gentleman will know that it is going up steadily. Assets lay at £2.1 billion in 1992, and by the end of 1993 they had increased to £2.4 billion. The so-called loss of £800 million is already being steadily recouped by the soundness of the Church Commissioners' investment.

Future pensions will continue to be linked to clergy stipends. Clergy stipends have been linked to average earnings. That link is likely to persist.

Historic Church Buildings

29. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what representation the Commission has received regarding value added tax on repairs and maintenance of historic church buildings.

Mr. Alison: The commissioners have no direct responsibility within the Church of England on the issue, but they have supported representations by the Churches Main Committee to the Government about the heavy VAT burden which churches currently have to bear.

Mr. Miller: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the Right Rev. Michael Baughen, Bishop of Chester, that such a reduction in VAT would help to protect our historic church buildings? If the European Commission brings forward the proposals that have been suggested, should not the Government accept such proposals as a way of protecting those buildings?

Mr. Alison: Yes, I very much hope that any changes recommended by the European Commission in this matter will be reflected by changes in the Government's approach to VAT. I endorse what Bishop Michael Baughen has said about the heavy burden represented by VAT, but it should not be overlooked that the Government have been supportive of charities in the past, not only by the long-standing exemption from income tax from their direct income, but by introducing gift aid and relaxing the regulations on charitable deeds of covenant. They have increased the ability of English Heritage to make grants to cathedrals and other places of worship in use. We should not underestimate the extent to which the Government have sought to help charities, but I agree that there is more land to be possessed.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Secretary of State for National Heritage recently kindly met a deputation from the Historic Churches Preservation Trust to discuss that and other issues? Will my right hon. Friend talk to the Secretary of State about the matter and ensure that vigourous representations are made, as the measure places a crippling burden on many smaller, and particularly rural, parishes?

Mr. Alison: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage has a peculiarly attuned and sensitive ear and is capable of hearing anything which is bruited around the House. He will have taken careful note of what my hon. Friend has said, and he will reflect that I have had occasion to write to his Department on the matter. I hope that there will be a benign approach to any changes proposed by Brussels on VAT.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

36. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what measures he plans to restrict the scope of legal aid.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor): The Lord Chancellor does not plan to restrict the scope of legal aid. New proposals for legal aid will be the subject of a Green

Paper later in the year, as anticipated in the Lord Chancellor's recent speech to the Social Market Foundation.

Mr. Brazier: Is my hon. Friend aware of how welcome are the proposals which my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor has outlined for setting up limited budgets to many hard-pressed taxpayers? Given the considerable powers which officials in area legal aid offices have, and given that those powers are likely to be extended, is there not a strong case for having some voluntary oversight?

Mr. Taylor: The board can refuse legal aid on the grounds of merit and, if so, an applicant can appeal to an area committee, whose members are independent legal practitioners not employed by the board. In addition, complaints about the board's administration are susceptible to investigation by the ombudsman.

Mr. William O'Brien: Does the Minister agree that it is important that people who rely on legal aid to obtain justice should have the same level of representation as the Crown Prosecution Service at any appeal to a court or to the Lord Chancellor? Will he ensure that there will be that equality of representation?

Mr. Taylor: I want to give a serious answer to a serious question, but I should have thought that most advocates in the private sector would consider themselves to be every bit as good as the advocates in the Crown Prosecution Service.

Mr. Stephen: Can my hon. Friend confirm press reports that the Legal Aid Board has granted legal aid to Winston Silcott to enable him to sue the police? Is my hon. Friend aware that Mr. Silcott has received £17,000 compensation from the Home Office within the past six months? How can it be that people can give money away to friends and relations, as Silcott has done, and then claim to be too poor to pay their own lawyers' fees? Does not that make a mockery of the legal aid system?

Mr. Taylor: Although I cannot comment on the details of any individual case, I have no reason to believe that Mr. Silcott's application has been dealt with any differently from anybody else's.

37. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals he has to deal with abuses of the legal aid system; and when he will bring them forward.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Legal Aid Board has made a number of proposals in relation to the green form scheme, which are being taken forward now.

Mr. Mudie: The Minister will be aware that the Lord Chancellor has suggested cash-limiting the legal aid budget on a regional basis. Is the Minister aware that where that has been tried, in the social fund, hundreds of thousands of genuine claimants have been refused aid because the money has run out? Does the Minister agree that it would be intolerable for that to happen in justice? Will he ask the Lord Chancellor to think again? If the noble Lord wishes to persist, will the Minister ensure that there are proper safeguards to protect innocent people?

Mr. Taylor: That matter is so far only the subject of a prelude speech by the Lord Chancellor. A Green Paper will be issued. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's question will be taken into account. For the moment, raising the spectre of cash running out is scaremongering and we certainly want to ensure that that does not happen.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: When considering changes to the legal aid system, will my hon. Friend consider those cases in which someone assisted by legal aid can pursue a civil claim against a business, which is not able to claim such aid? The case can bring the business almost to the point of bankruptcy and, even when the business eventually wins, it is unlikely to be awarded any compensation by the courts.

Mr. Taylor: It is part of the original sin of legal aid—if that is the correct expression—that, in civil cases, one encounters disputes in which party A has legal aid and party B does not, whether the latter is a limited liability company or another citizen. As long as resources are not infinite and there has to be a cut-off point, as there does with many such welfare schemes, it is almost inevitable that one party will be legally aided while the other is not.

Mr. Boateng: We have heard a lot from the Minister about cuts that affect the consumers of legal services. What are he and the Lord Chancellor doing to deal with the scandal of restrictive practices within the legal profession? Have they met the Bar and the Law Society to deal with how lawyers might put their own house in order, so that more consumers can benefit from legal services at a time when those are being cut?

Mr. Taylor: That was an interesting question. I am no more in favour of restrictive practices than the hon. Gentleman, but he knows as well as I that the legal professions are self-regulating. Obviously, we view any abuses of public money with the greatest possible concern because that is what the House would want us to do. Meanwhile, I think that the hon. Gentleman will join me in welcoming the fact that the Lord Chancellor wants to widen the categories of people who dispense legal advice. It need not be solicitors and barristers only, but could include citizens advice bureaux, as supported by me, and law centres, as supported by him.

38. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what further changes are planned for the legal aid system.

Mr. John M. Taylor: New proposals for legal aid will be the subject of a Green Paper later in the year.

Mr. Hawkins: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that one of the great concerns about the system has been the large number of people on modest incomes who have not been eligible for legal aid? That was one of the concerns highlighted in the excellent debate in the House last Wednesday morning, to which my hon. Friend replied. Will he reconsider the position of the so-called MINELAs—middle income, not eligible for legal aid?

Mr. Taylor: Yes. I am probably in that category. I want to share with my hon. Friend the emergence of the regime of conditional fees—no win, no fee. Many cases, especially personal injury cases, will be susceptible to that scheme. Although the idea is in a fledgling state, there

is also a possibility of people obtaining legal expenses insurance, as many of us do in respect of our motor policies.

Mrs. Roche: Given that the Lord Chancellor removed legal aid from 14 million people in 1993, is it not about time that he and his Department started to make the legal system more accessible to ordinary people and more efficient, rather than clobbering them time after time?

Mr. Taylor: I have never understood how 14 million people could fall out of a scheme used by 3 million people. We want to widen access and some of my suggestions to the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) were along those lines.

39. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received about the provision of legal aid to the apparently rich.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor and I have received a number of representations on that subject and it was for that reason that the Lord Chancellor issued the consultation paper "Legal Aid for the Apparently Wealthy" on 20 December 1994. Responses are required by 1 March.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is unprecedented public anger that people such as Mr. Ernest Saunders, Mr. Roger Levitt, Mr. Gordon Foxley and Mr. Hashim should get legal aid? Does not that roll call of wealthy parasites, including Mr. Asil Nadir, underline the need to deprive the apparently wealthy of access to the taxpayer's money?

Mr. Taylor: To his credit, my hon. Friend was successful in securing a debate on that subject on the Floor of the House last Wednesday morning. He was eloquent then and was equally robust and clear in the point that he has just made. I am grateful to him.

Mr. Skinner: What is the answer, then?

Madam Speaker: Does the Minister want to go further in answering that question? If so, I must allow him to do so.

Mr. Taylor: I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, because it was clear from sedentary interventions that certain hon. Members thought that my reply did not hit the nail on the head. The answer is, as some hon. Members know already, that we have produced a consultative paper entitled "Legal Aid for the Apparently Wealthy" which deals, among other things, with exactly the points about which my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) is concerned.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that not only did Asil Nadir get legal aid but it has now been proved that the money handed over by Asil Nadir to the Tory party, amounting to £440,000, had been stolen? The Tory Minister dealing with the matter at that stage said that if the money were found to be stolen, he would ensure that it went back to its rightful source. Has that been done?

Mr. Taylor: Do you know, Madam Speaker, the extraordinary thing is that there is nothing in my file about that?

Privity of Contract

41. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received about privity of contract; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: My hon. Friend will know the latest state of play from the meeting that I had with him last Thursday.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my hon. Friend urge his colleagues in the Department of the Environment to complete their consultations as soon as possible with a view to the Government introducing a reform Bill without further delay?

Mr. Taylor: I am always prepared to assist my hon. Friend by any conversations that I can usefully have with the Department of the Environment, but I should put it on record that the Government had agreed my hon. Friend's Bill when he introduced it. While I am pleased that the British Retail Consortium and the British Property Federation are agreed, they have agreed to something else, and that sets us back a bit. I am concerned, above all, about the small tenant.

Trials (Press Coverage)

42. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the press coverage of trials.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The administration of justice should, so far as possible, be public. Subject to certain statutory safeguards, including the law relating to contempt of court, the coverage of trials is a matter for the press itself.

Mr. Soley: Why did not the Lord Chancellor's Department act in the case of the Taylor sisters, where the court decided, partly on the basis of press coverage, that they had been wrongly convicted? Has the Lord Chancellor considered the alternative of requiring newspapers to cover both the defence and the prosecution equally, so that prosecutions are not based on salacious claims that later turn out to be false?

Mr. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor would not intervene in a judicial capacity—he would not act in an appellate function. I know that the hon. Gentleman has great knowledge of that subject because, some time ago, he introduced a private Member's Bill that dealt with it. I do not know whether we should consider obliging the press to cover each side equally, as they do in general elections. [*Laughter.*] That proposition does not seem to have found a favourable reception. I shall reflect on the matter and write to the hon. Gentleman about equality of coverage.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend agree that the sub judice system in the United Kingdom is the envy of other parts of the English-speaking world? Does he further agree that the O.J. Simpson trial is making a mockery of the United States' judicial system?

Mr. Taylor: I watched some of that on television last night. The sub judice rule has served us well and should be reconsidered only with the greatest possible care.

Legal Aid

43. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received from legal aid lawyers in Rochdale, in the past six months, regarding proposed changes to the legal aid system.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I am not aware that the Lord Chancellor or I have received any such representations directly from Rochdale solicitors or via the hon. Lady. The Rochdale solicitors have been particularly helpful with a non-solicitor legal aid experiment conducted with the Rochdale citizens advice bureau. I wish all parties to those arrangements every possible success.

Ms Lynne: Is the Minister aware that many solicitors are finding it increasingly unprofitable to perform legal aid work? What assurances can he give my constituents in Rochdale and elsewhere that the services will not decline?

Mr. Taylor: We owe it to the House to keep an eye on the levels of expenditure on legal aid, as it constitutes part of the public purse. I believe that, by and large, legal aid practitioners know how to work expeditiously and to a high standard, and many of them are acquiring franchises by so doing. I think that the best of them will work well and find standard fees extremely congenial with their skills.

Channel Tunnel (Security)

3.29 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West) (*by private notice*) asked the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement on security in the channel tunnel.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): Allegations were published yesterday that on certain specified days security arrangements for the Eurostar and Eurotunnel trains were inadequate. When those allegations were brought to my attention at the beginning of the weekend, I immediately called for urgent reports from the two companies.

The Channel Tunnel (Security) Order 1994 requires the operators of the tunnel and of the trains that go through it to carry out counter-terrorist security measures. Similar measures are applied in France and Belgium as agreed between our three Governments. The operators are responsible for ensuring that the security measures are applied properly. Here, my Department's inspectors give instructions, offer advice and make both announced and unannounced inspections.

The Government's requirements have not changed since the tunnel was opened. The House will not expect me to detail the requirements. Suffice to say that security measures are closely tailored to the threat, as assessed by the Government's security advisers. Among other measures, all traffic in the tunnel, passenger and freight, is liable to be searched. There is not and never has been a requirement for all passengers or vehicles to be searched. On the other hand, permitting a passenger to get off a train prior to arrival at his destination and leaving behind an unattended bag is a potentially serious matter, and could be a breach of security requirements.

Like other right hon. and hon. Members, I take security issues seriously. I will decide what further action needs to be taken in light of the reports that I have commissioned and any further security advice that I receive.

Mr. Meacher: In the debate about the Channel Tunnel (Security) Order last year, the Minister for Public Transport wrote to members of the Committee on 3 March stating:

"John Taylor also sought reassurance that the security of channel tunnel services would be comparable with arrangements at airports, and I was happy to give him that assurance".

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of that correspondence and will he confirm that that commitment is very far from being met? Even if that requirement were excessive, will he not accept that, given the symbolic significance of the channel tunnel, there is a balance to be struck between ensuring speed of throughput and non-intrusiveness of checks on the one hand and a reasonably high level of security on the other, and the *Observer* revelations yesterday suggest that that balance is being struck at too low a level of security?

How are the right hon. Gentleman's assurances today about security in the channel tunnel consistent with random checks which show that most cars are not even subject to the most cursory search, most foot passengers' baggage is not scanned electronically, and only a few lorries have been required to pass through the enhanced X-ray scanner? Is it not a breach of procedure—the Minister seemed to agree that it was—that passengers were permitted to leave the Eurostar train without any checks being made of their baggage? In light of what he said, what action is he taking to ensure that that does not happen again?

Since the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the implementation of agreed security procedures in the channel tunnel rests with the Department of Transport security division, will the Minister say how many inspections of the tunnel operators' procedures that division has carried out so far? When was the last inspection and to what extent did it reveal any deficiencies?

In addition to the risk of terrorist bombing, will the Minister also inform the House whether evacuation procedures have been fully tested and practised in the event of a breakdown or fire in the tunnel, taking into account fully loaded trains and a throughput at peak capacity of a train in the tunnel every three minutes—which means that there could be up to seven trains in the tunnel at any one time? Have evacuation procedures been properly tested under those conditions, including the requirement for following trains to reverse out of the tunnel? If so, will the right hon. Gentleman publish the results?

There can be no absolute guarantee of passenger or vehicle safety, but does the Secretary of State accept that the laxity in procedures that has been exposed is not acceptable, and can and must be tightened without significant intrusiveness or loss of speed of transmission?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am aware that my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Public Transport wrote to members of the Committee, referring to his remarks to the House. I noted with interest that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) gave only a partial quotation over the weekend, as did the *Observer*. My right hon. Friend told the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor):

"security at the tunnel will be comparable to that of airlines and at airports, commensurate with the threat."—[*Official Report*, 16 February 1994; Vol. 237, c. 982.]

Those words were left out of the quotations that filled the airways and the hon. Gentleman's comments over the weekend.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that a balance must be struck, and not in a way that deliberately or in a focused manner seeks to underestimate the importance of security. He and I are as one on that. However, I will not prejudge—and the hon. Gentleman will understand why—the reports that I have sought. Given my personal background, I take security issues particularly seriously. I will study carefully the reports that I urgently commissioned, and if I judge that further action should be taken, I will not hesitate to take that action.

As to the hon. Gentleman's point about evacuation, certificates to run trains through the tunnel require safety checks of the sort to which he referred. I hope that he finds that reassuring.

I want to end on a common note in responding to the hon. Gentleman's questions. I was pleased that he recognised that there can never be an absolute guarantee of safety—but together we share the view that all appropriate steps should be taken, for the sake of not only safety but public confidence.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Does my right hon. Friend agree that anyone who has served as a Northern Ireland Minister retains a special interest in security

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

matters? Is he aware that I have had several opportunities to study the operation of the channel tunnel, the most recent being yesterday? Does my right hon. Friend agree that anyone who approaches security issues is wise to do so with discretion and balance—two qualities in short supply at the *Observer*, and of which the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is devoid?

Dr. Mawhinney: I agree with my hon. Friend that he and I, and others, have special reason to take security matters seriously and that his experiences, like mine, are not lightly forgotten. I come to the issue against that background. If the newspaper in question had been concerned about security issues, one might have thought that it would raise them with the appropriate people—the operators—in a framework that gave them an opportunity to respond adequately and appropriately to the allegations. But that might not have created such a good newspaper story.

Having said that, I recognise the seriousness of the issues and of the allegations made. They must and will be investigated. If I believe that further action must be taken, I will ensure that the operators take it.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): The whole House will recognise that we cannot prejudge the reports that the Secretary of State has asked for. I hope that he will accept that from the Liberal Democrat party at least.

We also welcome the right hon. Gentleman's most important remark this afternoon—that he accepts full ministerial responsibility. He has shown as much by making this statement.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is widespread concern about the mechanisms—who is watching the watchdogs? The Minister takes responsibility, but what is there to ensure that those who are responsible for surveillance, evacuation and emergency procedures are themselves under the surveillance of the Minister, or at least under his authority? If no such system is in place, the Minister must be aware that incidents of this sort will continue and will constantly be referred back to the House and to his desk at the Department.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful for what the hon. Gentleman said about not prejudging the issue: I agree with him. If he was saying that security measures must be related to the threat, including the vulnerability of the system, I also agree with him on that important point.

I said in my answer to the private notice question that my Department's inspectors, independently of the operators, give security instructions, offer advice and make announced and unannounced inspections of the system. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will find some encouragement in that.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the synthetic outrage generated by this stunt is not allowed to obscure the genuine and long-standing concern of some of us about the training of channel tunnel staff and the co-ordination of the emergency services that work with the tunnel operators? My right hon. Friend will know that the recent bi-national exercise left a number of unanswered questions; one would hope that, as a result of the lessons learned, action will have been taken.

Will my right hon. Friend seek to ensure that a further bi-national exercise is held, so that we can establish whether the lessons of bi-nat 6 have been learned, and so that we can test the security services?

Dr. Mawhinney: As my hon. Friend will appreciate, I am not going to refer to security arrangements in any form from the Dispatch Box. I was grateful to the hon. Member for Oldham, West for his recognition of that. I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that all appropriate steps need to be taken and that they are likely to include training, which is an important and legitimate aspect of security arrangements. I should have thought that the whole House would be as keen as I am to ensure that public confidence in the system, which is high, remains high—and justifiably so.

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I am delighted that the Minister has not responded to attempts to politicise this issue, because it is not—it should not be—remotely a party political one. The channel tunnel is the No. 1 terrorist target in the world. It would not take a major terrorist organisation to destroy it; that could be done by a tiny organisation with access to relatively unsophisticated technology.

Will the right hon. Gentleman review the idea that security must be tailored to the threat? Although that seems a smart phrase to use, and although security can be upped or lowered at the margins, the threat from a tiny organisation can be such that no amount of manipulating the response to it will result in preparedness for someone trying a long shot from 60 yards.

I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will recognise that my point is valid. I ask him not to be beguiled by security analysts who describe the threat as greater or lesser. When the threat is thought to be low is the very time when some organisation can try it on, possibly with disastrous consequences.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful for what the hon. Gentleman said about not making this into a partisan issue—although he will understand that, just occasionally, the temptation is large. *[Interruption.]* I am glad to note that he does not belong to the same luddite tendency as the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) appears to belong to.

A security assessment is not just a beguiling figment of the imagination, but having said that, I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. We are tending to move into an Adjournment debate when putting questions to the Minister. Could I now have brisk and direct questions to the Minister?

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, when the reports are forthcoming, he will not publish them? Does he agree that the British public have the safest transport systems in the world when it comes to security? They can have total confidence in the

system. In particular, they can have confidence in this case in the Department's own inspectors, in the Kent constabulary and in the Gendarmerie Nationale.

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is right in all respects. I have travelled through the channel tunnel with full confidence and expect to do so again very shortly.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): As my constituents have suffered from a number of bomb outrages, will the Secretary of State, in the new review of channel tunnel security, include consideration of possible terrorist outrages at the St. Pancras terminal?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Lady is getting somewhat beyond the scope of the question, and in the light of your instructions, Madam Speaker, I will not respond.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the Minister is correct. Perhaps the hon. Lady will put a question to the appropriate Minister on the appropriate day.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Has not the gleeful scaremongering in this case got something to do with the gleeful mudslinging in the case of Ebbsfleet station, in as much as it puts in jeopardy the future jobs of people in Kent? If there are instances, as there appear to be, of lapses in security, is not the proper response to take it privately to the competent authorities, all the way up to the Secretary of State if necessary?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is right; if there are concerns, suspicions or allegations, they should be properly investigated and those reports studied carefully. I will do that.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I am sure that the Secretary of State will accept that the issue concerns more than just the south-east of England. It concerns, of course, the other regions of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Bearing in minding that fact, does he accept that his resentment at the coverage that the *Observer* has given to the issue reflects the image of a departmental team caught on the hop? Does not the disarray of Transport Ministers show that the public are paying the price of the merry-go-round in Transport Ministers that exists under the Government? Does that not reflect his state of unreadiness?

Dr. Mawhinney: First, let me make it clear that I have no resentment about the *Observer* running whatever articles it wishes to run—be they true, false or somewhere in between. Secondly, there is no state of unreadiness. Thirdly, I have explained to the House exactly who is responsible and the various layers of responsibility. Fourthly, if action needs to be taken, it will be, and in a way which I hope will reassure the hon. Gentleman of the competence and readiness of this team to pursue its due responsibilities not only up to the next election but beyond.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, far from the picture painted by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy), his Department looked at the most sophisticated scientific techniques of non-invasive automated cargo inspection as far back as the beginning of 1991 and that programmes were undertaken to test that technology? Without giving the House the details of that technology, because it is a matter of security, will he confirm that the most sophisticated measures were looked at and will continue to be examined by his Department, especially the security officials within it?

Dr. Mawhinney: For reasons that I explained earlier, I will not be drawn into discussing security measures, but my hon. Friend is right to bolster public confidence in the arrangements that are in place.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): There was a strange omission in the Secretary of State's response today. He said that his own inspectorate has powers to inspect and see what has been happening. On what occasions has it inspected? That was asked earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), and there was no response. Was it satisfied with its inspection? If not, did it report that to the Minister? What action was taken?

Dr. Mawhinney: As the House will understand, that question involves security. I will not be drawn on such issues.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Is it not a fact that no inspectors have been appointed under the auspices of the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority, and that the inspectors referred to by the Secretary of State are mere civil servants—although, no doubt, senior bods? They have no statutory basis. When will the Government clarify the respective responsibilities of the French authorities, the British Health and Safety Executive and the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority? When will proper inspectors be appointed, and who precisely are the inspectors referred to by the Secretary of State?

Dr. Mawhinney: The House will have noted the hon. Gentleman's contempt for civil servants, security advisers and inspectors. I must tell him that that contempt is restricted to him. As for co-operation between national Governments and national security authorities, it is very good.

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): Has there not been legitimate concern that Eurostar's marketing strategy has downplayed the special nature of this form of transport? Has that not led to insufficient emphasis on the need to arrive on time, and hence to very rushed security measures before people board the train? Travellers have been unsure whether they are boarding a train with the same security arrangements as an aircraft, or an ordinary, conventional train. Even Members of Parliament have fallen foul of the arrangements.

Dr. Mawhinney: I do not accept that for a moment. Coincidentally, the other day someone told me that they were concerned about the amount of time for which it was apparently necessary to be present before the train's departure, precisely because of the various security arrangements that had to be made before boarding was possible.

Points of Order

3.51 pm

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On Thursday, before Business Questions, I made an intemperate allegation relating to Opposition Members and the Register of Members' Interests. With your permission, Madam Speaker, I wish to withdraw the remark, which was made in the heat of the moment. I apologise to you and the House for any offence that I may have caused.

Madam Speaker: I am much obliged to the hon. Gentleman. That is precisely the way in which we should deal with such matters in the House.

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

(Clauses Nos. 2, 5, 8, 15, 52, 64 and 91, Schedules Nos. 1, 4, 11, and 14, and any new Clauses first appearing on the Order Paper not later than 19th January and designed to continue the statutory effect of any of the Ways and Means Resolutions of the House of 13th December)

Considered in Committee [Progress, 25th January]

[MR. MICHAEL MORRIS *in the Chair*]

Ordered,

That the order in which the remaining proceedings in Committee of the whole House on the Finance Bill are to be taken shall be Clause 52, Schedule 11, Clause 15, Schedule 4.—[*Mr. Kirkhope.*]

Clause 52

PENSIONS

3.52 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 45, line 36, at end insert—

'(2) Schedule 11 shall come into effect only if the Government has presented a report to Parliament before the passing of this Act on certain aspects of the Schedule specified in subsection (3) below.

(3) The Government shall report to Parliament on—

(a) the likely effects of the provisions of Schedule 11 to this Act on the costs of administering personal pension schemes;

(b) an assessment of the risks to members of personal pension schemes of decisions taken as a result of the provisions of Schedule 11; and

(c) considerations raised by the extension of the provisions of Schedule 11 to retirement benefit schemes and retirement annuity contracts.'.

The subject of pensions may not often be the stuff of political cut and thrust—and, indeed, there is widespread agreement on the principle of this part of the Bill—but we have a number of questions and anxieties.

While welcoming the principle underlying clause 52—the introduction of more flexibility in the purchase of annuities—the amendment raises concerns that have been expressed inside and outside the House about both the cost of the scheme and who will meet it, and the whole question of risk. I refer to the risk of deferment, and also to that involved in any arrangements made by those wishing to secure greater flexibility than would be available in, for example, an occupational pension scheme. The amendment also deals with certain other considerations. Its purpose is to probe the Government on their intentions, mindful as we are that what Ministers say in the House can be relied on by those outside. I hope that I shall be able to persuade Ministers to make one or two helpful explanations.

As I have said, we welcome the flexibility introduced by clause 52, which will enable people to defer purchasing their annuities at any time between the ages of 50 and 75—a flexibility heralded by the White Paper that the Government published in June last year. We welcome that, but a number of problems remain.

While the flexibility for personal pension schemes is welcome in that it will enable people to defer purchasing an annuity if they think that circumstances justify such deferment, there are two particular concerns that need to

be addressed. The first is obvious, and it is that people must be warned that there is no guarantee that rates will necessarily get better. Although there is flexibility and many people will be tempted to think that things can only get better, experience should tell them that that is not necessarily the case.

I shall return to that because, clearly, the warnings given to people who buy pensions or who transfer from occupational schemes to private schemes have exercised Parliament and people outside for some time. If the Government or the industry propose to publicise the provision, it is important for people to be warned that deferring purchase does not necessarily guarantee better returns.

The second matter concerning us is the cost of the scheme. I notice that the Government—as they do now with nearly all measures—published a compliance cost assessment which is available on request from the Treasury. It makes interesting reading, because it looks at the costs of introducing the measure and in particular at the businesses that might be affected and states that it would not affect small business. But that depends on how one defines costs, because many financial advisers, who for the most part constitute small businesses, will incur additional costs for the advice and the preparation of papers that need to be given to prospective purchasers of policies.

The Committee will be aware that, under the new disclosure regime it is necessary to give far more information to prospective purchasers of pensions and that will give rise to costs for small businesses. Therefore, I am surprised that the Government can assert in their compliance cost assessment that small businesses will not be affected.

Looking generally at the compliance costs, I note that the Revenue admits that the setting-up costs of the new scheme will be about £1.15 billion. That is a substantial cost and, of course, it will have to be met by the public. The Government do not propose to meet it, and I do not suggest for a minute that they should because, clearly, the industry must meet the costs itself. However, at the end of the day any cost incurred by the industry will be passed on to the public, and that is bound to affect people's decisions. I shall shortly return to the whole question of the regulatory regime that goes side by side with this in assessing risks and costs.

It is important at the outset to flag up the fact that there will be a significant cost. I understand that an annual recurring cost of more than £500,000 is expected to be incurred. I mention that because an article in today's edition of the *Financial Times* makes disturbing reading. It suggests that more than 20 per cent. of pension policies are halted within the first year and, plainly, cost will be one reason for that halting. After that period, termination rates are also high.

It is very much in the interests of individuals and in the interests of any Government to ensure that people make provision for themselves alongside public provision. If we are to encourage people to do that we must be mindful of the costs that will be imposed on them and of the warnings given to people who decide to buy certain policies.

As I have said, disclosure will clearly flag up to people what they are paying for, at least if disclosure works properly, but it could have a knock-on effect in terms of reduced sales, which have already taken a knock over the past year because of loss of confidence in the regulatory regime. I understand that some people in the industry think that sales may have gone down by about 10 per cent. over the past year because of that loss of confidence.

The main point on which I would like to draw Ministers is the thinking behind the decision apparently—I emphasise apparently—not to extend the flexibility to other pension schemes. The clause affects private pensions and we have no objection to that, but it would be helpful to get a clear statement of policy from Ministers about the Government's intentions. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury made a statement through a press release, but, of course, that has no legal force whatever. Many members of the public and people who work in the industry would like to know the Government's view on extending flexibility to occupational schemes and AVCs. In one view, they might be excluded because of Inland Revenue practice. I think that they might be excluded more because of practice than because of the law.

A number of categories are not included. Retirement annuity contracts were the forerunners of personal pensions and were largely superseded in 1988. They are apparently not affected. In a Treasury press release issued on 4 January, the Financial Secretary said that those people would benefit because

"they all had the option to transfer funds into a personal pension on the open market."

Indeed they have that option, but, if one considers the recent history of pension transfers, one might have thought that Ministers would have thought long and hard about casually saying to people who have retirement annuity contracts, "Don't worry. Just transfer."

Transfer incurs costs and may be inappropriate in a number of cases, depending on individual circumstances. To suggest, as the Financial Secretary apparently did, that no difficulty was involved, but that people should simply transfer to a private personal pension was not necessarily the appropriate advice to give. It would be helpful if either the Financial Secretary or the Minister of State, who appears to be poised to answer for the Government, would comment on that matter.

4 pm

Ministers should bear it in mind that it is only a year since the Securities and Investments Board discovered that up to 2 million pensions might have been inappropriately sold to people, who were wrongly persuaded to opt out of occupational schemes and to transfer to personal pension schemes. The Government should be wary of, as a matter of policy, encouraging people to opt out of an occupational scheme, or of any other scheme, and to transfer to a private pension, if they do not need to do so.

I am not saying that we should discourage people from taking out private pensions, which is appropriate for a number of people. The Government seem to accept that a need for flexibility exists in relation to occupational pensions, but the House should pass no measure that forces people to opt out and to transfer to a private pension, when they would not otherwise do so.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I am seeking to follow the hon. Gentleman's argument closely, and I have some sympathy with it. To refine his point further, will he clarify that he is talking about the unwisdom of persuading people to transfer to personal

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

pensions from occupational pensions when they are, shall we say, aged over 45 or 50? Is not he making a blanket statement about people of all ages in their working career?

Mr. Darling: For many people, it is entirely appropriate to have a private pension—it depends on what they do, their age and their likely work pattern. Unlike in the past, many people will not reasonably expect to be in the same employment from the age of 20 to the age of 60 or 65, when the receive their gold watch. The Labour party has never said that the purchase of a private pension—never mind transfer—is a bad thing. That can be good and appropriate.

No doubt exists, however, that, in the past few years, a number of people have been wrongly advised to come out of occupational schemes and to go into private schemes, not because it was good for them, but because it was good for the salesman and insurance companies. That is the point that has exercised people in the past year.

I am making a general point. The Financial Secretary said that the way out of the difficulty, and the way to achieve flexibility, was for people in occupational schemes to transfer to private schemes. The Government should not force people to opt out to achieve flexibility if, through certain measures in the House or a change in Inland Revenue practice, they could achieve the same flexibility by staying where they are. Transfer should not be forced on people.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I agree with my hon. Friend. In the past few years, the Government and people acting on their behalf have obviously sent a signal to many workers, such as those in the mining industry, that it would be a splendid idea to opt out of the National Coal Board and British Coal pension, with the result that there are more than 100,000 casualties in the coalfields—people with redundancy money and the pensions entitlement. The net result is that there are people in every constituency in the coalfield areas who have been kidded on by salesmen acting on the signal sent by the Government. Many are now trying to fight in the courts to re-establish their entitlement to a pension although, of course, they are unable to get legal aid because the Government have chopped that, too.

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We all remember the television advertisements depicting a man in a straitjacket being freed by the change in the law in the late 1980s, a change for which the current Secretary of State for Social Security and another Minister—now the Prime Minister—had prime responsibility. We are all aware of the difficulties subsequently caused by the mis-selling of pensions. My point is that we should not bring about another situation in which people are forced to transfer to get the flexibility that we welcome in respect of private pensions. It is on that point in particular that I want Ministers to tell the House what the Government believe the law to be and what they believe to be the Inland Revenue's practice.

As I said, we should not as a matter of principle force people to opt out. It is bad enough that people are wrongly persuaded to do so for all sorts of extraneous reasons—because of the way in which the commission system works, or because salesmen are under pressure to sell policies in order to keep their jobs and earn enough to feed their families, which I regard as a fundamental structural defect in the industry—but the House should not do the same.

Mr. Forman: Once again I must ask the hon. Gentleman to clarify the point. I think that he is using language rather loosely. He talks about people being forced to transfer. Clearly, we all deplore the mis-selling of pensions that has happened, but nothing in the Bill requires such a transfer to be made; there are simply advantages held out for those who make such a move.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is also guilty of being a bit vague. No one is suggesting that there is anything in the Bill to force someone to transfer, but clearly, if there is flexibility with a personal pension and inflexibility with an occupational pension, although people are not forced to transfer in the sense that no one is holding a gun to their heads, they may be "forced" to get the necessary flexibility. If the Government are committed to flexibility—a principle that we support—I should have thought that it should be universally applied to all pensions, unless there are good reasons why not. If there are good reasons why it should not be universally applied, we shall no doubt hear them, but, as things stand at the moment, the Bill provides flexibility for private pensions.

If he was quoted correctly—as the words appear in a Treasury press release, I have no reason to believe that they are incorrect—the Financial Secretary said that those who had retirement annuity contracts would benefit because they had the option to transfer. That means that they would have to transfer to get that option. Exactly the same thing applies to occupational pension schemes.

The press release also reports the Financial Secretary as saying:

"it is not clear that any legislative changes are needed. The purchase of an annuity is very often a part of the structure of these schemes, but the Inland Revenue are prepared to consider any ideas that scheme sponsors may have for introducing more flexibility in this area."

It is my understanding that no legal change is necessary—I am sure that Ministers will tell me if my understanding is wrong—but the Financial Secretary concedes in the statement that, as a matter of practice rather than as a matter of law, the Inland Revenue can influence whether the flexibility that we are talking about can be transferred to an occupational scheme. He said that the Inland Revenue was now prepared to

"consider any ideas that scheme sponsors may have for introducing more flexibility".

It would be helpful if the Minister of State could tell us what rules and principles the Inland Revenue is proposing to apply when sponsors of schemes come forward. It would be interesting for those in occupational schemes and those who sponsor such schemes. It is not clear from anything that Ministers have said, by way of press release or, indeed, by any other means, what the Government think will be changed in occupational schemes. Given that, judging from the reaction, there is general agreement that flexibility is good as a matter of principle, provided that people are warned that there is no guarantee of more money at the end of the day, it must apply to all schemes.

The Minister says that the Revenue is prepared to consider any ideas. It would be very helpful if we could find out the principles that Ministers are prepared to

consider. Otherwise, we may be stuck with the current position, whereby the Inland Revenue practice, which for all practicable purposes has virtually the same effect as the law, may prevent flexibility from being extended to occupational schemes.

As I understand it, under the present practice, a scheme would be approved only if the rules of a money purchase occupational scheme require that an annuity is purchased on retirement. Consequently, there is something to be said for changing those rules so that the Revenue will allow flexibility of the sort that we are discussing with private pensions. The Government's intentions are not at all clear. Given that the industry is entitled to rely on ministerial statements, it would be very helpful if the Minister could tell us what the Government have in mind.

Our amendment refers to two particular points, which must be emphasised. The first is the question of cost, which, if I am successful in drawing the Government on allowing increased flexibility for occupational schemes, may be less of a problem. At the moment, when people transfer to private schemes they incur a cost. Everybody knows that, when one transfers a pension, not only are there administrative charges, but, very often, the act of transfer means that other optional benefits provided by the schemes could be forgone. That leads me directly to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). Many people who transferred inappropriately in the late 1980s not only gave up their entitlement in their contract of insurance, but the optional bonuses which they never get under private schemes.

Clearly, cost is incurred if one has to transfer, which is why I emphasise again and again that flexibility must be universally applied unless there are very good reasons for not doing so. We should not do anything in the House to force the substantial number of people in good occupational schemes out of those schemes. To please the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), we should not so heavily influence people that they are driven to the conclusion that transfer is the only way out.

As I said, the new regime of disclosure, which we very much welcome, will help because people will be able to identify their costs. However, perversely, I suspect that sales may be initially depressed when people receive their print-outs from their independent financial adviser or their insurance company and see the cost of buying a policy. The Government should be aware that substantial costs are involved.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, there is the question of risk. I said at the outset that added flexibility does not necessarily mean that all is good news for those who choose to defer their purchase, because rates may not improve and people may make bad decisions. Individuals must decide that for themselves.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: Yes, in one minute.

It is no part of a Government's function to try to substitute their judgment for that of individuals. However, individuals must know of all the pros and cons before they reach a decision and only an effective regulatory system can ensure that.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman will understand—indeed, it was explained to the all-party group on occupational pensions only last week—that quite a number of pension funds are now offering a phased arrangement, whereby people may change to gilts on a periodic basis. So each year they put a proportion in, depending on how far they are away from retirement. That will eliminate much of the risk about which the hon. Gentleman is talking. However, they would need pretty good professional advice to make those decisions.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman has made my case. He said that people will need pretty good professional advice. However, the ability to give pretty good professional advice has eluded many in the industry. I accept that if there is an ability to phase and to buy more gilts, that should benefit the individual.

We all accept that the difficulty is that only a handful of people in this country understand how pensions work. If we had a private, anonymous and confidential poll in the House, we would find that only a handful of hon. Members understand how the pensions regime works. That should worry all of us as the House passes pensions legislation. Indeed, the Pensions Bill is in the other place at the moment. Every year, hundreds of thousands of people will buy pensions or take out pensions through their employers, but they do not have a clue how those pensions work.

4.15 pm

No doubt the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) will want to make a pitch for his other interests and perhaps come to our rescue. However, if we change the regime and give people greater flexibility, we should ensure that people know what they are letting themselves in for.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a danger here? Some of the decisions that people will take in respect of this clause, or in related areas of pensions, cannot possibly be the subject of advice—except from Nostradamus—because they depend entirely on a view of the state of the market in 10 years' time. We should be wary of placing a huge reliance on advice when that advice can only be an informed guess.

Mr. Darling: I am not sure whether Nostradamus is registered under the Financial Services Act 1986 to provide such advice. Equally, I am not sure what point I am supposed to take from the hon. Gentleman's comments.

Mr. Stern: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: No. I want to progress matters a little further.

Of course no one knows what will happen in 10 years' time. No one knows what is going to happen in five years. Unless the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) had a different manifesto from that of his colleagues, he will recall that he made a gross error of judgment in 1992 when he told his electors that things were going to improve in 1992 and that growth would start the day after the general election. No one knows what the conditions are going to be and no one would suggest that the Government or a regulator should place themselves in the shoes of an individual and make such judgments for them.

[Mr. Darling]

However, a regulatory system can ensure that, when someone buys a pension or any other financial services product, that person should know what the risks are. People must form a judgment. The difficulty that we have had in this country for too long is that people do not know what the risks are because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover said, too many salesmen did not bother them about the risks. People were told to sign on the bottom line and to ignore the small print. They were assured that the money would be all right and that whatever they did would be better.

Happily, the regulatory system is beginning to bite on some of those people. However, there are still occasions when reputable companies, household names and companies which should know better allow inappropriate selling methods to continue. Companies with very good training regimes and very good and efficient regulatory regimes undermine those aspects by making their work forces depend on commission. If salesmen have to sell 10 policies a week, and only five have been sold by Friday afternoon, common sense tells us that a mistake is likely to be made.

I am not suggesting that we should attempt to substitute the judgment of Parliament or of the Government for the judgment of individuals. However, I am absolutely certain that we need a regulatory system that ensures that people are told the risks. That point has been raised many times in the House and I am afraid that it will be raised on many occasions in the future. Clause 52 and schedule 11 give a new opportunity for flexibility, and we welcome that. However, there is apparently an inflexibility with regard to occupational schemes. It would be reckless of us simply to nod the proposals through without having regard to the fact that the current regulatory regime is flawed in many respects.

That view is not held simply by Opposition Members. Many Conservative Members accept that there are problems with the regulatory regime which need to be addressed. That view is increasingly held outside the industry. I do not argue for a minute that there is unanimity about what should be done about the problem. We believe that self-regulation should be scrapped, but many Conservative Members do not hold that view. However, we are nearly at one in the belief that the system needs to be improved.

I mention that point because there are concerns. The Association of British Insurers, I think, has written to all members of the Finance Bill Standing Committee, stating:

"The risks to policyholders inherent in decisions of this nature must not be overlooked. There is no guarantee that a policyholder will benefit from a decision to defer purchase of his annuity"—

this will be a costly system to provide—

"a factor overlooked in the compliance cost assessment"

to which I referred. Its present view is:

"Only those with funds at retirement in excess of £100,000 are likely to find this facility economic."

If the ABI is right about that—it has a certain view because of what it is, but otherwise it is a respected and reputable organisation—surely the Committee needs to spend some time considering what we are doing.

If the costs are so great that people will benefit only if they have £100,000 or more, we must reflect upon that, but we must reflect even more on the difficulties and risks involved in such a transfer. As it is within his ministerial responsibility, perhaps the Minister of State will tell us whether the Government have at last accepted that the regulatory regime needs to be looked at in respect of not only its structure but the quality of regulation.

The Personal Investment Authority is now off the ground. It is still recruiting its members, but it is becoming more and more responsible for the retail end of the market. There is concern about the quality and degree of regulation. Although the PIA has a rule and regulation for just about every eventuality, there are doubts about how effective they are. That matter needs to be looked at, especially in the light of this measure.

The other matter of which Ministers must be aware is that the pension transfer problem, which was highlighted 13 or 14 months ago, has not yet been resolved. Indeed, although the Securities and Investments Board has now instructed the Personal Investment Authority to examine pension transfer cases, the Minister will be aware that many people in the industry are trying to block that review. Before the courts at present, which is why I cannot go into the matter in too much detail, is an action that I understand is funded by individual independent financial advisers' professional indemnity insurers.

If that review is blocked, we will be back at square one. The Minister will then be driven to accept that legislation is necessary to try to unscramble the mess that we are in, but we should not compound the problem with pension transfers until that matter is cleared up. Although the Minister will say that the review is under way, it will be at risk if the judicial review is successful, and we will not know that for a few weeks. If the Minister has more information, no doubt he will tell us.

I observe in passing that it is ironic that the insurance industry itself—professional indemnity insurers—is trying to block the regulators from trying to unscramble the mess and to sort out the problems of, possibly, 2 million people. Only under the Conservative Government could we have the absurd situation that self-regulation allows the interests of so many people to be in such a mess and threatened by litigation that is funded by another branch of the insurance industry. One would have thought that the Government might have accepted that they had some responsibility.

As I have said, more and more people will want to make provision for themselves, and more and more people are doing so. If we are to encourage them to do that, they are entitled to turn to Parliament and say, "You make sure that the regulatory system works." At present, the regulatory system does not work. There are fundamental problems with pension transfers which Ministers must address. Ministers have used self-regulation to turn their backs on the problem and walk away from it. It is high time that they faced up to their responsibilities and acted on behalf of the general public and not on behalf of those who continue to espouse self-regulation.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman will remember that my interest in the matter predates 1986, when I sat on the Committee which considered the Financial Services Bill, and that it also predates his sneering reference to the fact that I have advised the British Insurance and Investment Brokers Association on such issues for many years. Under the Labour party's proposals, which it put forward in 1986 and which accepted the principle of self-regulation—the

only difference was that it wanted a statutory SIB—how would the presence of a statutory SIB rather than the present structure have altered the present position?

Mr. Darling: Direct regulation by the Securities and Investments Board, which is what we favour, would mean that the fiction of self-regulation by bodies such as the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Organisation, the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation and now the Personal Investment Authority would be done away with.

We would not have spent millions of pounds on setting up the PIA during the past three years. There would not have been the additional costs caused by the Treasury telling the SIB what to do, and then the SIB telling the self-regulatory bodies what they must do. We would abolish the difficulties caused by the fact that the PIA had to bid for members as well as bidding for recognition as a regulator. It is very difficult to serve two masters at once. That is the short answer.

Mr. Butterfill *rose—*

Mr. Darling: No, I have not finished yet.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West was unkind to accuse me of sneering. I have not mentioned one of the hon. Gentleman's many interests in the Register of Members' Interests. I am saving that for the Committee. The hon. Gentleman's entry in the Register is almost as long as some of the schedules in the Bill. He should not worry—I shall return to that subject.

I am not sneering at the hon. Gentleman. He takes a great interest in these matters and, in between times, he makes occasional lucid remarks which have a great deal of force. That was the sneering bit. The subject is too important to indulge in the sort of exchange that the hon. Gentleman has in mind.

I return to a point that I do not want to labour. Self-regulation does not work, because it is very difficult to serve the trade interest and the public interest. We want regulation that acts in the public interest. Of course we must have the involvement of practitioners—that is very important—but it must serve the public interest first and foremost.

Mr. Butterfill: What the hon. Gentleman is saying is rather different from the position that the Labour party took in 1986, when it endorsed the principle of self-regulation and simply wanted a statutory SIB above it, rather than the present structure of the SIB. Is he not moving the goalposts as he speaks?

Mr. Darling: One would be hard pressed to find anyone in the country who believes that the Financial Services Act 1986 does not need revisiting. That applies to people of all shades of opinion, both political and industrial. That was not a terribly good point.

Having looked at what my colleagues said in 1986 and before that, I think that what I am saying—with regard to our experiences over the past eight or nine years—is a logical development of that. There needs to be a change, and one day—perhaps even in this Parliament—we may have the Second Reading debate for a new Financial Services Act, if the Government face up to the fact that changes are needed.

Perhaps the new regime—there are a number of new faces on the Treasury Front Bench—might even see that change is needed. Perhaps the Government will continue their policy of clearing the decks in advance of a general election, in the hope that nobody notices those things between now and 1996, or whenever the election is.

It is important that we reflect that the pension transfer problem which was highlighted 14 to 16 months ago has not yet been resolved. The House is being invited today to approve something that could add to the problems, unless the regulatory regime is put on a proper footing. That is the point that I am making, and I shall continue to make it until the Government face the fact that reform is needed.

It will be helpful to the House and to the country if the Minister tells us whether the Government accept that changes have to come to the regulatory regime, and whether the Government will contemplate even consulting on the matter or having further legislation because the present situation cannot possibly be allowed to continue. Given that it will probably take two or three years between the change being announced and anything being put in place, the sooner the Government take action, the better.

I shall revert to the subject that has dominated our thinking this afternoon—whether people will be forced to transfer. I draw to the House's attention a letter that I received from a firm which advises nurses and others in occupational schemes. The firm makes the point that those people may be forced into a position where, in order to get flexibility, they will have to transfer their pensions. That cannot possibly be right, and I hope that Ministers will make absolutely clear what the Government believe needs to be done to provide greater flexibility.

If there is no need to change the law, and it is simply a question of changing the Inland Revenue's practice, it would be helpful if Ministers could first announce that the Revenue is to change its practice and allow flexibility in occupational schemes. It would be helpful if the Government were to announce what their thinking is and what the goalposts are, if I might use that term. Many people outside the House want to know the position.

Paragraph 4(4) of schedule 11, headed "Income withdrawals", deals with a technical matter—I describe it thus as it is rather obscure. It requires that the withdrawals

"must be not less than 70 per cent. or more than 100 per cent. of the annual amount of the annuity which would have been purchasable by him"—

the policyholder—

"on the relevant reference date."

I understand that the Government will publish tables of annuity rates to which people can refer to calculate whether 70 per cent. is being withdrawn. I have been told that the problem with the table rates is that they will be arrived at on the basis of a level annuity—in other words with no indexation on the basis that there will be no pension for a surviving spouse.

I do not know whether that is true. Can the Minister tell me whether my understanding is correct? If it is, is not the 70 per cent. tariff high, as it might lead to far more disbursement than would be wise? Perhaps a 50 per cent. rate might be appropriate. I am seeking information and it would be helpful if the Minister could let us know the Government's thinking on that matter.

4.30 pm

In conclusion—you will be pleased to hear, Mr. Morris—we welcome the flexibility that the measure offers. It is a good thing, provided that people know that there is a cost, what the risks are and that we can never guarantee that deferral will mean more, or even the same amount, in the end.

Secondly, we need a clear statement on flexibility and the extension of that principle to all pension schemes. What is the Government's position, what are the rules and regulations and, if flexibility is to be allowed, what relaxation or changes do the Inland Revenue propose?

Our amendment highlights not merely the costs, but the need for the industry to be properly regulated. I shall emphasise time and again that self-regulation does not work in the conduct of the affairs of the House, or in the regulation of the financial services industry, and the sooner the Government face up to that fact the better. In that spirit, I hope that the Government will be able to explain their thinking.

Mr. Stern: First, I must make it clear that I have a personal interest in this matter. I was self-employed for most of my working life before I came to the House, I am still self-employed as regards my outside interests, and I inevitably took out some of the old retirement annuity policies and retained them. That fact will inform some of my later comments.

The comments of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) on flexibility were a little rich. In 1984-85, before the hon. Gentleman came to the House, I served on the Standing Committees considering two social security measures that paved the way for the introduction of personal pensions. I remember the vitriol that the hon. Gentleman's colleagues—the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett)—threw at the concept of personal pensions, purely because they thought that ordinary people could not be trusted with flexibility in pensions. They were not prepared to consider the idea of people being able to choose between a good, honest, upstanding occupational scheme and a personal scheme that might accidentally be more appropriate in certain circumstances.

I welcome the change in outlook in the Opposition Front-Bench team, and the fact that they accept that ordinary people, as opposed to the organised masses for whom they were formerly speaking, welcome that flexibility. I urge the hon. Gentlemen to encourage some of his colleagues who have been here for longer to look at many of their entrenched attitudes towards other areas where ordinary people could benefit from the flexibility that he now lauds.

In introducing his amendment, the hon. Gentleman rightly distinguished between personal pensions that are being given the extra flexibility of taking an annuity on a range of dates; occupational pensions; and section 226 policies. But he failed to make one crucial distinction: such flexibility already exists in many good occupational pension schemes, and can be introduced in others. In any case, flexibility is available to employers to increase a pension in payment, which many large occupational pension schemes already do.

Such flexibility is not available to a person who has purchased either a personal pension or a retirement annuity. Many retirement annuity policies currently exist, and premiums are still paid into them. I am indebted to Scottish Equitable for supplying me rapidly with information on this matter and telling me that some 5 million section 226 policies are still in force, and many of those continue to grow.

Those policyholders do not have the flexibility that is being offered to personal pension holders under the clause, nor is it suggested that they should be entitled to it, despite the fact that current thinking in pensions is towards greater flexibility in retirement. For example, many people may now leave invested a large part of their pension provision to pay for care costs when they are very elderly, need much more care than can be provided through the state system, or need care that differs from that provided through the state system, for which they must pay. Such flexibility is built into the personal pension regime now proposed by the Government, but is on offer to no one else.

I hope that, both in replying to this debate and when we return to the subject later during the passage of the Bill, as I suspect we will, my hon. Friend the Minister will give better reasons for excluding retirement annuity policyholders and, to a large extent, many occupational pension scheme members, from the flexibility that is now proposed. It is not sufficient to say that it is open to a retirement annuity pensioner to transfer.

First, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central rightly said, a suitable policy may not be on offer. Secondly, costs are incurred whether those are borne by the individual or other pension holders. The estimated cost for each retirement annuity policy transferred into a personal pension policy is some £50 per policy. Why should those costs be incurred when it is of no apparent benefit to the Exchequer to exclude section 226 policyholders from the benefits in the clause?

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will give a detailed explanation of why we are reintroducing a class system into pensions.

Mr. Forman: I agree with much of what my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) said. I, too, look forward to a clear explanation from my hon. Friend the Minister, which I am sure we shall have, about the thinking behind how the lines have been drawn in the schedule. I say "schedule" because, even though we are talking about clause 52, the thrust of the debate so far has been about the terms and the implications of schedule 11.

In opening the debate, it is interesting that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) made it clear to the House—and, through *Hansard*, to the country—that any future Labour Government would see a further upheaval of the financial services industry through the introduction of direct statutory regulation by the Securities and Investments Board in place of the existing measures and structure, which have taken the best part of seven years to put in place. I think that the industry must be warned about that.

The main point I wish to make in this afternoon's fairly narrow but necessary debate is that, as I understand it, clause 52 and schedule 11 constitute a permissive and not a mandatory measure. That goes to the heart of what I said to the hon. Gentleman by way of intervention. The arrangements do not force any transfer upon pension holders, and nothing is required to be transferred by law. If the Bill becomes law, certain advantageous

arrangements will be offered to categories of pension holders, and they may or may not take advantage of them, depending on the quality of advice they receive and their own decisions about their plans between the age of 50 and 75 years.

I want to ask the Minister of State some relevant questions. First, if the Bill goes ahead unamended, can he confirm that the costs of making a transfer will be of the order mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West, or will they be more or less than that? Have some estimated categories of cost been overlooked at this stage?

Secondly, are there any persuasive arguments against the idea of extending the principle of flexibility to the other instruments mentioned by my hon. Friend? Thirdly, can we feel confident that, when best advice is given, particularly by independent financial advisers, that best advice will include not only the advantages of transferring—all hon. Members know of cases where those advantages have proved illusory and damaging to the people concerned—but the advantages of staying with the existing arrangements?

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central said, quite correctly, that most people in the country, and indeed in this House, do not fully understand their own pension arrangements, let alone those of other people. Obviously it is important that independent financial advisers argue clearly the advantages of maintaining the present position rather than making a change.

I welcome the option of flexibility which the clause opens up for people between the age of 50 and 75. I do not think that it will clinch the decision for all people: they would be wise to look carefully at the implications of the measure for their individual circumstances.

I urge my hon. Friend to think carefully, and preferably inform the House as fully as possible, about the assumptions which lie behind the present policy. Perhaps he could include some up-to-date figures about the size and scope of the personal pensions market today. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West has already cited figures in relation to section 226 contracts, and it would be useful to compare them with the personal pensions market.

I welcome this element of the Finance Bill, and wish it well. However, I think that we need to address some of the detailed points which have been raised on both sides of the Chamber.

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): The debate so far has hinged on the question not whether flexibility is desirable, but whether the regulatory system which is in place is sufficient to ensure that those who choose to exercise flexibility take the right decisions. That is where the real question marks arise, and there is little sign that the Government are addressing the weaknesses in the regulatory system.

Obviously, anyone who considers exercising the new flexibility afforded by clause 52 will be making a critical and very difficult decision. As has already been said, that decision requires the ability to project into the future in a way that few people, including professional advisers, are able to do. Recent evidence shows that those who have sought to project into the future have fairly consistently overstated the benefits of taking a particular investment decision, which has left people very vulnerable.

4.45 pm

An obvious example which comes to mind is the sale of home income bonds in the late 1980s. The pitch behind that sale—"Here is a way of making far more out of your capital than you previously thought possible"—could apply also to the holder of a personal pension. That exercise ended in disaster for many households.

Although the costs have not yet proven to be as high, it is clear that the sale of endowment mortgages—essentially a gamble on the performance of the stock market—in the 1980s took place on the basis of results which have not been achieved. The projections for the performance of endowment mortgages which were approved at that time by the regulatory organisations have subsequently been scaled down.

In looking at using personal pensions in a flexible manner, we must say that the regulatory system failed to ensure that people received the best advice in those circumstances. My worry about clause 52—not the principle of it, but its practical consequences—is that good advice is again not likely to be forthcoming.

We do not know whether someone who has bought a personal pension will have much money to invest in an annuity. People who have invested two or three years' savings with a firm such as Guardian may find that they have nothing left when their policy matures after 20 or 30 years, because, according to the projections of *Money Management* magazine, the effects of fees and charges will exhaust their savings altogether. Many people who have entered the personal pensions market believing that money is accruing safely to provide for their future pensions will find that they have very little or no money left at the end of the day.

Even more important than the flexibility with which people can invest in a pension fund is the return they receive on that investment. The survey by *Money Management* showed that some firms produce twice the rate of return on policies as others. At the moment, the regulatory system contains little to enable a personal pension purchaser to distinguish between the best and the worst performers in the industry.

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Gentleman agree, therefore, that it is even more important that independent financial advisers retain their place in the market, and that we do not move to a system where most schemes are marketed directly by financial institutions which do not offer a range of independent advice? Does he agree that the report conducted into the matter for the Securities and Investments Board showed that those who took independent financial advice fared much better than those who bought directly from financial institutions?

Mr. Denham: I am not aware of the report which made that distinction. Some independent financial advisers offer a good service; equally, there are those who do not. The record books are full of both examples, and one could argue either way in order to prove one's case. However, I think that it is to the consumers' advantage that they can turn to independent financial advisers for advice as well as to the major companies.

The Government's failure to regulate in that area is costing the taxpayer a great deal of money. It appears that, up to 1992, £3.5 billion was paid to private insurance companies on behalf of personal pensions by people whose incomes were so low that they would have been

[Mr. Denham]

better off remaining in state earnings-related pension schemes. That is an enormous sum of public money to pay the private insurance industry to put people in a worse situation than they would be in otherwise.

Assuming that such people retain their pensions until they mature, they may find that the annuity in which they wish to invest under this clause will buy them a pension less than the one they would have received under SERPS—whether they purchase the annuity on the date that the policy matures, or whether they buy it some time later. There are no signs yet that the Government are using the regulatory system to clamp down on that sort of mis-selling. Pension fund opt-outs affect perhaps half a million people, but opt-outs from SERPS by people on low incomes affect perhaps 2.5 million. Numerically, it is a much greater problem than that with which the board is wrestling.

One in five people abandon their personal pensions within the first year of sale. Almost every one will lose practically all the money that they paid, and the money paid by the taxpayer in the form of national insurance contributions and additional rebates will be entirely wasted. Although this debate naturally concentrates on policy maturity, far too little is done by the Government to make sure that someone who buys a personal pension is in a position to maintain it until its maturity.

Mr. Forman: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the start of long-term schemes. Does he have further evidence that, in the majority of cases, people terminate their pensions because of a force majeure—a downturn in their personal circumstances? Is it not more usually the case that the advice that they were initially given was defective?

Mr. Denham: There is no satisfactory answer to that question, because studies of individual cases in sufficient detail have not been completed. The question arises, what is force majeure in such circumstances? If someone discovers that they cannot continue a policy less than one year after it was sold to them, that is arguably something that a competent salesperson, properly managed, should have predicted. That will not always be so, but in many cases where policy payments lapse after a relatively short time, the reasons will include bad advice because the salesperson did not look sufficiently into the future in determining the best policy.

That is often the case when individuals are encouraged to sign up for regular premium policies, when they would have been better advised to enter into a single premium policy. Such a policy would largely protect them from the whole of the first three years' premiums being absorbed by commissions and fees, and would provide the security of knowing that the amount invested will stay invested for a reasonable time.

I am not against the principle of flexibility but a major investment decision by someone in their fifties, sixties or seventies requires a level of advice and expertise that the financial services industry and its regulators have not yet demonstrated. Hand-in-hand with the Government's proposed measures should be a reassurance that they will continue to drive the regulatory structure, so that consumers will be better protected from bad advice than in recent years.

Mr. Butterfill: I am the first to agree with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) that the existing regulatory structure contains defects, and did so ab initio. The problem is that, following implementation of the Financial Services Act 1986, the Securities and Investments Board did not require a single retail regulator. That, above all else, caused the majority of the subsequent problems.

Regrettably, Sir Kenneth Berrill, the board's first chairman, concentrated more on writing detailed rule books—as one might have anticipated of a former civil servant—than considering the big picture of what was to happen in the marketplace. Had he done that, and insisted on a single retail regulator, today's position would be considerably different.

However, we have a single retail regulator now in the Personal Investment Authority. I agree with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central that it took a lot of cajoling to secure one. I would have preferred a modest amendment to the 1986 Act, to give the SIB power to direct the way in which practitioners were regulated and by whom. That would have made the PIA's birth much less painful. Having said that, it is up and running and likely to work satisfactorily. We ought to give it a good try before embarking on wholesale reform of the 1986 Act.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) about section 226 policyholders. Again, I must declare an interest as such a policyholder myself. Distinguishing between one group of pension holders and another is unjustifiable. I am particularly concerned about people in occupational schemes that are money purchase schemes, who will be disadvantaged relative to those in other schemes under the Government's proposals.

I see no justification for disadvantaging some policyholders, and agree with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central that we ought to remedy that situation in the Bill. There is a grave danger that many people in good occupational schemes that are money-purchased will be tempted out of them and into personal pensions that may be inappropriate. Contrary to the suggestion of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, the respectable part of the independent adviser profession agrees with him. He may have seen the briefing that the IFA Association sent to hon. Members.

Mr. Darling: At no time did I suggest that independent advisers in general or particular were at fault. The hon. Gentleman must be thinking of another speaker.

Mr. Butterfill: I will read *Hansard* carefully, but my clear recollection is that the hon. Gentleman said that it was likely to lead to such further mis-selling, by anybody. The IFA Association agrees with the hon. Gentleman. Its chairman wrote to me:

> "Why should the personal pension have an advantage over all other schemes? Has the Government not yet learnt the lesson from pension transfers and opt outs? . . . I see restriction of deferred purchase to personal pensions as yet again opening the floodgates for the unscrupulous salesman."

The hon. Gentleman's views are endorsed by the profession itself. It is right to allow deferral, because it is wrong that someone reaching retirement at an

unpropitious time in the market should be forced to make an investment decision that nobody with the freedom would make at that time.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider reducing from 70 per cent. to 50 per cent. the minimum amount taken, because although people reaching retirement age are likely to be suffering a substantial diminution in income, and they will probably need more money, if they retire at a time in the market when the yield on their annuity is unusually low, it is unreasonable to expect them to take a substantially increased risk as a result.

I am concerned also about the taxation provisions, and seek my hon. Friend's advice. If, following a member's death, where there is deferral, his widow chooses to take the lump sum, she will be liable at that time to tax at 35 per cent. That seems to breach the general rule that transfers on death between husbands and wives will be free of taxation, and seems unnecessarily harsh.

Of course, the wife might die shortly after her husband. For example, if the husband died immediately in a car crash in which they were both victims, but his wife died some weeks later, there could be double taxation. The estate would pay not only 35 per cent. tax but inheritance tax. I hope that my hon. Friend will consider those points when he responds.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): Clause 25 and schedule 11 are clearly designed to alleviate a problem that arises in relation to personal pension schemes—the obligation placed on members to use accumulated funds in pension schemes to purchase an annuity as soon as any benefit is taken from the pension fund. That means that people may be obliged to buy their annuity at a time when market rates are less favourable than they might be. The advantage to everybody of such a rule is that it results in clarity. Everyone knows that, at the point at which a fund matures, the purchase of the annuity has to be made.

This inflexibility, however, can cause problems for someone who has contributed large amounts of income to the fund for many years, at a time when rates may have been significantly higher than they are at the point when the fund is used for annuity purchase. In those circumstances, the Government have sensibly sought ways of avoiding the problems. Their plans were set out clearly in the DSS White Paper, "Security, Equality, Choice: The Future for Pensions".

5pm

Published in June 1994, the White Paper states in paragraph 3.9:

"The Government is aware of the effect that annuity rates at the time of retirement can have on the size of the pension bought with the contents of a money purchase pension fund. The Government favours greater flexibility in this area."

Certainly, the proposals in the Finance Bill will achieve that flexibility.

The basic proposition will allow personal pension scheme members to purchase an annuity at any stage between the ages of 50 and 75. Secondly, it will allow retired people who have deferred annuity purchase to withdraw income broadly equivalent to the annuity that the fund would have purchased. These proposals for flexibility at least address the basic problem which I have described.

The issue for the Opposition concerns whether the proposals will work in practice and whether they will remedy the harm that we are worried about. Of course I accept that the Government's proposals will give members of personal pension schemes a greater range of choice; but in so doing, certain difficulties are likely to arise for members. It is those difficulties that amendment No. 13 is designed to deal with.

First comes the risk problem. Although rates may have been falling for some time, there is clearly no guarantee that a policyholder will gain from any decision to defer the purchase of an annuity. There is a risk that, if rates have been falling while contributions have been paid into a fund, they may continue to fall. So deferral will merely serve to achieve the purchase of an annuity at still lower rates. That is a judgment which any holder will have to make.

The difficulty with exercising this judgment is that it requires a fairly sophisticated understanding of markets and how they are going to operate. Thus flexibility does not necessarily bring benefits for the individual concerned.

We should also bear in mind the more substantial consideration at stake—the costs that policyholders may have to bear in the exercise of this choice. The Inland Revenue has calculated that the one-off cost to personal pension providers of setting up the new system will be about £1.15 billion, together with annual recurring costs of as much as £600.000 a year by the third year of operation. Those figures are contained in the compliance cost assessment of 29 November 1994. The Revenue goes on to state:

"It is expected that personal pension providers will pass on all compliance costs to their members in the form of an administration charge."

That will significantly reduce the money available for the ultimate purchase of the annuity. The cost will fall to the pension holder, in the form of reduced benefits on retirement.

Policyholders who are contemplating making use of the new flexibility and choice will need to understand all the risks involved. I have already mentioned one: the fact that rates may continue to fall, so the fund will purchase still less in the form on an annuity. Hence anyone taking advantage of the new flexibility will need professional advice—which tends to be rather expensive. That is necessarily so, because the advice needs to be as sophisticated as circumstances dictate.

Mr. Butterfill: Surely the advice does not need to be terribly sophisticated? One has only to look at the long-term money rate trend in the market. If the market is discounting a higher rate for the future, it clearly expects interest rates to rise. That is about as far as anyone can predict.

Mr. Hoon: That is right, but the problem is that many people depend on expert advice. When people have paid substantial contributions into their pension funds so as to buy an annuity, we want them to have the best possible advice. The hon. Gentleman makes light of these judgments, but they are of grave concern to people embarking on their retirements. I repeat that this sort of professional advice, especially if it is of the highest quality, can be expensive.

[Mr. Hoon]

All this tends to suggest that the proposals in this years's Finance Bill are likely to benefit only the wealthier members of society. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) has already said, and as the Association of British Insurers reiterates,

"Our present view is that only those with funds at retirement in excess of £100,000 are likely to find this facility economic."

That is quite a large fund. Although flexibility obviously benefits people with that much to invest, we would like to ensure that the disadvantages are not so great as to render the exercise uneconomic for other people. There is also a clear risk of poor decisions and judgments about how the new rules should operate being reached.

Our amendment seeks at least to provide further information about how the rules would operate. It suggests that the Government report to Parliament on the likely costs of administering personal pension schemes, and provide an assessment of the risks to members of such schemes. We believe that that would provide a context in which to reach a judgment on the operation of the proposals; and on whether, in practice, they benefit not just the wealthy but also the greater number of people who might expect to take advantage of them because they have a fund into which they have paid throughout their working lives. Such people will want to purchase annuities at the most favourable rates.

Generally speaking, while we can see the benefits of the flexibility that these proposals allow for personal pension schemes, we are worried that the flexibility involved may be achieved only at some risk. Amendment No. 13 at least eliminates some of those risks.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): There is one matter on which hon. Members on both sides of the Committee can agree—pensions are a complicated business. Most people rarely understand the full details of their own pension let alone the range of those offered on the market, the benefits that derive from them and the tax treatment of them. That is a matter for regret. In the search for equity and greater self-provision, it is probably inevitable that there will be complexities in the provision of choice and equity, but at the same time—the complexity of such schemes has been raised by a number of hon. Members—it raises the whole issue of education about financial provision. It is an issue to which I have referred on numerous occasions in the House and I do so again today.

One does not want in any way to be too patronising, because, of course, the Government are obliged to frame the law properly and regulators are obliged to supervise the law properly, but at the end of the day there must be an obligation on the individual to look carefully at investment products—particularly long-term investment products such as pensions—before they enter into them, to seek advice from those who have expert abilities and to ensure as far as possible that the contract that they are entering into meets their needs.

We can do the best that we can, and we can seek to refine the legislation, as I will endeavour to show later, and the regulatory system, to give as much support and backing as possible, but we must address a wider issue, perhaps through the education system, perhaps in a variety of publicity ways, by regulators and product providers, to ensure that people understand much better the nature of the products that they are offered, their obligations and the benefits that they are likely to receive.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): I have listened intently to the debate as one of those persons ill-informed on pension provision. I take the point about education, but, practically, how can one provide that with changes being made to the pension provision almost daily, notwithstanding the clause before us? How will the Government be forced to do that?

Mr. Nelson: The principal means of improving awareness about the nature of products, the obligations and benefits that arise under them, is through disclosure, the transparency and the understanding of the nature of the product itself. The disclosure regime, which came into effect from the beginning of this year—not just with regard to life insurance products but the wider application—goes to the heart of the issue and goes a long way towards answering the hon. Gentleman's question.

I suggest that there is a wider obligation, because one can disclose; one can tell people; one can write to people; but unless one is pretty certain that people understand, they can still be mis-sold, or they can enter inadvertently into a disadvantageous contract. I have no wish to use this important debate to give a polemic on the wider issue, but it is relevant and is a matter to which the Committee may wish to return.

A number of reasonable points were made by hon. Members and I shall do my best to comment on them and provide answers where possible.

Clause 52 and schedule 11 will give personal pension scheme members greater choice over the timing of the annuity purchase and will enable them to continue to benefit from the further investment growth of their funds while drawing an income in retirement. The amendment proposes that the provisions of schedule 11 should come into effect only after the Government have reported on three issues: the costs to personal pension schemes of administering the new provisions; the risks to personal pension scheme members who take advantage of the provisions; and the extension of the provisions to occupational pension schemes and to retirement annuity contracts.

I sympathise with the concerns raised by a number of hon. Members on those matters. The Government have already taken action to meet those concerns as far as they can. I must say, therefore, that I do not think that the proposed amendment to clause 52 will serve any useful purpose. I shall explain why by providing reassurance, I hope, on each of the issues covered by the amendment.

I deal first with the likely effects of the provisions of schedule 11 on the costs of administering personal pension schemes—a point raised by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling). As a matter of general Government policy, all Departments are required to prepare a structured appraisal of the likely cost to businesses of complying with new or amended regulations. In that way, compliance costs can be assessed and unnecessary burdens to business identified. In the case of annuity deferral, a full compliance cost assessment—CCA—has been made and has been available, as announced in an Inland Revenue press review from its deregulation unit, since Budget day.

The CCA broadly examines the likely administrative costs to personal pension providers over and above the costs of administering the present regime, which requires immediate annuity purchase once benefits are taken from a personal pension scheme. Costs are divided into those that are non-recurring, such as the cost of amending computer systems, and recurring ones, such as arranging income withdrawals for people who defer annuity purchase.

5.15 pm

Of course, the costs are likely to rise in future years as more people retire and take advantage of the new flexibility, but we would expect all pension providers to recover those costs by means of an administration charge, such as that already levied in respect of personal pension arrangements.

Mr. Hoon: Does the Minister expect that that administration charge will be spread evenly throughout all personal pension holders, or will it simply be paid by those who are deferring their annuity purchase?

Mr. Nelson: That will be a matter for the individual schemes to determine. It is not a matter for regulation. The costs, in general terms, while inevitably as much a guesstimate as an estimate, are clearly set out. It will be for the industry to determine how to recover those costs. In the case of smaller businesses—a number of hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, raised this point—independent financial advisers already have to give the best advice possible, and we do not see that that necessarily will involve additional net costs, but there will obviously be particular compliance costs for the product providers, as such, rather than the intermediaries. It will be a matter for them broadly to determine how the costs are spread.

The second point covered in the amendment concerns the risks that people will run in deferring annuity purchase. It is an important issue. It must be apparent to all hon. Members that flexibility involves choice, and choice involves risk. It is an interesting paradox that risk can be present both with flexibility and with inflexibility. If any regime is too inflexible, and tethers people down to only one recourse, that can be highly risky and can prejudice them.

Equally, if one introduces flexibility into any regime, as we seek further to do with the amendment and schedule, it opens up a choice, but it opens up the prospect of some risk, or relatively better performance by one who behaves in one way as opposed to another. So although there might not—I hope—be a fundamental risk in terms of the whole stream of income or the value of the security of a fund, there will be a differential result, obviously, for people who behave in different ways.

It is inevitable in providing flexibility or choice that there will be some risk for people that they take a decision, the outcome of which will be less preferential to them than had they chosen otherwise. What I am saying is obviously a truism in one sense, but it raises the point made by hon. Members—that such risk can best be avoided by getting the best possible advice from professionals on how people should proceed, and how they should or should not take advantage of the flexibilities provided under the clause and schedule.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend agree, however, that although there is undoubtedly some risk inherent in the choice, the overall risk is reduced by giving that choice? Although some people will make bad choices, overall the element of risk must be reduced by giving that choice.

Mr. Nelson: I hope and believe so. The Government would not have brought the measure forward unless we believed that to be so. Of course, without straying too much from the narrow provision of the clause and schedule, the Government's overall macro-economic policy is there to try to bring about a sustained period of low inflation and interest rates as low as can be sustained to continue to bear down on that level of inflation.

If it were possible—an objective seriously to be desired by all hon. Members—for the country to enjoy a very long period of low inflation and low interest rates, it follows that it might not necessarily be right for people to defer for a long period the purchase of an annuity. Indeed, as the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) and others pointed out, they might be disadvantaged: the market can move in both directions, and interest rates may fall. People must make their own decisions.

Understandably, over the past couple of years—particularly a year or so ago—there was apprehension about the requirement for the removal of any money from a personal pension immediately to trigger the need to buy an annuity at what were historically low interest rates: no option was available. We hope that the introduction of further flexibility will meet people's needs, although it does not necessarily follow that it is right for them to defer without expert advice.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): What advice would the Minister give people today, with the prospect of a rise in interest rates?

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Gentleman tempts me, but I cannot advise people on such matters.

Let me return to the risk involved in the deferral of annuity purchase. I am well aware of the concerns that have been expressed, and assure the House that the Government take them very seriously in the light of past mis-selling of personal pensions. The Securities and Investments Board has already made its recommendations for redress following cases of mis-selling, and the House will recall the statement that I made about the matter on 25 October last year.

We should remember that the annuity deferral proposals were made in response to a flaw in the present personal pensions regime. We want above all to free people from the obligation to buy an annuity as soon as they take benefits from their pension scheme, possibly at a time when annuity rates are low. The new flexibility that we are offering has been widely welcomed, but—as my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) pointed out—it is only an option: no one will be forced to defer buying an annuity if they are unhappy about the risks involved. Indeed, we do not expect that many people will wish to do so for more than a few years.

So what are the risks that people may run if they opt for income withdrawals? The main risk is that their income may decrease at some point in the future, either because of falling interest rates which have a direct effect on annuity rates or because of an unexpectedly low investment performance by their fund in the deferral period. There is also the risk, for people with a small fund,

[Mr. Nelson]

that administration charges will erode the value of the fund before the annuity is bought—a point raised by more than one hon. Member.

Regulatory bodies such as the Personal Investment Authority will therefore have a duty to ensure that personal pension scheme members are made aware of the risks, and the disclosure regime on life products that came into effect on 1 January this year provides an excellent basis for that. Pension providers will be obliged to disclose the potential risks in deferring annuity purchase, and individual scheme members will normally consider seeking expert financial advice before reaching a decision.

The proposed legislation itself provides a further safeguard against the too-rapid depletion of the pension fund: personal pension providers will have to review members' funds every three years to ensure that income withdrawals are in line with the value of the fund. Members will, of course, be able to convert their pension fund to an annuity at any time they choose up to the age of 75.

Let me now deal with the third issue covered by the amendment—the possible extension of the proposals to money-purchase occupational pension schemes and retirement annuity contracts. The Government considered that very carefully when formulating the present clause and schedule. In the light of press comments following the Budget day announcement, we examined the matter yet again; and, as has been mentioned, my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary made a statement that was reported in an Inland Revenue press release issued on 4 January.

That statement pointed out that the present tax approval rules for occupational pension schemes did not prevent flexibility in the timing of annuity purchase, although a pension must be taken. The provision of annuities is often part of the structure of the schemes, for reasons unconnected with the tax rules. Following the Budget day announcement about the proposal to amend the personal pension schemes tax rules, we made it clear that we would be happy to discuss the issue with the promoters of occupational pension schemes. As a result, some insurance companies have approached the Inland Revenue to see what changes would be needed in the rules governing tax-approved occupational pension schemes.

At this stage, it is not at all clear that any legislative changes are needed in relation to occupational pension schemes, but if it proves—as a result of discussion with the promoters of the schemes—that some changes are desirable, we shall consider introducing appropriate measures.

Mr. Darling: Does that mean that the Government are agreeable to the principle of extending flexibility to occupational schemes? Have any difficulties been highlighted so far by the approaches made to them?

Mr. Nelson: Yes and no. Yes, we are in favour of the principle of extending flexibility: that is, we believe that flexibility already reasonably exists, but if we were persuaded otherwise we would want to examine the matter carefully. No, our discussions and consultations have not flagged up any problems. Unless compelling reasons are given for us to introduce appropriate measures, we see no need to assert in legislation what is already the case.

The statement also pointed out that the retirement annuity legislation had been obsolescent and had remained unchanged since 1988, when personal pensions superseded retirement annuity contracts. In any case, it was not necessary to amend the retirement annuity rules, because holders of RACs can already transfer their funds to a personal pension scheme if they want to benefit from the new provisions. Inland Revenue officials have spoken to nine insurance companies, all of which said that they would make no charge for internal transfers—that is, transfers from a retirement annuity contract to a personal pension scheme with the same company. That option therefore need not involve any additional cost.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central raised the question of the principles that should be applied to administrative savings for schemes, and to any annuity changes and transfers that are made. Broadly, amendments to occupational pension schemes should ensure that changes are consistent with the purpose of pension schemes. It is a tax approval condition that the schemes should provide a pension for life. Any proposals should be consistent with that principle, based on actuarial considerations relating to life expectancy and periodic reviews of funds.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) asked whether we were reintroducing a class system into pensions. That is far from being the case; we intend to ensure, by providing greater flexibility and choice, that people are better able to take the course that they consider best for them. The provision of an opportunity that does not currently exist should only break down any class system that may be in the pensions regime.

I hope that I have made it clear that it is easy for people with retirement annuity contracts to transfer to personal pension schemes; certainly, that was suggested by nine insurance companies that we consulted.

Mr. Stern *rose—*

Mr. Nelson: I will give way in a moment. First, let me make a further point which I think was implicit in what a number of hon. Members said. They asked why we have not in this or in other legislation referred specifically to retirement annuity contracts. I have said that that is essentially obsolescent legislation. A complicated corpus of further clauses in the Bill would be required to address what we believe is not in practice a problem.

There would be no great advantage. It would not offer to those with retirement annuity contracts a choice or an option that is not already there. It could not be done at no or low cost, and in any case we have assurances that it can already be done. It is open to people to change to a personal pension, thereby taking full advantage of the flexibility provided by the clause and the schedule. For the reasons that I have given with regard to occupational pensions and retirement annuity contracts, we do not think that the problem arises.

5.30 pm

Mr. Stern: I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Minister has so clearly misunderstood, failed to comprehend, the genuine fears of people who hold retirement annuities. First, he said that retirement annuities were obsolescent but they cannot be obsolescent because many hundreds of thousands of people continue to pay premiums and will go on doing so for the next 20 to 30 years. They are not obsolescent: they are very much alive.

Secondly, my hon. Friend said that some insurance companies have agreed not to charge people who wish to transfer and take advantage of the flexibility which retirement annuity holders, and they alone according to the Minister, will be debarred from taking under the existing legislation. He is wrong. First, those costs exist, and if they are not borne by a charge on the policy holder making the change they will be borne by the general fund of policy holders. Secondly, what happens if the personal pension offered by the insurance company with which someone has a retirement annuity is not suitable for that person and he wishes to transfer? Costs will be transferred automatically.

Mr. Nelson *rose—*

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. That intervention verged on a speech and I have strong views on that.

Mr. Nelson: With that stricture in mind, I hasten to assure my hon. Friend that I do not wish my remarks about retirement annuity contracts to be taken as derogatory. Far from it. They exist, and people took them out and continue to subscribe to them. For many people they have distinct advantages and they wish to retain those contracts. However, my hon. Friend and I both know that personal pensions legislation superseded them and offers a different set of opportunities and benefits.

In some ways RACs have certain benefits that are not provided under the personal pensions regime. I acknowledge all that and, as I say, I am not in any way being derogatory. We are discussing the issue of taking advantage of deferment flexibility. I am saying only that that can be done without necessarily introducing a whole corpus of law to provide freedom and flexibility for RACs in particular. It can be done easily by filling in a form and transferring from the RAC to a personal pension.

As I have said, there are no direct costs to the prospective pensioner. Of course costs are involved, but how they are absorbed is a matter for the companies. I assume that the Committee is principally concerned about whether there is a cost to those people who exercise their rights for deferment and take advantage of the flexibility. All the evidence, as far as we can assess it, is that there is not.

Mr. Butterfill: I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern). The reply by my hon. Friend the Minister will not do. He admits that it may not be appropriate for some people to transfer from RACs to personal pensions. How do we relieve their predicament if they are not offered the proposed flexibility? Secondly, the Minister may be surprised to know that what he says may not be widely disseminated outside the confines of the Chamber. I suspect that thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of personal pension holders will be unaware that they can transfer in this way. They will continue to hold RACs and will suffer as a result. It is incumbent on the Government to amend the legislation, if not in this Finance Bill in the next one.

Mr. Nelson: I hear what my hon. Friend says and take it seriously. I shall reflect upon any shortcomings that he feels are in the current legislation or proposals. I was simply trying to respond to concerns raised at the beginning of the debate which seemed to show that those with retirement annuity contracts did not have this option or, if the deferment option did apply, it would involve them in costs. I have tried to show that the opportunity is there.

RACs are different from personal pensions, and to provide the deferment regime on top of RACs would be going beyond what is currently proposed. People can exercise their right to defer and can choose to implement at a later date the purchase of their annuity through transfer. That is not unreasonable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) asked about size and scope of personal pensions. The latest figures show that there are about 8 million personal pension holders. That is a considerable number and shows the choice that people have exercised since 1988 to make provision for themselves. Despite the undoubted serious problems relating to the mis-selling of personal pensions, the figures demonstrate that for many people such pensions are popular and will continue to be so for the many who wish to make flexible provision for themselves for retirement.

My hon. Friend said that the arguments for staying put in an occupational pension scheme should be presented as clearly as the arguments for transferring to another one. I entirely agree. That is exactly the purpose of the disclosure regime and the product and advice regimes which we have tried to implement through Securities and Investments Boards rules and the Personal Investment Authority.

It is necessary to point out to prospective investors the advantages of the status quo as well as the option for change. It would certainly be inadequate and a serious shortcoming of that advice if a comparison were not made. It is implicit in giving best advice that it is compared with the current range of available benefits. In its executive function the regulatory regime has sought seriously to improve the quality and efficiency with which such information and advice is rendered.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) said that the flexibility in the clause requires good advice. That echoes what he said several times in the past, and I whole-heartedly agree with him. We must constantly support measures to improve the quality of advice and to crack down on bad advice. That means costs for the industry and, of course, at the end of the day for the product buyer, the investor. But if markets are to be free they must also be fair, and if people are to have more confidence in investor protection they must have impartial and good quality investment advice.

The changes which Andrew Large, the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board has instituted, and the shake-up and changes in the self-regulatory organisations will deliver very much better standards of investment advice. Of course, that will always stop short of a guarantee that people will get perfect advice, and even the best advice may not match how events eventually turn out, but there must be a constant quest to improve the quality of advice and in that regard substantial progress has been made.

Mr. Hoon: The Minister spoke about the benefits of extra advice and no one challenges his suggestion. But there will clearly be a cost involved. Perhaps I may use the illustration used earlier in the debate. A company providing a personal pension scheme will have to employ someone for the time that it takes to provide advice on whether it is sensible to defer the purchase of an annuity.

[Mr. Hoon]

In those circumstances, and given the extra costs for the company, would it not be sensible to accept at least the spirit of the amendment tabled in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith)? There should be some consideration of the extra costs involved in administering personal pension schemes.

Mr. Nelson: I have, of course, read the amendment and I understand its purpose. I am endeavouring to explain to the hon. Gentleman and to the House that the Government have considered these matters carefully, and that we have reported on some of them—I referred to the cost compliance assessment. Eventually, people reach the point where they must make up their minds and decide what to do. One cannot make all policies a matter of constant review. I know of the popularity of that with the Opposition. All policies seem to be put on hold while someone else decides what the outcome should be.

With matters as important for people's provisions as pensions, however, people must not make judgments on the basis of the fact that the regime will be revised and reviewed, and that it may be imperfect. They must make long-term personal decisions on the basis of the regime that operates, and of the Government's best judgment of how it should do so. That is the purpose of law in the matter. It is important that it should be certain, even if it is not wholly inflexible. Of course, we revise and consider things with the experience of time, but we have already spent a good deal of time on considering how flexibility can be better extended.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) gave a broad welcome to the Personal Investment Authority. He said that it was important to give the PIA a chance, before we engaged in radical reform of the regulatory system. I agree with him. The establishment of the PIA marks a step change in the quality of investment, advice, supervision and regulation in the retail sector.

Although, through shortcomings and inadequacies, well-advertised problems and serious consequences have arisen for many individuals in recent years, the changes that have been put into place, if only because of the controversy that has sometimes been aroused by the constituent members of the PIA, demonstrate that they are taking their responsibilities seriously. I reiterate that I give Mr. Palmer and all members of the PIA my full support in seeing through the important changes that they are bringing about and which are improving significantly the quality of the provision of investment services in the retail sector.

My hon. Friend said that it was right to allow deferral. I am grateful for the broad support that, I take it, he was giving to the clause and schedule. He asked, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central did, about the amount of income that would have to be withdrawn during the deferral period, and my hon. Friend asked whether it might be appropriate for the minimum level to be lowered even further.

Perhaps it would be helpful if I explained that the intention is to ensure that, where someone exercises deferral, some income is taken out of the fund that has been built up. The aim is to ensure, in part, that that income, which is then taxed, goes to help refund the reliefs that have been available for contributions to the fund during its lifetime. Otherwise, a danger would exist that such funds would become just a money-box that people could dip into from time to time.

5.45 pm

The essence of our personal pension policy and, indeed, our pensions law and provision is that people receive tax relief on their contributions during their working lifetimes to build up or to fund an amount, which can then provide a decent income for them in retirement, which will be subject to tax, and which will equate with the contributions made and the reliefs during the lifetime of contributions. If it were possible for no income to be withdrawn for a long period of time, it would offer a savings opportunity and a non-pensions opportunity, which was not the intention. If a case exists for providing reliefs for long-term savings, we should do that, as the Government have done through schemes such as the personal equity plan. We should consider that sector.

On pensions, the intention broadly should not necessarily be to assist especially high-worth savers to build up a very large sum at the expense of the Inland Revenue, when they have had relief on contributions during the lifetime; it should be to ensure that a relationship exists between the taxation that is recouped and the relief that is given during the period of contributions.

On the amount of withdrawal during the deferment period, the Government considered carefully the single annuity to ensure that some flexibility was built in for people who might have purchased different sorts of annuity—one providing benefits for a spouse and one providing for staged increases in benefit entitlement. That is why there was a difference between the minimum and maximum. However, partly as a result of some of the comments made outside the House as well as within it, we accept that a case may exist for reconsidering the matter.

I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West said. In particular, he made a case for a reduction from 70 per cent. to 50 per cent. The Government might want to consider that further. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central raised that point at the end of his remarks.

The Government's proposals for enabling annuity purchase to be deferred have been widely welcomed, but some people have said that a minimum deferral of 70 per cent. is too high. The Government now accept that, and we are discussing the right figure with interested parties. When that consultation has been completed, we will propose an appropriate amendment on Report. I hope that the House will accept that that is a sensible way to proceed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West raised a point about taxation on death. There might be taxation on a spouse receiving the cash sum from a pension fund, and were she or he to die subsequently, they might also be liable to further tax, such as inheritance tax, if it formed part of the estate. That has always been the case.

It is also the case with other savings funds that are built up. If the widow or spouse decided to continue with the deferment and to purchase the annuity, they would be able to do that; there would be no tax charged, other than on the income that subsequently arose under the annuity. I know, however, that comments have been made about the tax level, were the surviving spouse to take the whole of

the lump sum, instead of continuing with the deferment. I hope that that has explained the position to my hon. Friend.

The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) asked about flexibility. He said that it could work against a person if market rates declined. I understand the point, which I think I have dealt with adequately.

The issues about the regulatory system, while perhaps going somewhat wider than the clause and schedule allow, are nevertheless relevant. The House is right to seek assurances that our legislative system, both in the statute book and in practice, delivers the sort of public confidence that people are entitled to receive. Any system or structure that one devises and implements by law does not necessarily deliver the human judgments that result in high-quality investor protection.

Sometimes, there is a quest for reform. I make no complaint about people testing arguments, especially if they can come up with better systems, but massive and costly uncertainty and change do not necessarily result in cowboys being put out of business, or in the prevention of fraudsters. I believe that the course that we have adopted, which is to make the system work significantly better, is the right course to deliver greater confidence to investors and depositors.

Many of the problems that have been uncovered in recent years and which are being redressed demonstrate that the system is working. We may not like some of the consequences in that some firms have gone bust or some people lose out but the fact that problems are being detected and redressed, and the fact that there is an investors' compensation scheme that provides relatively high recompense to those who have lost out and that it has worked out in practice, is an endorsement of a good success record. The fact that we have built in the many changes that Andrew Large and others have instituted means that we are not complacent—far from it—but that we are determined to ensure that the system works better.

However, revolution in the structure of regulation of the City is no answer for those who seek more certainty. It is an answer for those who want ever more centralist control of the financial resources in our economic system but we will have no part in that. It is not our intention to embark on a blighted period of cost and uncertainty for the financial services industry. That would merely deliver more opportunity for, rather than detection of, the worst sort of practices.

Mr. Butterfill: May I press the Minister on one other point? Talking about the position of those in occupational schemes which are money-purchase schemes, he said that he did not think that there would be any difficulty in the trustees of such schemes allowing deferral and that there was no legislative barrier to that taking place. What could he do to overcome the difficulty that might arise if individual employees wished to choose deferral but the trustees said no because it was an extra cost that they were not prepared to load on to the scheme? In the case of personal pensions, the initiative or option rests with the policy holder himself but, in the case that he has described, the decision lies with the pension trustees. Does he regard that as satisfactory?

Mr. Nelson: I acknowledge immediately that this does not deal entirely with my hon. Friend's point, but one answer is that people can opt out of an occupational pension into a personal pension scheme. When an individual decides to be a member of an occupational scheme, it is implicit that he understands—or at least, one hopes that he does—the implications of being part of a collective scheme, which has benefits as well as obligations. It also has risks and involves exercising a choice.

About 90 per cent. of people in occupational pension schemes have defined benefit schemes rather than money-purchase schemes. Only a small proportion of those in occupational pension schemes decide to translate into annuity the benefits that they receive and very often do so because it is more certain and easier for them to do so. It may be only a minority but it does not make it any less important that individuals should have as much flexibility as possible. However, I repeat that we are not aware that there is a problem or that anything inhibits deferral, provided that the scheme decides to take that line and offer deferral to its beneficiaries.

Mr. Butterfill: I accept that there are at present more defined benefit schemes than money-purchase schemes but the Minister will be aware that the trend is going the other way. There are virtually no new defined benefit schemes being set up and major companies such as BP are suggesting that they may move from defined benefit schemes to money-purchase schemes.

Mr. Nelson: My hon. Friend, who is well informed on this and related matters, is absolutely right, and I take his point seriously. If there proves to be a problem in practice, we shall certainly reconsider the matter but we think that the flexibility for retirement annuity contracts and for occupational pensions is adequate. Therefore, though worthy, the amendment is unnecessary. For that reason, I hope that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central will withdraw it.

Mr. Darling: I would not be too confident about that. I thank the Minister for his remarks about schedule 11. I accept entirely that if tax reliefs are given we should ensure that we are not subsidising saving in a way that does not apply to other savings products. However, the Government will have to explain why 70 per cent., as opposed to 65 per cent. or any other figure, is the appropriate one.

Having said that, it is fascinating that the Minister and a number of Conservative Members—although not all of them—take as their touchstone for whether a scheme is good or bad what the industry—the product providers—have to say about it. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) and the Minister were at pains to point out that no one was forced to transfer. Indeed, no one is forced to buy a pension; it is always possible to go through life without one and then wait and see what happens when one retires. People may not be forced, but the Minister should reflect on the point made by Labour Members and one or two Conservative Members. Although people are not physically forced to transfer, many may feel that they have to because there is no flexibility in the scheme that they have, whether that is an occupational scheme or any other sort.

It is not good enough for the Minister to say that he has spoken to nine companies which have said that people can transfer as long as they move to one of their schemes. That is precisely what we do not want; we do not want employees to be able to transfer only to one of the

[Mr. Darling]

schemes that a company happens to have on offer. The alternative scheme which has the flexibility may not be the best—another company may have a better one.

The Government must sometimes ask not only what is good for business but what is good for the general public. The Government say that they have a compliance test and seek to check business costs and red tape. That is a good thing and perhaps they will apply the same principles to the rest of the evening's debate.

Yes, let us ask the industry and the product providers but let us consider, too, the effect of such policies on people in general. Parliament is supposed to be representing the people at large, not only those in business. We must not take what the industry says as the last word on the matter. We must consider the wider interests, something that the Minister and the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington failed to do. However, I shall look to my new ally, the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern), for support.

Mr. Stern: The hon. Gentleman is wise to do so. I was going to take his point a little further. Does he agree that the Government are not only looking purely to business but are going further and saying that two classes of policy holders will be entitled to a say, whereas a third class of policyholder will have the option either of not accepting the flexibility being offered or transferring willy-nilly? We are offering freedom to some but not to all.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point and, in so far as he is allowed to, I hope that he will return to it in Standing Committee. For the Government to say that no one is forced to transfer is not adequate.

The fundamental issue that has been touched on repeatedly is regulation. Again, it is interesting that the Minister and one or two other Conservative Members take as their touchstone the increasingly minority view that there is nothing wrong with the Financial Services Act 1986 and that no change is needed. The Minister said that any change would mean a revolution and central control of resources but no regulatory system on this earth seeks to control resources in that way. The fact is that a growing number of people recognise that the 1986 Act will have to be amended and the sooner the Government face that, the better.

We believe that we should build on what we have but it is nonsense to try to continue with the fiction of self-regulation. The Minister cannot say that the system is working because many problems have been identified. Indeed, many of the problems that arose with pension transfers were due to the fact that the system was not working and was driven by the industry, which knew that bad practices existed but too many of those involved chose to do nothing about it.

Mr. Forman: The hon. Gentleman is referring to a point that I made in an earlier intervention. I was trying to tell the hon. Gentleman that it has taken the best part of nine years to perfect and improve the system of self-regulation within a statutory framework. It would be very unwise, in the interests of this country and the financial services sector, to tear that up by the roots again, as I understand that his party would seek to do were it to come into office.

Mr. Darling: We are not proposing to tear it up by the roots but to reform and to strengthen it. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the regulatory system has improved dramatically, especially since Mr. Andrew Large became chairman of the Securities and Investments Board. The Minister cited Mr. Large's review as a major step change. Indeed it was, but the Minister might be candid enough to admit that poor Mr. Large had to conduct his review in the straitjacket of knowing that the Government would not introduce any new legislation.

The Government have always made clear to anyone who cared to ask that they would not legislate. That is because they are not confident of getting a Bill that is committed to self-regulation through the House. Not only Opposition Members, but Conservative Members have doubts about the whole philosophy of self-regulation. It is expensive, it is cumbersome and it does not work.

The debate has been extremely useful, in that I think that the Minister is now in no doubt that we are looking for flexibility to be extended universally across pension provision. The sooner that the Government do that the better. I very much welcome the fact that the Government have admitted, perhaps not in clear terms, that they would make the necessary changes if it turned out that there was some fundamental problem in allowing that flexibility. I hope that the Minister will report to the House further as and when discussions continue.

6 pm

The Government have nothing new to say about regulation. Yet again, they seem to be in the pockets of a minority of providers in the industry. They are not prepared to face up to the fact that the public and, increasingly, a large section of the industry, have lost confidence in our regulatory system. Until that is put right, sales will continue to fall and people will continue to lack the confidence to make provision for themselves—the sort of confidence that they ought to have—because they will have doubts about the integrity and the efficiency of the regulatory system. That must be put right. For that reason, if for no other, we shall certainly press our amendment to the vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 215, Noes 275.

Division No. 53] **[6.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Boateng, Paul
Adams, Mrs Irene	Boyes, Roland
Ainger, Nick	Bradley, Keith
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Allen, Graham	Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Alton, David	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Burden, Richard
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Byers, Stephen
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Cabom, Richard
Ashton, Joe	Callaghan, Jim
Austin-Walker, John	Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Barnes, Harry	Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Battle, John	Campbell-Savours, D N
Bayley, Hugh	Canavan, Dennis
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret	Cann, Jamie
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Chidgey, David
Benton, Joe	Chisholm, Malcolm
Bermingham, Gerald	Church, Judith
Berry, Roger	Clapham, Michael
Blair, Rt Hon Tony	Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*

Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Lynne *(Birm S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kean, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wythenshawe)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Wiltshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lewm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & Fsbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Tessa Jowell and
Ms Estelle Morris

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rutclf)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gryffs, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward

Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'ham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sth)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope

Amendment accordingly negatived.
Clause 52 ordered to stand part of the Bill.
Schedule 11 agreed to.

Clause 15

VEHICLE EXCISE AND REGISTRATION: OTHER PROVISIONS

6.15 pm

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 11, line 42, at end insert

'only if the Government has presented a report to Parliament before the passing of this Act on certain of its implications specified in subsection (2) below.

(2) The Government shall report to Parliament on the implications of Schedule 4 for—

(a) public and traffic safety;

(b) the standard of public service; and

(c) the costs to individuals, service providers and businesses; and on the results of public consultation.'.

The amendment requires the Government to withdraw schedule 4, which is long and complex, covers 24 pages and is cross-referenced with the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994. In their haste to open up another base for indirect taxation, we believe that the Government have not taken proper account of public safety or of the cost to businesses and the likely implications for employment. In particular, I want to emphasise the full ramifications of the schedule and I want to put the case for full assessment, with public consultation with the relevant bodies, to be undertaken before the Government require the House to take a decision on these matters.

Rather than deal with every category in the schedule, I shall use examples to make the principle points on public safety and the costs to businesses. The matter is further complicated by the fact that, in addition to schedule 4, the Government have tabled complex amendments in acknowledgement of their errors. They have tabled them in an attempt to ameliorate the worst excesses of their original proposals, but they have failed in that attempt.

I want first to consider the categories of vehicles that are now to have vehicle excise duty applied to them. Those vehicles are chiefly—*[Interruption.]* It is difficult to debate an important issue while half a dozen conversations are going on. Forgive me, Dame Janet—

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) is right. It was in my mind to draw attention to the matter, and I now do so formally. If hon. Members want to chat, they must go outside the Chamber to do so.

Ms Primarolo: Thank you, Dame Janet. I am much obliged.

The vehicles that are covered—snow ploughs, gritters, street cleansing vehicles, street lighting tower wagons and road construction vehicles—are mainly used by local authorities or by the private contractors which now fulfil certain obligations, as a result of the Government's

compulsory competitive tendering policy. I shall deal only with road safety and likely costs. Because of the complexity of the Bill, it has been difficult for private contractors or local authorities, in such a short period, to unravel the complicated relationships that are set out in the schedule.

The Association of Metropolitan Authorities has made representations to me on the difficulties of ascertaining exactly the new rates of duty. Because of the separation of direct labour organisations and privatisation, it is difficult to see how costs can be measured. Clearly, for local authorities that are already rate-capped and have severe local authority grant settlements, any increase in cost will not just threaten the provision of services. I am sure that hon. Members can appreciate the significance of gritters or snow ploughs, particularly for authorities in the north of the country.

For example, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities has said that about 30 vehicles in the Wigan authority's fleet will be in this class of taxation for the first time. In trying to decide the effect of the new charges, it contacted the local taxation office, which was unable to supply anything other than a range of duties that may apply. That means that the additional costs to that authority could be anything from £1,500 to £60,000 a year.

Not only are there costs and possible implications for local authorities, private business and employment, but there are clear road safety implications. If local authorities which face severe grant restrictions are unable to find money, there could be severe consequences for the future maintenance of local authority highways and for road safety. That is at a time when there is extreme concern about the condition of roads in local authority remits, as a result of funding arrangements.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): In addition, is there not an equity point that, if specialist vehicles spend most of their time stationary because men are up the tower or if they are used only for the few weeks of the year when salting is necessary, that goes right against the theology of vehicle excise duty, which is aimed at trying to deal with damage to our roads? Clearly, a vehicle which spends little time travelling or is used for only a few days a year should not, in equity, be asked to pay the same as a heavy goods vehicle which travels our roads for up to 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Ms Primarolo: As a former Minister in the Department of Transport, the hon. Gentleman has considerable expertise. I agree with his point. Before any alterations are made to exemptions or to concessionary classes for vehicle excise duty, the Government need to undertake a rigorous assessment of the likely impact of such changes on public safety. For example, I refer to the environment, although we have not mentioned it in the amendment, costs to businesses—because of contracting out, there are now private contractors—and the likely long-term effects on the quality of our roads. We are not satisfied that the Government have undertaken any consultations or consideration before preparing schedule 4.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Last week, in my constituency in north-west Yorkshire, there were severe weather conditions. The gritters and snow ploughs were out. Under the standard spending assessment, there was no extra allocation for increases in vehicle excise duty in respect of the vehicles that my hon. Friend has mentioned. Because weather conditions have not been as severe over the past few years, the budget has been cut. Whether that is right or wrong, it has happened, and it will be the case in future. Therefore, road safety will be affected.

Ms Primarolo: I agree with my hon. Friend. I was surprised, in the west country, to see television news reports of the dreadful weather that was occurring only a few hundred miles up the road and to see the different demands on the local authorities concerned. I do not want to make this into a larger point, but gritters are often dual-purpose vehicles. They might be dust carts as well.

Our general criticism still stands: the Government have not undertaken the necessary review. Whether a local authority undertakes work directly or whether it is done by a private contractor, the costs of providing that service will increase and therefore will fall on council tax payers. As a form of indirect taxation, that is regressive in that it hits people unequally. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities has struggled to understand the implications of the measures, because it is also concerned about prospects for road safety.

The Government proclaim themselves, first, to be concerned about the environment; secondly, to be concerned about safety, and road safety in particular; and, thirdly, to be considerate of small business and employment prospects. However, they have opened an entire taxation base without undertaking a proper assessment. The vehicle excise duties that can be imposed under schedule 4 can be increased every year, just as vehicle excise duty on private cars has been increased in the past.

That presents an enormous dilemma in properly assessing the likely impact. The Government have not undertaken an assessment. Local authorities cannot say what the impact will be. Private contractors whom I have contacted are in the same position—they need more information and discussion before they can make a conclusive statement.

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): The Automobile Association, the Royal Automobile Club and all emergency organisations are with the hon. Lady on that point.

Ms Primarolo: I was about to refer to the AA, the RAC and private vehicle recovery firms which undertake essential safety work on our roads. They not only recover stranded motorists but deal with dangerous lorry loads, oil tankers and many noxious chemicals and products that are transported on our roads.

The proposals on road recovery vehicles offer the greatest threat to road safety. We recognise that the Government were trying to simplify the vehicle excise duty regime but schedule 4 makes for a more complex scheme. Road recovery vehicles had been taxed at a concessionary rate of £85 per year, regardless of size. Under schedule 4, that concessionary status would be removed, and there would be an increase in the taxation classes to between £135 and £5,000 a year. The Government are now proposing to amend that figure, and the Minister will no doubt put his case later in the debate.

The pegging of the excise duty is dependent on the weight of the vehicle and the new taxation rates are linked to those for heavy goods vehicles. HGVs are on the road much more and their work is more predictable than that

[Ms Primarolo]

of recovery vehicles, so the categories are not comparable. By the nature of their work, recovery vehicles are used occasionally. The work load cannot be planned, as it depends on the weather and what accidents the vehicles are called to. Consequently, they spend a great deal of time off the road on standby. Safety could be compromised if the proposals go ahead.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): I have been in contact with two operators of heavy recovery vehicles in my constituency, and they have said that if the vehicle licence remains high, they will have to go out of business. As my hon. Friend said, it is only on the odd occasion when the vehicles are needed, and they are usually called out to help a tanker in trouble or in an emergency. I am worried that, if those operators go out of business, nobody will take up the emergency and recovery service.

6.30 pm

Ms Primarolo: I shall come to that point.

I have letters from private companies engaged in road recovery work which describe the difficulties that they will have in complying with the new rate if it is imposed, and also the implications for road safety. Large recovery vehicles may be called out only once a month to a road accident, but they are essential as they can clear any obstruction quickly. In a moment, I shall deal with the comments of the police with regard to the Government's proposals.

If a vehicle is taken out of circulation because it is too expensive to tax, another vehicle will have to be brought in from further away. The companies which are able to deal with accidents will be spread more thinly, and therefore there could be longer delays in responding to accidents and the time that the police will have to remain at an accident while waiting for an obstruction to be cleared could increase. That will not only waste the time of the police, who should be doing other things, but will cause a great deal of obstruction and possibly distress. It could cause disruption on the roads, and it is wasteful as well as unsafe. It is clear that the police cannot leave the scene of an accident before the road is clear.

The Association of Vehicle Recovery Operators has conducted a survey of all its regions. It says that if the proposal goes through, there will be no heavy goods vehicle recovery operators in Scotland north of Perth. In North Yorkshire, there is only one operator capable of removing heavy goods vehicles from Sutton bank, near Leeming Bar, which is a 1:3 gradient. That operator says that he will not be able to continue his service if the rate goes through, and if that happens, there will be no suitable vehicle to deal with an emergency within a 100-mile radius of that area.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): My hon. Friend is raising the problems in my county. I have spoken to the company in question, and its 26-tonne heavy vehicle—a vehicle on which the excise duty would rise from £85 to some £5,000 under the Bill's provisions—was used on only eight occasions last year. The company was paid on only six of those occasions. Even under the Government's modified proposal of a £750 vehicle excise duty, does that not mean that the Government will be taxing the operator more than £100 for every trip he makes with a vehicle that is delivering a public service in opening roads for the police and for other road users?

Ms Primarolo: I agree with the point so ably made by my hon. Friend.

The Paymaster General (Mr. **David Heathcoat-Amory**): It may assist the Committee if I invite hon. Members to look at Government amendments Nos. 44 to 47, which entirely take account of the points which have been raised.

Ms Primarolo: The Minister will put his case carefully and adequately to the Committee this evening, but we reject what he has said. The Government amendments do not go far enough, and we wish to press our points.

Those points are reinforced in a letter from the North Yorkshire police on the specific matter of road safety, which was addressed by my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley). The force makes it clear that the proposals to remove the concessionary classes will cause considerable difficulties. The North Yorkshire force currently contracts the recovery of accident and broken-down vehicles to the RAC. The actual recovery work is subject to a business agreement between the RAC and the individual private specialist recovery operators, with the recovery fees being reclaimed from the individual companies or from insurance.

The major concern of the force is not about the commercial implications of the excise duty changes but with the knock-on effect that will occur on the availability of suitably equipped recovery vehicles to deal with accidents and safety requirements. The implications for the North Yorkshire force and for the motoring public who use the roads of the county may be quite profound. As the number of recovery trucks diminishes, the time of arrival at accident scenes will increase, the frequency of tailbacks will grow and there will be a further risk of accidents. That will create a need for the police to spend more time at accidents, which will have obvious implications for road safety.

We think that the Government have been hasty in their rush to extend their taxation base. They have not taken proper account of the cost implications, nor of the implications for the future existence of businesses. That is shown yet again in a later schedule which affects farm goods vehicles, and increases the costs on farming businesses. Those costs are estimated to be more than £6 million for the loss of the exempt classes, and £3.8 million for loss of the concessionary classes.

Finally, to demonstrate the folly of the schedule, a Government who claim to be interested in the environment and have used the increase in petrol duties as their fig leaf, claiming that they are sticking to the Rio targets on traffic pollution and pollution generally, are proposing to extend vehicle excise duty to electric milk floats—environmentally sound vehicles that should be encouraged, not taxed—which will cause problems for a milk industry that is already beleaguered because of the Government's policies.

The schedule is ill thought-out and no consultation has taken place. It has implications for road recovery vehicles and businesses and for public safety, which are all at risk. We request that the Government withdraw the schedule,

undertake a full consultation, produce a review and report back to the House before they make any changes to vehicle excise duty for those vehicles.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It might assist the Committee if I set out the general background to the measures. Although we are debating clause 15, most of the detail is in schedule 4, to which the clause relates. A general explanation at this stage will help us when we debate the details of that schedule.

The present vehicle excise duty system is needlessly complex, with 132 different classes of concession and exemption. Lawyers cannot agree on some of the interpretations, which provides endless scope for expensive litigation. The system is also extremely archaic. Many of the provisions date back to before the second world war. They were added to during the time of digging for victory, when privileges and exemptions for agriculture were easier to justify.

Since then, technology has moved on. Some of the legislation that we are replacing refers to water being used for propulsion. It also explicitly provides for the wartime device of towing a trailer containing gas, which was used to propel the vehicle in question. That system is certainly no longer with us.

Some of the existing classes are empty. There is no relevant vehicle in them—perhaps there never was. New types have arisen, such as all-terrain vehicles, which have to fall into the general tax class because the concessionary tax classes have not caught up with their existence. I think that all hon. Members agree that the need for reform is plain and that it is overdue. The legislation is also anomalous.

Mr. Mills: When were the concessions for emergency relief vehicles on motorways discussed and agreed? I thought that it was about five years ago, so my hon. Friend's explanation hardly applies.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, another section of my speech deals with those matters. My general argument is that the system which we have inherited is anomalous and inconsistent.

I regret the fact that many of the amendments tabled by the official Opposition appear to cling to those anomalies. The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) referred to street-cleaning vehicles, snow clearing and so forth, and I shall touch on those in detail later.

Under existing law, if a street-cleaning vehicle uses its hose to clear a gully, it is exempt from vehicle excise duty, but if it extends its hose a little more under the street to flush out a sewer, it is supposed to pay the full vehicle excise duty. A tower wagon—an hydraulic platform on wheels—is exempt when it is used for mending street lighting, but it must pay the full duty if it is mending a telegraph pole or a power line. The anomalies are indefensible and they invite tax evasion. We cannot expect policemen to check how far under the street the hose pipe from one of those cleansing vehicles goes, so the legislation is practically tailor-made for cheating and exemptions.

Many of the concessions are granted on the basis of nothing more than an operator's declaration that he or she qualifies and are thus almost impossible to police. When the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency carried out a detailed check on one class—restricted goods vehicles—it found that 90 per cent. of claimants for special treatment seemed to be claiming the concession wrongly.

6.45 pm

The legislation is extremely bureaucratic. For example, let us consider the exemption for vehicles travelling six road miles a week. We shall debate it later, so I shall not go into great detail, but claimants must fill in a form every year and swear that they will not depart from the road routes that they use between their fields. If they want to make a detour during the year, because of a blocked road or some such thing, they are supposed to inform the DVLA in writing.

None of that makes for good taxation. In fact, the present system breaks every rule of good taxation; it is inconsistent, out of date, unclear, and difficult to enforce. We have aimed, first, to simplify the system so that it is easier for users to understand and cheap for the Government to operate. Secondly, we want to bring it up to date and to concentrate special treatment on those that most warrant it. Thirdly, we aim to grant consistent treatment for similar types of vehicles, thus removing anomalies. Fourthly, we insist that we can easily check that claimants for special treatment are genuine, so removing the opportunity to evade.

In place of the 132 classes, we have concentrated on four basic classes of vehicle, leaving unchanged the few add-ons for motor cycles, vintage cars and the like. First, vehicle excise duty exemption is granted to the most deserving cases, such as 999 emergency vehicles and those for the severely disabled. Secondly, very low rates of VED—only £35—are applied to those with a good case, such as snow ploughs, gritters, electric vehicles, tractors, other agricultural machines and mowing machines. Thirdly, a special low rate of £150 is applied to specialised vehicles that are based mostly on heavy lorries and have a specialised use; examples include mobile cranes, road rollers, digging machines, work trucks and showmen's lorries.

All other classes must pay the full vehicle excise duty. The presumption must be that, without good reason otherwise, a vehicle should be in that class. Most vehicles in the £35 and £150 classes will also continue to benefit from very low rates of duty on their diesel.

With any comprehensive reform, there are some winners and some losers—that is inevitable. The measures as a whole, however, increase the revenue from VED by less than 1 per cent. I believe that members of the Committee will join me in thinking that this is an overdue reform.

In her introductory remarks, the hon. Member for Bristol, South mentioned recovery vehicles.

Mr. Bayley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Will the hon. Gentleman forgive me if I do not give way? I know that he intervened, and I hope that I can assist him and my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills).

I appreciate that the hon. Member for Bristol, South probably wrote her speech before the Government tabled amendments Nos. 44 to 47, but even after that was pointed out she ploughed on with unnecessary remarks about the additional taxation of recovery vehicles, with which we have already dealt.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

It is reasonable to put light breakdown vehicles, which are commercial high-mileage vehicles, into the £135 per annum class. We have met the concerns raised by a number of hon. Members and the trade that to tax very large vehicles, which may be infrequently used, at the full heavy goods vehicle rate would be wrong. That is why we put the heavier vehicles into three bands, the highest of which will tax them at £750 per annum.

Mr. Bayley: When the Minister intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), he might have been under the misapprehension that I was talking about the vehicle excise duty rates for 26-tonne recovery vehicles, as originally proposed. I was not. The original proposal was for £5,000 excise duty. I gave the new figure of £750, which the Minister proposes in his amendment.

The point is that, in the past 12 months, that operator in my county, the only operator who can clear Sutton Bank road, made just eight trips with his 26-tonne vehicle. As it happens, he was paid on only six of those occasions. Under the Minister's new proposal, the duty on that vehicle will rise from £85 to £750—a tax increase of more than £100 for each occasion on which the vehicle was used and paid for.

The Minister may say that his tax proposal amounts to only a 1 per cent. increase in the total vehicle excise bill, but for that operator—

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. As I told another hon. Member earlier, interventions should be short. The hon. Gentleman's intervention has been quite long enough.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I fully understood the hon. Gentleman's point. It was put to me by the Retail Motor Industry Federation, which represents the Association of Recovery Vehicle Operators, when its representatives came to see me. I listened carefully to, and met, the federation's concerns. I have before me a letter from the federation saying that it is happy with the compromise that we have reached. If it is happy—after all, it represents the industry and the operator mentioned by the hon. Gentleman—that should be good enough for the hon. Gentleman.

We shall return to the issue in a later group of amendments.

Mr. Bayley *rose—*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am sorry, but I answered the hon. Gentleman's point. I said that the trade was happy with the new limit on very heavy recovery vehicles of not £5,000, but £750, a year.

The hon. Member for Bristol, South mentioned snow-clearing and street-cleaning vehicles. I want to say a little more about that matter, because it encapsulates the problems with which we are dealing and the necessity for the reforms that we are introducing. We have recognised the special nature of snow-clearing and ice-gritting vehicles by putting them in the category that charges only £35 a year VED and allowing them to retain their right to use rebated fuel—so called "red diesel". Were those vehicles in the heavy goods vehicle class, they would pay not £35 a year but between £150 and £5,000 a year, as well as full duty on the diesel that they use.

Street-cleaning and street-lighting vehicles will face normal VED rates. After all, those are commercial operations and, today, few such vehicles are owned by local authorities. Most are owned by private sector operators, often under contract to local authorities. Many local service vehicles such as refuse lorries already pay full VED. Why should street-cleaning vehicles be exempt when almost identical vehicles that clean sewers are taxed?

The Labour party needs to come up to date on that matter and realise what has been happening. Instead of single-use machines all owned by local authorities, we now have multi-use machines operated under contract by the private sector. It makes no sense to impose full annual VED on a vehicle when it is doing a job such as cleaning sewers, and exempt it when it is doing a slightly different job such as street cleaning, possibly on the very next day.

Ms Primarolo: The Minister said that the changes in VED are to simplify the system. He then explained that the Government needed to make the system a little more complex because it did not take account of recovery vehicles, which now need to be put in a different regime. He then referred to red diesel, which was previously linked to vehicle excise duty exemptions and concessions, which must now have an entire schedule to itself to override the vehicle excise duty schedules because the system does not satisfy demand. Is that not a more complex rather than a simpler system?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am glad that the hon. Lady has given me an opportunity to point out that we shall have a chance tomorrow, when the Bill goes upstairs to Committee, to debate the precise issue of the use of rebated fuel. Far from adding complexity to the system, we shall simplify that matter as well and put that provision into statute law.

I urge the Labour party to take on board the fact that the world has changed from one of municipally owned vehicles simply doing one job. Frequently, vehicles change operations from one day to another. Vehicles can change their configuration from one season to the next by using swap bodies; for example, a snow plough used in winter can be used for an entirely different operation in summer. The Labour amendment refuses to recognise that and puts back all the difficulties we seek to get away from.

The trade recognises the need for change, even if the Labour party does not. The police and the licensing agency know that the current system is becoming impossible to enforce. I only wish that we could persuade the Opposition, particularly the Labour party, to drop their ideological baggage just long enough to withdraw the amendment, which would take us back in time rather than forward.

The amendment would hinder and delay the very reforms that I have outlined. There are no adverse road or safety implications in the provision. We have given careful thought to the reforms, and the overwhelming need for them is recognised by outside bodies. We have delayed implementation of the VED system until 1 July 1995 both to give those affected an opportunity to adapt to the changes and to enable them to draw attention to any specific and special difficulties. I have already explained how we have responded to well-thought-out arguments presented to us in the context of recovery vehicles.

We are not convinced, however, by the arguments against the need for overall change, which is why I ask the Committee to accept the clause and to reject the Opposition amendment.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I wish to follow the Minister, as he has rightly put before the Committee the rationale of the whole of schedule 4. We are not just dealing with the Labour party amendment; it is right and proper that we look at the principles behind the proposed changes.

I am delighted to see the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Epping Forrest (Mr. Norris) in the Chamber to listen to the debate. His Department must have been actively consulted about the rationale for the changes, as I hope that the Department of Trade and Industry was consulted about their important energy implications.

There are a number of amendments standing in the names of my right hon. and hon. Friends. They relate to agricultural vehicles, vehicle usage as opposed to vehicle ownership—that is the key energy conservation issue with which we should be concerned—the impact that lorries have on the economy and, finally, the special circumstances relating to commercial traffic on islands. My hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) will speak about that matter a little later.

I shall illustrate the extent to which the Government's apparent attempt to simplify vehicle excise duty not only will make the situation more complicated but is clearly not worth the candle. The Minister said that the total take in a full financial year will amount to only a 1 per cent. increase in VED, yet he is blundering into a series of mini-calamities—each one may not be important to everybody, but they add up to a snowstorm of calamities.

As the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) said earlier, the only logical way to approach the tax is to relate it either to use of the highway or to the use of scarce resources. The Government's proposals do not relate directly to either use.

Perhaps the panic stations in rural constituencies have persuaded the Minister and his Treasury colleagues to re-examine the proposals for agricultural vehicles that use the roads for only a limited period. All U-turns are welcome, even if they are conducted on a motorway at such a slow speed that they cause a major hold-up. By trying to buy off his colleagues in rural constituencies, there is a danger that the Minister will end up with a situation that is as bad as the one he started with. It certainly will not be any less complex.

I will illustrate how the proposals will affect the individual farmer. A farmer from my constituency gave me at the weekend a careful assessment of the precise implications of the Bill—as it then stood; I acknowledge the Minister's comments in that regard. He estimated that he faced an additional cost of £1,080 a year under the Bill as it then stood. No doubt the amendments will improve the situation somewhat, but it will not improve dramatically.

My constituent is a hill livestock farmer with 265 acres of land which is bisected by a major road proposal—the A30 on Bodmin moor. As a result, he has great difficulty in reaching some parts of his land. He says that he has

"no alternative other than to travel short distances on the public highway with agricultural vehicles and machinery to carry out essential day to day tasks such as inspecting livestock during the summer and transporting fodder in the winter."

I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has now left his position on the Front Bench.

The farmer continued:

"Bearing in mind the fact that this government has also axed Farm Waste Pollution Control and Farm Conservation Grants in this same budget, reduced the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances by 2.5 per cent. in the past year, I feel it is outrageous to expect me to find a further £1080 per year to run my business and also to threaten extra costs for fuel when the Customs & Excise review their policy on red diesel."

I know that the Minister intends to address that matter in Committee, but I think that he will acknowledge that the industry is correct to be concerned about that point.

The National Farmers Union has also briefed a number of hon. Members on the subject and has said:

"Many agricultural holdings have parcels of land which are geographically close but not integrated within a "ring fence", and many more have contiguous parcels of land which are bisected by public roads necessitating the crossing of the road to take a vehicle from one field to another".

The NFU and individual farmers are saying that there is no specific rationale for the change which the Government currently propose. Their usage of the highway is very limited, but the legislation will impact greatly on the industry and on individual farmers. The NFU said:

"The revenue benefit of forcing all these agricultural vehicles which are used for short local journeys into the VED system is out of all proportion to the additional administrative burden and cost which it would place on farmers".

The Minister makes great play of simplifying administration and removing burdens, but I suspect that he is taking administrative burdens away from the Treasury and loading them onto individual businesses.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I apologise for intervening for a second time. The Department of Transport organised an exemption for Dotto trains which allows small trains at seaside resorts to travel for a few hundred yards on the public highway. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we are not looking for an exemption for a farmer who takes a tractor into a market town on a regular basis; we are talking about journeys of 20 or 200 yd on the public highway? Many people in agriculture do not understand why their vehicles, which will otherwise be used on their own land, should be taxed for such small, infrequent journeys.

Mr. Tyler: Not for the first time, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I noticed with great pleasure the pained expression on the face of his hon. Friend the Minister. who has either not represented that view to the Treasury or failed to represent the views of the farming industry—and, for all I know, those of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food as well.

Many people believe that schedule 4 should be re-examined, because there has been inadequate consultation about the principles of the changes, let alone their practical implications and the economic effects on certain industries. We will return to that point later, so I will not labour it now.

There are a number of other "apparent anomalies"—to use the Minister's phrase—in the legislation. It has been suggested several times that the changes in the Budget, in the Finance Bill and in schedule 4 are intended to develop environmental objectives in some way. It is simply humbug. There is no environmental reason for increasing

[Mr. Tyler]

vehicle excise duty. We should make sure that future tax burdens are applied according to usage of the highway and of scarce resources. Usage, not ownership, is the issue.

It is therefore absurd to increase the vehicle excise duty this year. We should reduce the vehicle excise duty on those vehicles which are modest in their consumption of fossil fuels. It should be possible to reduce the excise duty on the smallest vehicles to £10—just an administrative charge—while at the same time allowing the full weight of the Budget increase to fall on those who use the most fuel.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I am trying to follow the hon. Gentleman's logic. Is he saying that heavy recovery vehicles should pay more excise duty because they use considerable amounts of diesel, and that smaller recovery vehicles which travel many more miles should pay less?

Mr. Tyler: In a normal winter—who knows, we may be experiencing an abnormal one—many of the very large vehicles are on the road for only a short time, and therefore use an insignificant amount of fuel. I know that the hon. Gentleman represents a rural constituency, and I will show how a change of taxation emphasis from ownership to usage could assist his constituents.

The average private motorist in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, as in mine—even taking into account the difficulty of finding alternative public transport—travels only 8,000 or 8,500 miles per year. If that motorist does that sort of mileage in a comparatively modest car of between 1,200 and 1,500 cc and pays only £10 in VED but pays the full increase in petrol and diesel tax, that motorist will save a considerable amount of money. If the Government want to do something effective about the usage of fossil fuels and usage of the highways, they should encourage people to trade down and use modest vehicles more modestly. We will return to that issue at a later stage, but if there is to be any logic in schedule 4, the Government must do something more effective to persuade us.

The Royal Commission on the Environment reported a few months ago to the Department of Transport that the weight of responsibility for cost in terms of maintenance equations, the environment, and so on, is almost twice as much in the case of lorries as is paid in lorry vehicle excise duty. This morning, *The Times* reported, that despite the industry's claim that it is paying much more than it can afford, truck registrations in 1994 rose an astonishing 23 per cent. over 1993—the highest year-on-year increase on record, in stark contrast to the ailing car market.

That increase scarcely suggests that lorries are over-taxed and will be taxed out of business, even in the recession that is still afflicting so much of our country. Lorries are making less of a contribution to overall road costs, the economy and consequent environmental costs than they should.

Schedule 4, at best, portrays muddled thinking about transport and energy policy. At worst, it looks like yet another indiscriminate, ill-thought-out and illogical attack on not just particular sectors such as agriculture but the private motorist.

Mr. Bayley: Although the overall increase in vehicle excise duty may be modest in the context of the industry's total bill—a figure of 1 per cent. was suggested—the individual operator of a vehicle recovery service will find the rise staggering. Even under the modified proposal that the Minister considers acceptable, the firm that I mentioned earlier will have to confront a VED increase of more than 200 per cent.—from £1,020 to £3,300.

That will be less of a burden than the original proposal, which would have raised that firm's vehicle duty bill to nearly £20,000, but how does the Minister justify to that small business a 200 per cent. tax increase; and how does he respond to the case made by that firm and by North Yorkshire police, that such firms will reduce the number of their heavy recovery vehicles, which will extend the time that road users will be kept waiting when a heavy goods vehicle breaks down or is involved in an accident?

Earlier this month, the assistant chief constable of North Yorkshire police wrote to me about that matter.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Did he know about the changes?

Mr. Bayley: Of course not, because they were announced only last Friday as a panic measure by the Government when they realised that they had got it wrong with their initial proposal.

If the hon. Gentleman will listen, he will learn that assistant chief constable's comment was relevant before the change and after it. He stated that the duty increase for smaller vehicles weighing under 7.5 tonnes could be recovered by operators because such vehicles are used frequently. However, he added:

"The category over 7.5 tonnes will create a particular difficulty for recovery operators. Throughout the County there are approximately 16 recovery vehicles in this category and their work is extremely limited. They are primarily used for the recovery of broken down and accident damaged heavy goods vehicles, and I am aware that one operator has only used his vehicle on 12 occasions during the past 12 months. Despite this limited use it is imperative that North Yorkshire Police are able to call on this type of recovery vehicle."

Nevertheless, the Government are proposing for large vehicles an 800 per cent. rise, from £85 to £750. That represents a substantial increase in the tax burden on operators of large vehicles used only occasionally.

7.15 pm

The Minister recognised that the initial proposal was a mistake. His compromise is a step in the right direction, but not a big enough step. The revenue implications of going the whole hog in my county, which is geographically the largest in England, should be considered. There are only 16 such vehicles in my county, but there will be fewer as a result of the proposal.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): The vehicles to which the hon. Gentleman refers must be expensive. I do not know the depreciation involved, but can the hon.

Gentleman say how much the vehicle owner charged in each of the 12 instances mentioned by the assistant chief constable?

Mr. Bayley: The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point, in terms of the cost to the individual owner of a recovered vehicle of the extra £670. I cannot recall whether the hon. Gentleman was in his seat when I spoke earlier, but not all owners of recovered vehicles pay their bills. I said that one recovery vehicle was used only eight times during the course of a year, and its owner received payment on only six of those occasions. In that instance, the proposed increase would, if it had been passed on, have added £100 to the charge for each rescue.

Recovery vehicles provide a service to the public in removing an obstruction and opening the road to other users. Surely that is worth something in the Government's terms.

Mr. Lord: I heard the hon. Gentleman's earlier speech, but it strikes me that any business that uses such a vehicle so infrequently must build into its cost structure substantial fees per trip. Otherwise, the business is unlikely to be viable. Therefore, the proposed increase may represent a much smaller percentage of the firm's overheads than the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Bayley: When the hon. Gentleman intervened earlier, I acknowledged that he made a valid point when he said that the lower rate increase would not represent a huge extra cost, given the overall charges made for vehicle recovery. Is that not all the more reason for the Government to examine its costings in the round?

In the case of the vehicle used eight times a year, for which its operator was paid on six occasions, the tax would add £100 per use. Why do the Government not set against that the increased cost of police time spent waiting at the scene of an accident, if the time taken to effect recovery is lengthened because perhaps only eight suitable vehicles will operate in North Yorkshire instead of the 16 that operate at present?

The Government's initial proposal prompted the company in question to cancel the purchase of a new vehicle, which would have cost £100,000. That obviously led to an immediate reduction in the quality of the service to the public and the county. The second consequence was that the company decided not to go ahead with appointing someone to a job that it had advertised and had planned to fill. The company has 26 employees, so, proportionately speaking, this had a significant impact. Thirdly, the company decided to call a halt to its efforts to get BS 5750 accreditation, because it realised that it had to make savings.

I hope that, as a result of the reduced increases in VED, the company will be able to reconsider some of these decisions. As the Government have admitted that they were wrong in the first place to propose these excise increases, and as the Government, when bringing in the new lower rate for these vehicles, have failed in their objective of simplicity—putting all the heavy goods vehicles on the same rate of taxation, why do they not accept that these vehicles are infrequently used but perform a valuable public service? If there are fewer of them, there will be greater costs to the Exchequer in terms of police time and road blockages.

The Government's argument is really not worth the candle. For vehicles over 7.5 tonnes, the Government have gone halfway; they should now go the whole way and abandon this increase. The revenue implications will be minuscule. The benefits for an industry on which the Government and the police rely will be considerable. There will also be the benefits of BS 5750 accreditation and of more employment, which the Government say they want. More investment will also go into the industry. All that could be lost if the Government go ahead with this tax increase.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): This is one of those debates that go beyond the usual political point scoring with which we are so familiar. The Government should pay careful attention to what is said, with the intention of looking again at the proposals.

The Minister drew attention to the fact that most snow clearance, gritting, and street lighting and cleaning vehicles in Great Britain are owned by councils. Not so in Northern Ireland. He will be well aware that all those functions are still under the control of the Department of the Environment. One begins to wonder why the Government should impose a tax which they themselves will eventually have to pay. That does not seem the wisest way of proceeding to raise revenue.

The Minister talked about multi-use machines, but did not spell out what he meant by that. In my experience, many machines of the class that he described are single-use machines, used for gritting or for snow clearance—or sometimes for both but for nothing else—

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I gave a specific example of how a street cleaning vehicle could be exempt from VED when cleaning gutters with its hosepipe but, with a small adaptation—not uncommon with such vehicles—it could put its hose further down under the street and do the same job for the sewer. In the latter case, it would pay full VED. So it could switch in and out of exemption from one day to the next. That is a recipe for evasion, and it would create a bureaucratic nightmare.

Mr. Ross: I can see the problem with that case, but I wonder whether the Government's is the right way of dealing with it. I think they should look for a different solution. In any case, in Northern Ireland, these are all DOE vehicles. Thank God, the Department still owns the sewers—no doubt many in this House and elsewhere wish the same were true throughout the United Kingdom. The fact remains that, in the nation from which I come, these are essentially Government vehicles; now they are being asked to pay tax.

Even when the service is privatised, as it has been over here, the cost will eventually be paid by local government taxpayers. Who pays for snow clearance? The road authorities do. Eventually, therefore, local government taxpayers will foot the bill. This is thus a rather sneaky way of placing an unjustified burden on those taxpayers. As we know, it can be snowing in the north of England while the sun is shining in London, at the same time as the south-west is being washed away.

[Mr. Ross]

Had the Minister been with me in the plane today, he would have seen a great deal of England under water—

Ms Primarolo: Would a boat count as a recovery vehicle?

Mr. Ross: Certainly a boat would have been more suitable had the journey been made on the ground.

This measure has not been properly thought through, and the Government should go away and reconsider.

As the House will know, I have long been associated with agriculture, about which the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) spoke earlier. The difficulty is that many farm vehicles, especially tractors, are used only rarely and for short journeys. A farmer in the summer does not take his tractor down the road to look over the gate at the sheep or cattle: he drives a car. The car is taxed. He takes it because it saves him time and is cheaper.

In winter, he will transport fodder to his livestock, which may be only 20 yd away or up to a mile away, two or three times a week—although it may be less often because the cattle may have been moved closer to the farm or even indoors. His farm vehicle thus makes the journey to and from the cattle extremely rarely.

Many farms have more than one tractor. One may be used on longer journeys, and thus be taxed in the usual way, while another is kept to do runabout jobs on the farm. That saves the farmer money, and is quite justified in the circumstances. It all depends on whether a farm is traversed by public roads or by a private road or lane. In the latter case, the need to pay tax is practically non-existent. The Government should bear that in mind, too.

The final problem is that, whereas privatised road cleaning services may be able to recover their extra costs by putting up their prices, farmers cannot just say, "I've got to pay higher tax, so I'll need another pound for this lamb, friend." They can only make what the market will pay them—a fact that the Government appear to ignore.

I was astonished to hear the Minister say, in the context of recovery vehicles, that there was no implication for road safety. There is always a road safety implication when a broken-down vehicle is on the road, especially at night.

Last Friday, I tried to cross the Glenshane pass, which reminded me of the road to Basra at the end of the Gulf war. There had been two hours of wet snow, and the road was in an horrendous condition. I spent an hour admiring the surrounding hills—I could well have done without that—before we got through. The snow cleared up after a couple of hours, but at least two vehicles were off the road by then, and they were not going to be lifted out by a light recovery vehicle. It was clear that a heavy one would be needed.

The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) described the difficulties very well. These vehicles are very much needed—sometimes only rarely—and are essential to our road system.

The economics of the operation was raised. I believe that whether an operator of heavy recovery vehicles will spend £100,000 or go out and buy a second-hand or third-hand vehicle for a fraction of that cost depends on the amount of use that he expects to make of it. Those people are business men. They can count.

We all know that, in one part of the country, such a vehicle may be needed every day—certainly every week—but in others it may be needed half a dozen times a year and no more than that. In those circumstances, it will be an extremely heavy burden on the individual concerned. If the tax goes up to several times its present rate, there will be a knock-on effect on insurance costs. It may be small for an individual vehicle, but there will inevitably be a rise in insurance costs to cover increased costs, and, of course, there will also be the VAT, which I assume will be added, for the service of taking out the recovery vehicle and using it.

7.30 pm

The Minister said that it would raise only 1 per cent. The implication is that 1 per cent. is an absolutely tiny sum, scarcely worth thinking or bothering about. If so, why does he bother about it? Why does not he go away and forget about the tax for a year? He should listen to what is said this evening and no doubt to what will be said in Standing Committee. After that, he could come back with a regime that is more easily defendable than what is before us this evening.

The reality is that a number of completely obsolete vehicles are mentioned in the proposed legislation. The Minister does not have to worry about them. Nobody is breaking the law. The vehicles do not exist, so by definition the law cannot be broken. He could wipe them out at any time, and nobody would be too concerned. The mere fact that the present legislation has lasted so long says an awful lot for those who framed it. It would seem that they got it very nearly right.

I suspect that, if the Minister goes ahead with the proposed legislation, not only will he be unpopular but he will be back here again in a year or two trying to dress up the mistakes that the Government are currently making.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): I support the amendment proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), for two simple reasons: first, clause 15 and schedule 4 raise a question mark about the extent to which the Government have seriously taken on board some of the road safety and road traffic issues that Opposition Members have raised; and, secondly, there is a genuine case for reviewing the parts of the Bill that relate to changing vehicle excise duty on heavy recovery vehicles, because of the burden that the duty changes will place on many small businesses.

I was intrigued by some of the Minister's earlier remarks. He said two things that particularly caught my attention: first, that this part of the Bill is necessary. The hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) made it clear that the amounts being raised by the Government are very small, and some people might conclude, as he did, that therefore it is an argument that is not worth having at all. Secondly, he tried to make the case that the changes were necessary because the existing legislation was in a mess—it was confusing and complex and few people understood it.

Anyone involved in law making and applying the law wants to see Parliament make law that is comprehensible and sensible. That is not what the Government propose. That is particularly true of some of the changes being

made for vehicle excise duty on road recovery vehicles. At the moment, there is a simple provision in legislation in the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994, which specifies the rate of duty that those vehicles are to be charged. That will be replaced by a considerably more complex range of provisions, which is unlikely to see an end to the complex litigation and expensive law actions that have pursued that area of the law in the past.

I shall comment not only on road recovery vehicles but on the proposed exemption for emergency vehicles, or 999 vehicles, as the Minister described them.

Paragraph 3A of schedule 4 is to be inserted into schedule 2 of the 1994 Act, to create a new category of exempt vehicles. Many hon. Members, on both sides of the Committee, will be quite surprised to learn that police vehicles are not already exempt from vehicle excise duty. I support the extension of the category of exempt vehicles in section 5 of the 1994 Act to include that category. That is long overdue and sensible. The Government's intentions are clear from paragraph 3A—it is clearly designed to exempt police vehicles from paying vehicle excise duty. But there must be a question mark over whether the amendments proposed to schedule 2 of the 1994 Act will achieve the Government's objectives.

Schedule 2 is to be amended by the insertion of a new paragraph 3A, which says:

"A vehicle is an exempt vehicle when it is being used for police purposes."

The Minister said that that was designed to include 999 emergency vehicles to the concept on an exempt vehicle not liable to vehicle excise duty. I do not think that is what the Government have achieved.

I bring to the Minister's attention two problems with paragraph 3A. He may not be able to respond to these points tonight, but I hope that he is listening. First, there is no definition of "police purposes" for the purposes of the new paragraph. Secondly, there is no definition of what is a police vehicle. I should have thought that both problems were fundamental. If the Government simply propose an exemption for 999 emergency vehicles, is that what they have achieved? What about a range of police vehicles that are not used in 999 emergency situations, for example, vehicles that are used to transport prisoners to and from a magistrates court to prison? Will they be covered by the new paragraph 3A?

I used that example, because from the existing legislation that relates to the definition of police purposes—we could use section 25 of the Road Traffic Act 1960 and section 79 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1967—it is clear that both of them relate to emergency situations: when a police vehicle is attending the scene of a crime or an accident and must exceed the speed limit for that area. Clearly, not all police vehicles are designed or used for those emergency scenarios, so where does that leave us? If we look at existing case law that relates to both statutory provisions, we are unlikely to have much assistance. Therefore, no definition in existing case law appears to be of any great assistance to us.

Perhaps a more fundamental problem for the Government is that there is no definition of what is a police vehicle. That is strange. Other emergency vehicles, for example, fire engines and ambulances, which are already exempt under schedule 2 of the 1994 Act, are pretty comprehensively defined in schedule 2 of the 1994 Act. The Minister may not be aware of those definitions, but if he cares to look at schedule 2 of the Act, he will see in paragraphs 4, 5, 6 and 7 a pretty comprehensive and impressive definition of what those emergency vehicles are.

Why is there not a similar definition of a police vehicle for the purposes of the new exempted category of vehicles? Surely a paragraph such as paragraph 5 is capable of being used without any great intellectual effort to apply to the concept of a police vehicle. I wonder whether the Minister might consider at some point having another look at the new schedule and including in it some reference to the fact that the vehicle exempted from excise duty should not be a vehicle that is kept or operated by a police authority. Surely that is what the Minister intends this part of the Bill to achieve. Sadly, it is not what the Bill does.

I shall give the Minister three examples of where there might be a problem with police vehicles. First, what will happen if a police authority wishes to hire or rent a vehicle to enable business to be done by the police authority? It is not uncommon to see police stickers on the sides of vehicles that are, in fact, used to transport stores. Under the Bill as it stands, will such vehicles be exempt from vehicle excise duty? Are they being used for police purposes? They are not actually owned by the police authority.

Presumably, the company that owns such a vehicle—Hertz, for instance, or Eurodollar—will be able to ask for a rebate from the Inland Revenue or Customs and Excise, saying that the vehicle has been on contract hire to a police authority and that paragraph 3A of the new schedule to the 1994 Act should apply.

Secondly, what about the use of private vehicles commandeered by constables—or police officers of other rank—to respond to emergencies? Although we hope that such vehicles would be used for only a short time, in theory an owner could claim that his vehicle was being used for police purposes during that time. Do the Government want owners of private vehicles to be able to claim exemptions from vehicle excise duty? Probably not; in which case, why does not the Bill make it clear that only vehicles kept or operated by police authorities will be so exempted?

Schedule 4 is a complex provision, but it does not refer to earlier legislation dealing with police authorities, police vehicles and police purposes. That is not good enough. The Minister rightly described the law as complicated, and said that the Government wanted to simplify it; that is fine, but I fear that this part of the Bill will represent three cherries on the fruit machine for lawyers. I do not think that Members of Parliament are in the business of handing the prospect of expensive litigation to well-paid lawyers, when we can get our legislation right and make it simple.

The third problem involves prison escort vehicles. The Government have emphasised the need to privatise some of the escort services transferring people between prisons and courts. I do not wish to become involved in the merits or otherwise of their policy now; but could it not be argued that vehicles carrying remand or convicted prisoners between prison and court are acting for a police purpose, in the context of new paragraph 3A? Could not a private operator such as Group 4, which has won contracts in Humberside and the east midlands, argue that because police authorities are currently using its services, those services are being used for a police purpose?

[Mr. John Hutton]

Opposition Members do not wish to cause difficulties for the Government on this issue, at least; but let us be certain about the vehicles that we are exempting. The Government could tighten the drafting of the Bill with very little effort. The definition of police purposes could be refined if we inserted a provision to the effect that the vehicles involved need to be operated or kept by police authorities: that would limit exemptions to the category that the Government probably had in mind.

Amendment No. 12 also raises road safety and traffic issues. The Government have clearly had a change of heart, seeing the force of the arguments against them, which have been deployed again tonight: it seems probable that the duty will now be substantially less, and we welcome that. The proposed changes will, however, have an impact on heavy road recovery vehicles in my constituency in south Cumbria.

It has often been said that my constituency lies at the end of the longest cul de sac in Europe. I think that that is something of an exaggeration, but it gives a flavour of the sense of geographical isolation felt by many of my constituents. The bulk of the incoming traffic comes down the A590, which is an awful road; however, there are not many garages or other small companies running heavy vehicle recovery services in the area. I believe that there is a risk that the Government's proposed changes to vehicle excise duty legislation will jeopardise the provision of any such services. I put it no higher than that, but the Government must take the risk into account.

The Minister said that the Retail Motor Industry Federation was happy with the changes, but I should be interested to know how many small companies and garage operators have been consulted, even about these particular changes. Certainly, many small employers in my constituency are still extremely concerned about the impact of the measure on their businesses.

7.45 pm

In a very articulate letter, one of those small employers urges me to vote against the Government tonight. It will surprise no one when I disclose that that is exactly what I intend to do. My constituent, Mr. Bob Grieve, makes his case against the Government's proposals very clearly, writing:

"the new rates would force some operators out of business with others opting out of HGV recovery altogether;

many parts of the country would end up with only limited capacity for removing broken down or accident damaged heavy lorries from our roads, leading to longer delays in road clearance and raising the question of public safety."

That, I feel, is very pertinent to the interests and needs of my constituents.

My constituency is remote, and is served by only one major road. It is 40 miles from the M6, and even further from larger centres where there are other garage service providers. We are heavily dependent on local providers of HGV recovery services. I see no reasonable justification even for the modest changes that the Government propose. The law as it stands is very simple, and given what my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley) said about the few occasions on which heavy vehicles are used, I feel that there is obvious justice in keeping that law in place until we have had an opportunity to examine some of the wider issues raised by the proposed change.

I hope that the Government will re-examine the provision in schedule 4 that exempts police vehicles from vehicle excise duty, and ask whether there is scope for improvement in the drafting to specify the exempted vehicles more accurately.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) on a fascinating speech, and particularly on what he said about police vehicles.

I should first declare that I am a parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation, although I have no particular brief from the federation tonight. While listening to my hon. Friend, I thought of two more issues that might arise in regard to police vehicles unless the Government provide the clarification that he rightly demanded: given all-party interest in the matter, the Government should accept the need for such clarification.

I refer to conditions affecting unmarked surveillance vehicles. Such vehicles raise all sorts of questions in relation to when they are used. Some of them are quite old and, for obvious reasons, their dilapidated state is intended to make them less conspicuous. Some police officers, especially those in rural areas, drive home at night in police vehicles and return to work in them the following day. Obviously, when an officer is driving home he is not using the vehicle for a police purpose for which it is normally used. There is an obvious need for clarification.

My main objective in the debate is to raise the concerns of constituents who came to see me in my surgery. Harvey and Madeleine Wasson own Harvey's Recovery and Repairs of Exhall in Bedworth. Mrs. Wasson recently came to see me because she was concerned about the Government's proposals on vehicle excise duty. The company owns seven vehicles and has three employees. The husband and wife also work in the business. They were appalled by the proposals because they had just bought a four-axled vehicle of the type which is to be taxed at the highest rate. It was obtained at considerable sacrifice and they anticipated that the vehicle excise duty would be £85. They have suddenly found that it will be about £5,000.

I accept that, to some extent, the Minister has listened to representations from the industry and from hon. Members, including me, in all parts of the House because there is an alternative proposal considerably to reduce the tax on these vehicles.

Mr. and Mrs. Wasson have a good business but it is by no means making them millionaires, and the Minister should consider what he is doing to that couple. He is proposing to raise VED on their vehicle by about 800 per cent. That is a massive and unacceptable rise and the Minister should think seriously before going ahead with it.

Large recovery vehicles perform a public service. Without them, or with a reduction in their number, there would be increased congestion on our motorways and an increase in the cost of police and other time in dealing with accidents. If the only benefit to the Exchequer is a 1 per cent. increase in the take from VED it will be far outweighed by the extra expense of traffic congestion and more police inconvenience. The Minister should consult further.

I agree that the Minister has made considerable concessions, but why at the last minute has he had to amend his proposals? The reason is that he had not

consulted properly. His civil servants do not seem to have given him the detailed advice on which Ministers have to rely about the market in which heavy recovery vehicles operate. He did not seem to understand that the market would be damaged and he had to amend his original proposals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) outlined other inadequacies in the Bill. The Minister should accept, as he has already accepted to some extent because of his climbdown on VED, that he has not properly consulted or has inadequately considered some of the effects of the proposed changes. He should consult properly with industry and councils that will be affected, look in detail at the impact of his proposals, and consider the reality of the market. If he does that, he will find that his proposals will reduce the availability of heavy recovery vehicles and he will change his mind on some of the detail. We ask only for consultation. The Minister got into a mess by not consulting and his proposals are the result.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I should like to hear more from my hon. Friend about the use of the word "concessions". There is a danger of us falling into a trap. The Government set outrageous objectives and in a state of sheer panic they reduced them and claimed that they had made concessions. The Minister said that the trade welcomes these concessions. Of course it does, but that is because of the outrageous figure that was first proposed.

Mr. O'Brien: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I was about to come to that issue. The Minister said that the trade associations have accepted the "concessions". That is not surprising, because, matters could have been far worse. However, my constituents will not welcome the damage that will be caused to the small business which they struggled to establish by an 800 per cent. increase in VED. That is unacceptable. Such vehicles are rarely used and any extra burden placed on small businesses is damaging. The Minister should think carefully before imposing it.

The Wassons have told me that they will not go out of business if the changes are imposed, but they think that they will have to lay off staff and will probably get rid of the biggest vehicle. The Government should try to prevent them from doing that by changing the proposals. Our amendment asks merely for consultation. It is accepted that the various exemptions have many deficiencies, but people do not accept that the Government have found the correct way to deal with difficulties that have been around for a long time.

The proposals will be costly and are potentially damaging not only to the police and businesses but to everyone who uses our roads. The Minister should accept that the Opposition have made sensible suggestions on various issues and he should agree to consultation. That would be reasonable and it would mean that we would not have to press the matter to a vote.

Ms Primarolo: In opening the debate the Minister explained why there was a need to restructure vehicle excise duty. He said that there were anomalies, that the system was complex, and that we needed to make arrangements to simplify and ease understanding of the duty. As we have heard, the Government proposals do anything but that. They replace one nightmare of anomalies with a series of other anomalies. That point was ably made by my hon. Friends.

The Government claim that their proposals are good taxation and that they need to press ahead with them. They are doing that for the sake of, initially, a 1 per cent. increase in revenue. He fails to understand, however, that he started with a bad proposal, that he has amended it slightly so that it is not as bad as it was, but that it is still based on premises that are incorrect. It is hardly surprising that the Road Rescue Recovery Association is prepared to accept a reduction as a concession, when it was threatened with such a massive increase.

Companies are still faced with a massive increase in taxation and draw on resources, even as a result of the concessionary rates that the Minister has announced this evening. For instance, Link Assistance in North Yorkshire, which is paying an excise bill of £1,020 a year, and which is looking at a possible bill of £19,740 on the originally proposed rates, will find, even with the concession, that its taxation will be increased by £9,000.

In the debate, Labour Members have repeatedly said that the Government scheme is ill thought out. The increased costs will be transferred from the Government to either the private motorist or car user. They will be absorbed by companies or passed on to the consumer. It is simply not acceptable that the Government should behave in that way. My hon. Friends have made that case.

In echoing the points about road safety, the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) made clear the particular variations in Northern Ireland. He asked why we cannot if the scheme is so badly thought out, pause, undertake the review and bring back the proposals next year. It would be worth forgoing the 1 per cent. increase in revenue if the scheme were in place and operating correctly.

8 pm

In a detailed and knowledgeable speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), who has obviously, in his bedtime reading, compared the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994 with schedule 4 of the Bill, made clear the definitions of a police vehicle, its purposes and the varying purposes that would count under the definition. Again, he raised the point about the prison escort service. If those points have not created further anomalies in this so-called clear and simplified system, I do not know what will, or how the Government will understand the mess that they are getting themselves into.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien) echoed the points about road recovery difficulties. The Minister has not said whether the arrangements that he has announced tonight will be permanent, or whether they will stand simply for the next 12 months. He has not said that, in next year's Finance Bill, we will not face another debate on an incremental increase on the vehicle excise duties of all the vehicles that we have discussed this evening. Why not stop? Why not undertake the review? Why not undertake proper consultation instead of last-minute, knee-jerk reaction, and come up with a decent scheme for vehicle excise duty which deals with anomalies and which gives us a firm foundation to tax? That is a good taxation policy.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In this evening's debate, no hon. Member on either side of the House has disputed that

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

the existing system is riddled with anomalies, that it is out of date, and that it has great difficulty in coping with new vehicles that arrive on the scene and with technological changes. I have described some examples that give rise to those difficulties. My proposals are major, simplifying measures. They will make it a great deal easier for the trade, for users of the vehicles and for the Vehicle Certification Agency. They will reduce the classes of vehicles by more than 90 per cent.

Of course, no reform is painless and any group of users of vehicles affected by any increases are bound to argue against them, but I answered those points in my introductory remarks. The additional points raised in the debate cover a specific group of amendments which will arise later in the debate, so they will be covered.

I am disappointed that the Labour party is persisting, apparently, with a number of amendments that continue and take forward local authority privileges. I have already shown that, under its proposals, some of the vehicles that it wants to be exempt will face full duty if used in a mode on a Monday, but complete exemption if used with a slight adaptation on a Tuesday. That cannot be right. It invites evasion and, administratively, it is unworkable.

I will, however, answer the points raised by the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) because the police vehicle issue may not arise again. I assure him that the definition used for police purposes is common in transport legislation—it is used, for instance, in the Severn Bridge Tolls Act 1965. It will not give rise to litigation or ambiguity of the sort that he fears.

I confirm to the hon. Gentleman that leased vehicles will be covered if they are leased for more than a month, but commandeered vehicles will not be covered and the owner will not be able to claim exemption, unless the vehicles are commandeered for whole months at a time. In answer to the point about unmarked police surveillance vehicles, they will benefit from the exemption, but, for obvious reasons, they will display a tax disc, as if vehicle excise duty had been paid. As we are taking forward a definition that is used in other legislation, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the clause, as drafted, is sound.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 208, Noes 297.

Division No. 54] **[8.07 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'cstle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Btham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Macdonlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*

Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. Peter Mandelson

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'hre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Galle, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'ham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow West)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Knoardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter

Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Dr. Liam Fox and
Mr. Timothy Wood

Question accordingly negatived.
Clause 15 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 4

VEHICLE EXCISE AND REGISTRATION

Ms Primarolo: I beg to move amendment No. 27, in page 164, leave out line 23.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 22, leave out line 26.

No. 23, leave out line 27.

No. 24, leave out line 28.

No. 25, leave out lines 29 and 30.

Ms Primarolo: The amendments cover similar ground to the previous debate. I do not intend to delay the Committee by referring to each amendment, but I shall make special reference to amendment No. 27, which would maintain the status quo for electrically propelled vehicles. All the amendments would maintain the status quo of vehicle excise duty, as plan B in persuading the Government to undertake the review for which we argued in the past debate but, so far, have failed to secure.

There are no precise figures on the number of electric milk floats in use, but it is estimated that there are 25,000 milk rounds in England and Wales alone and on at least two thirds of those, electric vehicles are used. The imposition of even a reduced rate of £35 vehicle excise duty represents a considerable annual increase in costs to the industry. Any increase in cost targeted directly at doorstep delivery is a further threat to the viability of the milk round. The Government have maintained their support for the delivery of milk to people's doorsteps and we are sure that, on reflection, they will wish to reconsider the imposition.

A statement that the use of electric vehicles should not be penalised would be a positive contribution to the Government's professed claim to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Because of their very nature, the use of electric vehicles should be encouraged, not penalised by the imposition of vehicle excise duty. Since taxation is used by the Government as a method of encouraging environmentally friendly use of vehicles, it is absolutely absurd that they now propose to extend to all vehicles of this class an initial vehicle excise duty which, no doubt in subsequent years, they will seek to increase.

Ministerial responses to representations made so far have been inconsistent, to put it politely. The Secretary of State for Transport has stated that the imposition of a £35 rate of duty on electric milk floats will

"reduce evasion and be easier to understand and administer."

What gobbledegook; what rubbish. How can there be any evasion if there is no tax in the first place? Perhaps the Government will explain why we need to propose a tax to prevent evasion in a category in which there can be no evasion because there is no tax.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has said that it is a matter for the Treasury and that the imposition

"will make fraud more difficult and increase efficiency of administration."

What utter rubbish. The whole purpose of introducing this taxation is to open up a new area of indirect taxes—a rich vein into which the Government hope to tap, in their efforts to establish for themselves a war chest of booty from the electorate that the Government can try to give back in electoral bribes by reducing direct taxes just before the general election.

The Minister added insult to injury by calculating the additional tax on a cost per pint of milk in an attempt to hide the reality that the industry will face enormous difficulties. The imposition of costs which in the first year may be as much as £500,000 will undermine the milk rounds' ability to continue to exist.

We stand by the speeches made by Opposition Members in previous debates. We urge the Minister to withdraw the imposition of vehicle excise duty on the vehicle classes listed in schedule 4 and to consider bringing before the Committee a more rational, sensible and logically argued case for a new regime of vehicle excise duty.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We recognise that electric vehicles have certain environmental advantages. That is why they will be taxed at such an advantageous rate. Some would say that the environmental advantages are not overwhelming because an electrically powered vehicle has to use power generated elsewhere; in a sense, one is therefore simply shifting the pollution from the vehicle to the generating plant.

I recognise that such vehicles have certain advantages, especially because they produce less noise, which is why they will be placed in a concessionary class and charged £35 per annum only. However, it is right that they should be removed from the totally exempt category, which we are reserving for emergency vehicles and those used by the severely disabled.

Electric vehicles have an additional advantage in that there is no excise duty payable on the fuel that they use—electrical power.

Ms Primarolo: VAT is paid on it.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Lady suggests from a sedentary position that VAT is payable on the electricity. That is, of course, not the case. If she were to think more carefully, she would realise that the electricity is supplied commercially and, therefore, the VAT payable on the electricity supply is recoverable as input tax.

The other amendments in the group cover snow-clearing, ice-gritting, street-cleansing vehicles, and so on. We covered the point in relation to those vehicles fairly comprehensively. However, the hon. Lady must face up to something that she persistently avoids: she wants street-cleansing vehicles to be exempt from excise duty even though it has been explained to her that when

the same type of vehicle is used for marginally different activities—for example, cleaning out an underground drain or sewer—it will bear, according to the Opposition amendments, or lack of them, a full rate of vehicle excise duty.

How can Labour Members tolerate the continuance of a glaring anomaly when their whole Budget strategy was apparently based—or so we were told at the time—on ending anomalies and loopholes? Until they clear up that confusion in their own thinking, I do not think that the Committee will take the amendment seriously.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 222, Noes 276.

Division No. 55] **[8.30 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Burden, Richard
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(Btham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Mandelson and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela

Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rutclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'hire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Galle, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'td'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and
Mr. Timothy Wood

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I beg to move amendment No. 28, in page 164, leave out lines 31 and 32.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 32, in page 164, line 38, at end insert—

'3A. In paragraph 21 of Schedule 2 to the 1994 Act the following shall be inserted after sub-paragraph (b)—"and,

(c) for the purposes of agriculture, horticulture, and forestry."'.

Government amendments Nos. 42 and 43.

No. 35, in page 172, leave out lines 44 and 45.

No. 36, in page 173, leave out lines 14 to 19.

Mr. Bruce: This is an innocuous little amendment in terms of its place on the amendment paper and its length, but it is very important. It is astonishing that the Government should have thought that it would be possible to put into the Finance Bill the provisions which are enshrined in the lines that we wish to take out without accepting that that would create considerable concern in

the farming community. The exemption of farm vehicles from vehicle excise duty dates back to the 1920s. No Government have seriously considered changing that. Suddenly, without notice, farmers find that they are faced with having to pay vehicle excise duty on all farm vehicles. At least that was the situation until a couple of days ago, and I will refer to that matter in a minute.

I am sure that hon. Members who have connections with farming or agricultural interests will know of a number of matters which are relevant to farm vehicles and which are the reason for exemptions having been granted for so many years. A significant number of agricultural vehicles are used for only a few weeks of the year. Some combine harvesters might be used for only a few days a year. The Government now propose that farmers must pay the full rate of vehicle excise duty on them, which seems to be unreasonable and unfair. The previous ruling was that the exemption was restricted to vehicles that travelled no more than six miles from their point of registration.

Given the changes in agricultural holdings in recent years, there are fewer farms where there is no reason to take agricultural vehicles on to a public road simply to carry out the basic business of running a farm, because a farm straddles a public road, because fields can be reached only by going along a public road, or, increasingly, because holdings are physically detached and might be a mile or two apart.

In such circumstances, a very modest farmer might be expected to find vehicle excise duty for three, four or five vehicles for which he has never previously had to consider such a payment and for which there has been no warning, no discussion, no consultation and no sign that the Government were considering it. There has been no opportunity for farmers or their representatives in the National Farmers Union to make representations about the implications or to seek exemption or modification. That is reprehensible.

I represent a constituency in Scotland. Of course there are prosperous Scottish farmers. There are farmers for whom paying vehicle excise duty on three, four or five vehicles is a relatively small charge to their businesses, but there are an awful lot more farmers for whom that is a significant burden on top of other matters with which they must cope. In Scotland, 95 per cent. of agricultural land is in less-favoured areas. By definition, therefore, such farms require subsidy. The Government are providing a subsidy with one hand and clawing it back in additional taxes with the other hand. That does not seem to be fair, reasonable or even sensible.

8.45 pm

In the past few weeks, Scottish farmers have had a problem with sheep annual premiums that have not been paid, even though they have been paid throughout England and Wales. Scottish farmers were promised them in October-November. Two thousand farmers are due £8 million, but they have received no payment whatever, and they are told that the Scottish Office is unable to tell them when they might be paid, and that it could be some time after Easter.

On average, that sum works out at £4,000 per head. It relates only to partnerships, but a partnership business is often a husband and wife or, possibly, a son or a daughter. Such businesses are being deprived of £12,000 of basic salary. Farm support income has been cut, hill livestock compensation allowances have been cut, and farmers now have to pay additional taxes. That is unreasonable and unfair, especially without adequate consultation or consideration.

I welcome one matter. It is clear that, after we tabled our amendment, vibrations got through to the Treasury that perhaps there was a potential problem and that there was some resistance and resentment. The National Farmers Union has been busy, no doubt, contacting hon. Members with agricultural interests to point out the implications of the clause and schedule.

When we tabled our amendment, at least two Conservative Members put their names to it, as well as tabling their own amendment. Surprise, surprise, a couple of days later, the Paymaster General, apart from writing notes to several hon. Members, tabled his own amendment, which provides exemptions for all-terrain vehicles—no doubt he will tell us more about his proposals—and light farm vehicles. That is welcome. It is a recognition that the Government have overstretched the point, that they have not considered the matter, and that there is a need to respond. However, welcome as that response is, it means that all the arguments that I have put will still apply to the majority of farm vehicles affecting the majority of farms and farmers.

In those circumstances, our amendment is justified and desirable. That remains the view of the National Farmers Union, which also welcomes the pressure that has been brought to bear by hon. Members and which has generated a response from the Government. I always welcome evidence that action in the House is observed, acknowledged and responded to, and I give due credit to it.

Conservative Members who take the view that the Government amendment is adequate will find that the NFU does not agree, and many of their local farmers will tell them that the amendment neither affects nor benefits them. Farmers are faced with additional charges which have been introduced without warning or consultation at a time when Government support for many farmers is being withdrawn.

It is a little mischievous of the Government to cut subsidies while trying to claw back additional taxes from farmers. Why has a measure which has been accepted for 70 years suddenly been brought into the net? It does not seem reasonable or fair. The Government may have acknowledged that their proposal as it stands is unreasonable and needs qualification. It would be helpful if the Minister undertook to take the measure away, to consult farmers and their interests, and to bring it back in a form which takes account of those consultations.

I understand that one of the Government's arguments is that the administration of the scheme is somewhat bureaucratic. For 70 years, farmers have been perfectly happy to handle that bureaucracy and I have had no complaints about it from any farmer. It is funny that people in general think that bureaucracy is not a bad thing when they get a tax rebate, and that they are only opposed to it when they face a tax imposition. The serious point is that, if there is a bureaucratic problem, it can be addressed.

The NFU has suggested that a possible solution is a one-off registration with a requirement to notify changes. Nevertheless, the subject of bureaucracy was raised by the Minister after the Finance Bill was published, and no doubt there was justification. The matter has not, I

[Mr. Bruce]

understand, been raised by farmers' representatives complaining about the existing system. The NFU has simply responded to the Minister's assertion.

A significant change has been introduced after 70 years of unchallenged and accepted practice, without warning or consultation. The Government could simply say that they still want the measure—if that is their position—but that they accept that it has implications which they had not fully considered. The measure is clearly resented within the farming community, and it is felt to be a burden for which the Government have not made a case to justify the change.

The Government should take the measure away, reconsider it and possibly bring it back in a revised form after consultation. I would rather that they did not bring it back at all, but consultation has not taken place and I hope that the Minister accepts that it should now take place. Whether we press the amendment to a vote tonight will depend to a significant extent on the Minister's response, but I hope that he accepts that farmers are extremely unhappy about the way in which the measure is being introduced.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Government amendment No. 42 is, I think, entirely uncontroversial and removes an anomaly which might otherwise mean that a local authority which used tractors simply for the maintenance of roadside verges, hedges and trees would have to license them as haulage vehicles, and thus pay vehicle excise duty. They would also lose their entitlement to rebated diesel. As a result of the amendment, they will continue to enjoy their existing concessions to license them as agricultural tractors, and they will therefore pay £35 tax and use rebated diesel.

Government amendment No. 43 concerns the all-terrain vehicles which are familiar to any hon. Member with an agricultural constituency. The vehicles have increased in use, and are now a common sight on hills where sheep are rounded up or hay is delivered. This is a clear example of where the old concessionary classes have simply not anticipated the development of such vehicles. If the legislation were being laid down today, those vehicles would undoubtedly be considered a form of small lightweight tractor. Under the amendment, we propose to recognise that farmers do use ATVs like tractors and, accordingly, we define them as light agricultural vehicles. That means that they will be taxed in the £35 a year class and, although most of them are petrol-powered, a number which are diesel-powered will be able to use rebated fuel because of the amendment.

The other issue touched on by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) concerns the low-mileage vehicles which are often used by farmers between fields on a single farm. The legislation as drafted required farmers to pay vehicle excise duty for the first time. Most of the vehicles, of course, are tractors and therefore the duty was only £35. I must make it clear to the Committee that the proposals are not in this case driven by the need for extra revenue, but to end anomalies and to find a system which is administratively workable.

I must make clear at the outset that the current system for the vehicles—whereby exemption is based supposedly on the vehicles doing fewer than six miles a week on public roads—cannot continue. It is self-evidently impossible to police the scheme. It may be possible for a police officer to stop a vehicle and check its distance, but it is certainly impossible when the criteria for evasion is not just distance, but time and how many miles have been covered by that vehicle during the week. It will not surprise the Committee to know that prosecutions are unknown.

The scheme is bureaucratic in the extreme. I have with me one of the forms which must be filled out each year by people claiming the concession. Of course, they do not complain about it. As the hon. Member for Gordon fairly said, who would complain about filling in a form if it means that one does not have to pay tax? However, it cannot be good taxation if every year, a person claiming the concession must fill in a detailed description of the route to be travelled, and any divergence or detour from that route—because of a temporarily blocked road, for example—must be sent in writing to the authority before that concession can continue.

Hon. Members with agricultural constituencies will know what I mean when I say that, in private, farmers often concede that there is a certain amount of abuse of that concession. It is difficult for the authorities and bureaucratic for the users.

I am not wedded to the concept of taxing genuine cases, however, when vehicles necessarily have to cross main roads in the course of business. If trade organisations—the National Farmers Union, Country Landowners Association and other trade groups—or hon. Members can come up with a system that involves none of the form filling, is workable and administratively simple and prevents evasion, I will willingly consider it in time to table an amendment on Report.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Before my hon. Friend sits down—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The Minister has sat down.

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): First, I warmly welcome what the Minister said about all-terrain vehicles, as those were causing some anxiety in the farming community and his words will be widely welcomed.

On exemptions from normal vehicle excise duty for certain agricultural vehicles, I have much sympathy with the Chancellor's wish to tighten the rules and to lessen abuse of former concessions that allowed six miles per week and were misused, especially as regards livestock. One could say that farmers have brought the problems on themselves because of the widespread abuse of the system, but the change means that the majority of law-abiding farmers are being penalised because of an unscrupulous minority.

9 pm

I must draw two genuine problems to the Minister's attention. The first concerns the substantial vehicle excise duty and the second, the subsequent need to MOT a vehicle to motorway standards, when it will be used merely for crossing a farm road or up a narrow lane to get to another part of the farm. Technically, the first change in vehicle excise duty would result in a further change in the MOT requirements. Those should not apply to harvest vehicles and others of that type.

I have here a letter from a farmer in my constituency, who says that I should be aware that

"many farm harvest lorries have been un-MOT'd within the exempt ruling law, but will in future have to pay licence duty but also be liable to MOT to motorway standards. There must be many farmers with harvest grain transport trucks who will not MOT their vehicles to MOT motorway standard. We run two lorries for harvest work—that is all. Should the law change we would have to purchase two 14 ton trailers and hire two tractors—a considerable cost"

to their farming enterprise.

I also want to draw the Minister's attention to the views of the Country Landowners Association on "agricultural off-road vehicles", which is how it wants them to be described. I was glad to hear my hon. Friend say that he was open to suggestions. It suggests:

"The licence will only be valid within, say, x miles of the owner's place of business (the exact amount of miles to be determined by the distance from the postal address of the business to the furthest outlying field in the farm". The licence disc should be a special colour and include the address of the place of business so that if the vehicle is stopped on the public highway it should be immediately obvious to any policeman whether or not the licence is valid."

The inclusion of the business address would avoid the policing difficulties that have been encountered and which the Minister mentioned.

I should have thought that that change from X miles per week to a specific distance from a farmhouse or tractor store to the boundaries of the farm plus two miles would eliminate the major problem to which my hon. Friend the Minister drew our attention. Will he consider that suggestion and consult the NFU, the CLA and other interests, as he said he would? I hope that he will be able to table an amendment at a later stage as a result of his consultations.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I must place it on record that I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for the courteous way in which he received me last week to make representations on vehicle excise duty exemption for agricultural vehicles.

I am also grateful for his announcement that he will consider further representations from the Country Landowners Association, the National Farmers Union and colleagues. Perhaps I should declare an interest, as I am a member of the NFU and the CLA.

I endorse some of the arguments by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell). The Bill removes schedule 2, paragraph 21 of the Vehicle and Excise Registration Act 1994. It is worth dwelling for a minute or two on what we are doing and what we are abolishing. As the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said, the provisions have been in place for 70 years. Paragraph 21 of schedule 2 to the 1994 Act states:

"Where an applicant for a vehicle licence for a vehicle satisfies the Secretary of State that the vehicle is intended to be used on public roads—

(a) only in passing from land in his occupation to other land in his occupation, and

(b) for distances not exceeding an aggregate of six miles in any calendar week,

the Secretary of State may, with the consent of the Treasury, declare that the vehicle is an exempt vehicle when it is being used on public roads as mentioned in paragraphs (a) and (b)."

So we are abolishing a concise and precise exemption, which has been in operation for 70 years for a good reason. The reason is that the agricultural business involves travelling from one piece of land to another. It therefore seems onerous that farmers should suddenly be brought into the licensing net.

I understand the Minister's explanation that, by abolishing the exemption, he is making the law easier to enforce and police. It is generally acknowledged that the current concessions are widely abused, so we must come up with a better system, but I hope that he will listen carefully to suggestions made by the agricultural industry because, in some cases, the abolition of the concession will cause hardship.

The schedule shows that proposals with respect to some restricted HGV lorries, which may be used only on odd occasions in a year, such as during the harvest period or to transport a few sheep from one piece of land to another, could mean that a farmer who currently pays nothing may pay up to several thousand pounds under the new system. I accept that most tractors and agricultural vehicles, such as combines, will, under the concessions granted in the Bill, pay only £35. Under those circumstances, the obligation for farmers is not too onerous, but small farmers who must pay substantially more than £35 for HGVs which are used only on the odd occasion each year and which may only cross a road, may suffer hardship.

My hon. Friend the Minister already mentioned some of the ways in which the exemption could be kept. The Bill provides a new definition for "tractors" and makes it clear that we are dealing with vehicles that can travel at only up to 25 miles an hour, except the concession for ATVs, which I warmly welcome. As it is therefore unlikely that anyone in his right mind will drive those tractors or combine harvesters far on a public road, it must be possible to come up with a system whereby farmers apply for a normal licence but answer a question on the licence form about why they should be entitled to the exemption.

The exemption would specify the address from which the vehicle operated, and it would be reasonable to have a different colour licence that specified up to what range the vehicle could go. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to give that idea serious consideration. If a vehicle crosses a road only once or twice a year, it is unnecessary to go through the rigmarole of paying a considerable extra amount.

Sir David Mitchell: Does my hon. Friend accept that it is not just a case of crossing a road through a farm, but it may be a case of going a short distance along a road to enter another field?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I entirely accept that.

My suggestion about how the matter could be implemented and enforced by the police so that it would not be abused as at present would be less bureaucratic and easier to enforce than the present arrangement.

May I make a final plea to the Minister? I understand that the Department of Transport is carrying out an investigation into which agricultural vehicles should be subject to the MOT and what provisions should apply to them. It is ludicrous to suggest that combine harvesters should jam up MOT testing stations which are not big enough to cope with them in any case. I hope that my right hon. Friend will make representations to his colleagues in the Department of Transport to ensure that those types of agricultural vehicles will not be subject to the same testing and plating regulations that currently apply to commercial vehicles.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): I support amendment No. 28. I represent a farming constituency in west Wales and the representations that I have received from my constituents about vehicle excise duty have led me to believe that the Government have made a big mistake in not accepting the opposing arguments that have been advanced. Following tonight's debate, I hope that they will begin to listen both to their own Back Benchers and to the Opposition.

Farmers throughout the country are saying, "What has the Tory party got against the farming industry?" At the end of last year, the Government announced that hill livestock compensatory allowances would not be increased, even though hill farming incomes had declined by more than 20 per cent., and they also cut grant aid for pollution measures. That shows that, for some reason, farmers are not particularly popular with the Government.

As several hon. Members have said, the Government should have consulted widely before introducing the proposal to remove farm vehicles from the exemption from duty. We are not talking just about tractors or heavy goods vehicles; Britain has a successful, specialised farm sector and the farm engineering industry has produced an enormous range of vehicles to service it. One has only to visit agricultural shows every summer to see the enormous range of specialist vehicles that are now available to farmers.

Most of the vehicles are designed to perform a specific function and cannot be used for any other task. Recent developments with large bales of hay and silage require the use of extremely specialised vehicles and there is no question but that such vehicles can be used only on the farm to perform legitimate farm business.

In order to run a successful enterprise, farmers must own a great variety of farm vehicles—these are usually well maintained, although sometimes, sadly, they are not. Because of the Government's move, the introduction of MOT and the licensing of farm vehicles as HGVs may impose enormous costs on farmers.

The Paymaster General has said that the measure was introduced not to raise revenue but to address certain anomalies in the system. As I said earlier, I am sure that he could have addressed those anomalies by consulting with the farm unions and the Country Landowners Association and coming up with some more favourable, concrete proposals.

Several Government Members have made very sensible suggestions about how those anomalies could be addressed and, at the same time, how the Government could reduce the size of the bureaucracy and solve enforcement problems. I urge the Paymaster General to listen not just to what the Opposition are saying but to his own Back Benchers and to bring forward a sensible amendment to solve all our problems.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown). I must declare an interest in the debate as I am a farmer and I have to cross a road in order to get to part of my land. It is outrageous to suggest that I should have to license my farm vehicles in order to do so; and many of my farming constituents are in a similar position.

I do not wish to annoy my hon. Friend unduly, but I must point out that small farmers such as those I represent often do not buy new machinery—we rely on wealthy farmers like him to sell us their second-hand machinery. Therefore, we are the ones who will be clobbered by the MOT; his vehicles are new.

Mr. Clifton-Brown *rose—*

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I cannot give way to my hon. Friend. I have been told that I must be brief.

Such an imposition would be disastrous. Some farmers use combine harvesters that are 20 years old. That machinery could not be expected to pass the MOT test, yet it does a perfectly good job of bringing in the harvest. The same applies to silage-making machinery—it may not be new, but it works. To insist on MOT testing would be outrageous. I ask my hon. Friend the Paymaster General to temper the wind to the shorn sheep. It would be difficult for some farmers to go through all that rigmarole, and I hope that my hon. Friend will think again.

9.15 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I emphasise the comments of my right hon. and hon. Friends, and welcome the indication by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General that he is prepared to re-examine the issue. He did so in sufficiently open terms to satisfy the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce).

Mr. Malcolm Bruce *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Haselhurst: The hon. Gentleman is not as reasonable as he presents himself to the Committee. My hon. Friend said that he is prepared to consult. I find that satisfactory, and I am sure that that is true of the farmers in my constituency.

As my hon. Friend said, it is not primarily a revenue-raising matter. I wonder whether it is such a burning issue that it must be resolved for the purpose of removing an anomaly. In so far as there has been an increase in diesel and petrol duties, any extra mileage covered by such vehicles will cost farmers more in any case—so additional revenue will be raised if there is the supposed abuse of the present system.

The point has been made well that certain vehicles are used so little that it would be unreasonable to impose on them the panoply of taxation and regulation. I hope that a common-sense solution can be found. We should be attempting not to remove anomalies but to find a sensible answer relevant to the needs of the industry.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am fully persuaded by the Committee that there is a good, strong case for trying to find a way of responding to the case for agricultural vehicles that occasionally cross public roads or travel short distances along them. The present system is administratively too complex, and more or less impossible to enforce. In the pursuit of good government and administration, we must find a better way of granting exemptions, and one that is easy to understand and possible to enforce. Together with the industry and other hon. Members, I shall seek a way forward over the next few weeks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) and others raised the question of MOT testing. It is my understanding that no requirement exists for tractors or harvesters, but vehicles such as lorries that are used on public roads even for short distances must meet MOT test basic safety requirements. My hon. Friend's former Department, the Department of

Transport, is examining the whole question of vehicle testing. It may even be that he started that review, given that the good that Ministers do is generally harvested by those who succeed them. I undertake to draw to the Department's attention the remarks made by members of the Committee this evening.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The Minister seems a little confused. He accepts that the matter should be reconsidered but places the onus for devising alternative options on hon. Members and farmers' representatives rather than on the Government and civil servants, who have the resources and responsibility for doing that. When a Minister says, "I accept that this matter needs to be reconsidered," he usually accepts also the amendment to remove the measure in question, so that he can return with revised proposals after consulting. The Minister has introduced a measure granting exemption across the board to all-terrain vehicles. They are precisely the kind of vehicles whose owners can abuse the system—yet they are to be entirely exempt.

A farmer who keeps a combine harvester, however, will in future have to pay tax, as will farmers who keep balers or hayrollers on their farms. The Minister has acknowledged that that is unreasonable. His hon. Friends have said that they are unhappy with the idea, but they have more confidence than I do that the Minister will come up with an answer.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I am puzzled by the hon. Gentleman's reference to haybalers. Usually they are towed vehicles, not self-propelled.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Lady knows perfectly well that all sorts of farm machines never leave the farm but will now be taxed. She herself has said that this is an unreasonable proposal—

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman seems confused. If vehicles never travel on public roads, there is no question of catching them—that is certainly not our proposal.

Mr. Bruce: As I said earlier, farms are increasingly divided by public roads, or farmers need to use roads to gain access to other fields, separate from the farm. It is extraordinary that a rule which has worked perfectly satisfactorily for 70 years should suddenly be abolished without notice or consultation.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I hope that my hon. Friend will bear in mind the fact that some farmers, such as those with farms along the A1, have chunks of public roads through their farms, and thus find that they have to move combine harvesters from one field to another along busy dual carriageways, as well as bearing a tax burden for doing so. If the Government think that farm vehicles can be moved about the farm without going on public roads, they do not know much about farming.

Mr. Bruce: I agree. A number of farms in my constituency, for instance, are divided up by a railway line. Until the Government decided to privatise the railways, the farmers were allowed free access across the line, but British Rail now refuses to grant that access. Farmers are thus forced to go many miles around to get to fields on the other side of the line—and the Government now insist that the vehicles used for such journeys pay VED.

My main point is a simple one: the Government and the Minister have said that they accept that there is a problem. The Minister has admitted that wide consultation has not taken place. He has said that he is willing to hear alternative proposals. I suggest that he accept the amendment, consult and then consider the position. If he is not prepared to rise to his feet now and do that, we shall have no hesitation in pressing the matter to a vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 229, Noes 277.

Division No. 56] **[9.22 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'cstle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S

Killoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wythenshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lewis E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(SW'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Diana Maddock and
Mr. Don Foster

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'hre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ldford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard

Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'th'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Salmabury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and
Mr. David Willetts

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I beg to move amendment No. 29, in page 165, line 10, at end insert—

'(c) if it is a vehicle with engine size under 1,200 cc, the fuel efficient rate.'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 8, in line 12, at end insert—

'(3A) The fuel-efficient rate is 60 per cent. of the general rate.'.

Mr. Taylor: The amendment has two aims. First, it would help those who have been hard hit by rapid increases in petrol prices, a policy that the Government have pursued since the last general election. Secondly, it aims to reinforce the environmental benefits which the Government claim will flow from such changes.

It is ironic that so many Conservative Members attacked the Liberal Democrats during the general election campaign for proposing fuel duty increases because, since the 1992 general election, petrol duty has gone up from 27.79p to 36.14p per litre. That is a 30 per cent. hike and an average increase of 9.1 per cent. a year. When VAT is added to the duty, it means that people are paying nearly 10p a litre, or 44p a gallon, more at the pumps. That is double the rate of increase that we proposed, and those hon. Members—there are some in their places—who attacked us for that policy ought to reflect on their position if there is a vote on the amendment.

The Government claim that their policy is intended to have a material impact on emissions and is part of their drive to tackle our environmental problems, not the least of which are air pollution and global warming; but such increases are a very rough tool with which to seek to achieve those aims. It is calculated that a 10 per cent. increase makes a difference of 1 per cent. or less in the amount of fuel consumed. The tool is relatively ineffective and falls hard on people in rural areas and those who depend on car ownership to get about.

The alternative strategy is to use increases in petrol duty to cut vehicle excise duty. That has clear material benefits. First, it is vastly more effective in terms of the environmental aim. It gives people a direct incentive to invest in cars that are more fuel economic in the band that attracts lower vehicle excise duty. That means that the Government's emission targets can be achieved more effectively. People will have a direct financial incentive to downsize their vehicles.

Ultimately, despite catalytic converters and other efforts to achieve greater fuel efficiency and lower emissions, the best way to cut vehicle emissions is to burn less fuel and only two options would achieve that: we can either directly dissuade people from driving, which is the hard option given the modern society in which we live, or persuade them to drive vehicles that burn less fuel. That is relatively easy with financial incentives.

Everybody knows that a fuel-efficient vehicle will cost less to run, and we can add to that incentive by using revenues from petrol price increases to cut vehicle excise duty. Such cuts have another benefit in that they compensate those who are hardest hit by the Government's policy of increases in fuel duty; the money is put back in their pockets because they do not have to pay so much vehicle excise duty.

Moreover, it is an affordable policy for those on low incomes for example, rural pensioners who need a vehicle to get to the shops and get on with their lives. Such people find it hard to keep a vehicle on the road because of the highs and lows of the expenses of doing so. If VED is cut to a notional level, they will find it easier to afford a vehicle, because at the moment ownership is taxed.

However, those who cover an excessive mileage will pay more, because the use of the vehicle will be taxed. After all, it is the use and not the ownership of the vehicle that is a disbenefit to the wider community, whether it be through congestion or fuel emissions.

The amendment takes a moderate approach to the matter. It accepts that money is tight for the Government. The proposal is for the smallest-engined vehicles only. It suggests only a relatively moderate cut. I should have preferred it if the Government had taken a stronger line on the matter. I should have liked the vehicle excise duty for smaller-engined, more fuel-efficient vehicles to be cut to a notional level—possibly no duty at all, with the policing of vehicle insurance and MOTs transferring to an MOT certificate on the window.

If we considered cutting the duty to a notional level for smaller-engined vehicles, the vast majority of private motorists could easily be substantially better off. Some

[Mr. Taylor]

people find that relatively hard to believe, but let me give an example. If we cut vehicle excise duty to a notional level on vehicles with engines of up to 1300 cc, but put an extra 10p duty on each litre of petrol, as the Government have done in the past few years, running an economical 1300 cc car with an overall fuel consumption of 40 miles per gallon—a real figure that is taken from an actual vehicle—would mean consuming 225 gallons of petrol a year. The extra 10p duty would therefore cost the average rural motorist, who does 9,000 miles a year, £98 a year. He would, however, be a net beneficiary by £37 a year if vehicle excise duty were reduced to a notional level.

Most cars are not as economical as the one in the first example. Imagine a family car owner driving a 2,000 cc estate for 9,000 miles a year, at an average of 30 miles per gallon. On current figures, he pays £132 extra as a result of Government fuel price increases. The high-mileage car owner pays a whopping extra £366 per annum, but, under our policies, half the Tory fuel tax hike would bring in enough revenue to reduce VED to a nominal sum for cars up to 1,500 cc. People driving cars with 2 litre engines and above would not be entitled to any VED reduction, but they would have a substantial incentive to downsize their vehicles, again making substantial cost savings.

The Government need to tackle emissions and to deal with the costs of motoring to the nation. There has been an increase in air pollution and in asthma levels. Increasing numbers of young school children suffer asthma. There is congestion in the cities and even in many rural areas. The Government's policy, however, has almost no impact on those problems, although it takes substantial amounts of money out of pockets, including the pockets of many of the poorest people in society.

There is an alternative. I refuse to believe that Ministers' officials in the Treasury have not argued that abolishing VED and transferring the tax to petrol, so that it is a tax on the use rather than the ownership of a vehicle, makes sense. It makes sense to the people with whom we are most concerned—rural motorists, private motorists and the poorest motorists in particular. Poor motorists in rural areas do an average 7,000 miles a year. They would be clear net beneficiaries from the policies that we advocate.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am listening with great care to the hon. Gentleman and I have some sympathy with his remarks, but would not his policy benefit, as he put it, low-mileage motorists at the expense of high-mileage motorists? Would not that therefore tend to benefit urban motorists at the expense of rural motorists? The hon. Gentleman has many statistics. Will he assure me on that point?

9.45 pm

Mr. Taylor: First, let us bear in mind the fact that, if one is prepared to drive a smaller-engined vehicle, which we all want to encourage in order to reduce pollution, one could still be better off doing up to 20,000 miles a year, a substantial mileage. Secondly, we have argued for road-pricing schemes to tackle urban congestion and to encourage and finance the use of public transport, a policy that the Government are now considering. In those circumstances, the rural motorist would be a beneficiary and the urban motorist might well find that he was paying extra, unless he opted to use public transport.

The motorists who would be penalised by such a policy are a rather more specific breed, which may explain why the Government have decided not to pursue it—perhaps they feel that such people are their natural supporters. I refer, of course, to people driving very large-engined vehicles, by themselves, between cities and on a regular basis—in other words, people financed by large companies.

It is not something that we want to encourage, and I suspect that it is not something of which the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) sees a great deal in his constituency, so I do not think that he need worry. It may, of course, be something in which Members of Parliament have a particular interest, but I generally travel by train between London and my constituency.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Has the hon. Gentleman worked out how he would distinguish, in Cornwall or Somerset for example, between urban motorists—people in suburbs or villages perhaps two or three miles from a town—and rural motorists? Where would he draw the line? Would not his suggestion create a new tier of bureaucracy?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood. Some people have advocated specific compensation schemes for rural areas, which I do not believe could be made to work. We have argued for urban road pricing in areas of congestion, as the Government are increasingly doing. That is how the particular cost of driving in urban areas would be reflected. For other motorists, we would merely transfer the cost from VED to petrol.

One of the basic principles of environmental protection involves not taxing something that is essentially good. I do not think that anyone would wish to prevent vehicle ownership; we seek to tax the bad, or the excessive, use of a vehicle—excessive in terms either of mileage or of a vehicle's fuel consumption. That matter should not divide the Committee. Given that the Government have pursued a policy of high petrol price increases and taxation, I am surprised that they have not adopted our policy. As I said, I do not believe that Treasury officials have not investigated it as a possible option.

I hope that, while specifically offering the opportunity to compensate those in rural areas who have been penalised by the Government's policy, the amendment will also provide the Minister with an opportunity to explain why he has not accepted such an obvious way of tackling environmental problems without penalising those in rural areas, those on low incomes or those dependent on a car.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Member says that the amendment is modest because money is tight, but it would cost £242 million a year to implement. As the Liberal Democrats have criticised other Opposition parties for their financial irresponsibility in recent years, I think that it is up to them to apply the same criticism to the amendment. They did not say how else the money was to be raised. As usual, they were extremely good at arguing for tax cuts and public expenditure increases, but that is not a responsible position to adopt.

Another reason why we oppose the amendment is that it would not deliver the desired environmental objectives efficiently. Higher fuel prices have a part to play in reducing harmful emissions because they encourage people to reduce fuel consumption in a variety of ways. They encourage people to purchase smaller cars, drive less and more efficiently, make shorter journeys and switch to other modes of transport, whereas the technique advocated by the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) would not cover fuel consumption and would not penalise those who clock up high mileage or allow their vehicle's engine to fall into disrepair. Older cars, even if they are smaller, pollute more than newer cars, which have a larger capacity and are often fitted with catalytic convertors.

The hon. Gentleman got into a bit of a muddle over the effect on the rural motorist. The effect of increasing petrol prices but cutting vehicle excise duties on some cars would not help those in rural areas. It would help those in urban areas who have a low mileage. I refuse to accept not only the hon. Gentleman's amendment but his logic.

One other point—

Mr. Matthew Taylor *rose—*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am responding to the hon. Gentleman's speech.

If we were to relieve smaller cars of part of their VED, it would invite manufacturers to reclassify their engines at 1199 cc, which would have very little benefit for the environment and highly distort the automobile market. For all those reasons, I invite my hon. Friends to reject the amendment.

Mr. Taylor: I do not think that the Minister's arguments are terribly coherent. First, manufacturers already have various incentives, mainly because of markets overseas, to classify vehicles under the various capacities and, in this country, under the level of company taxation. Government policy, indeed, even in this country, already anticipitates that. It would be extremely difficult, however, for a company to reclassify a 2 litre, a 2.5 litre, or a 2.8 litre engine as a 1.199 litre engine. Simply, that is not practical.

Although it is true that particulate emissions and various other emissions from older vehicles are relatively high, the main aim of Government policy, as I understand it, is to reduce global warming gases, especially the emission of carbon dioxide. Whichever fuel is burned, carbon dioxide is burnt off and carbon dioxide levels are directly related to the amount of fuel used. Vehicles with smaller engines use less fuel.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): That is not true.

Mr. Taylor: It is a fact. It is also a fact that, because people are relatively affluent and can afford faster and more powerful vehicles, the fuel-efficiency savings available with modern, small-engined vehicles have been used up in achieving higher acceleration rates and higher power rather than higher fuel efficiency. Vehicles bought in the 1950s and 1960s, when petrol prices were relatively high, had 650 cc, 850 cc and 1 litre engines, whereas now they have 1.3 litre, 1.4 litre and 1.5 litre engines. There are no disincentives to buying larger-engined vehicles. We see a clear trend in—

Mr. Ian Bruce *rose—*

Mr. Taylor: I shall give way in just a moment.

The Minister argued that there was no advantage for rural motorists. The figures that I quoted came from the Automobile Association. The average rural motorist does 9,000 miles a year. The poorer rural motorist does an average of 7,000 miles a year. They are not the high-mileage drivers; they are beneficiaries of the policies that we advocate. The amendment is directly beneficial to them.

Even if we took the more extreme examples of policy that I gave earlier, rural motorists would benefit; indeed, all motorists in smaller cars would benefit up to 20,000 miles a year. That is a simple fact. I do not understand why the Government have not followed that path. It seems popular, effective in tackling environmental problems and far fairer than the policies that the Government have pursued. The only assumption to make is that the Government's proposals are a fund-raising measure rather than one to tackle the environment—in which case, the Minister should be more blunt in saying so, rather than dressing up the proposal in green language.

Mr. Bruce: I wanted to intervene only on the basis that the hon. Gentleman was making an assumption that vehicle manufacturers had increased engine sizes, as they did in many smaller cars, which made them more expensive to run. In fact, the very opposite happened. Many vehicles that have a larger engine for the same weight of vehicle use less fuel. One cannot assume that the size of the engine means that it uses more fuel. Often, the opposite is true.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. The only people who benefit in financial terms from larger-engined vehicles, as far as I know, are Members of Parliament. In the real world, people know that, broadly speaking, smaller-engined vehicles burn less fuel. That is a simple fact. To understand my point, the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) need only consider the fuel efficiency statistics and the rated fuel bands, as we did in working out this policy using figures from the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club and from motor manufacturers. If, at some stage, he loses his job in this place and decides to sell cars in a garage, if he argues with the customers who walk through the door that the bigger the engine size, the less fuel the car will use, he may experience a reaction similar to the one that he may receive at the next general election.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 246, Noes 277.

Division No. 57] **[9.55 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Adams, Mrs Irene	Ashton, Joe
Ainger, Nick	Austin-Walker, John
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Allen, Graham	Barnes, Harry
Alton, David	Battle, John
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Bayley, Hugh
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Rosd'dale)*	Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Armstrong, Hilary	Beith, Rt Hon A J

Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'cstle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Colley, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Birm S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kean, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Leslor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgld)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Simon Hughes and
Mr. Don Foster

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rutcl)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan

Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'ham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ldford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Gregg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'dn S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Salisbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shephard, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bas'ytrth)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sidney Chapman and
Mr. Michael Bates

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendments made: No. 42, in page 168, line 14, leave out 'or forestry' and insert

', forestry or activities falling within sub-paragraph (2A).

(2A) The activities falling within this sub-paragraph are—

(a) cutting verges bordering public roads;

(b) cutting hedges or trees bordering public roads or bordering verges which border public roads.'.

No. 43, in page 168, line 22, at end insert—

'4BB.—(1) A vehicle is a special concessionary vehicle if it is a light agricultural vehicle.

(2) In sub-paragraph (1) "light agricultural vehicle" means a vehicle which—

(a) has a revenue weight not exceeding 1,000 kilograms,

(b) is designed and constructed so as to seat only the driver,

(c) is designed and constructed primarily for use otherwise than on roads, and

(d) is used solely for purposes relating to agriculture, horticulture or forestry.'.—*[Dr. Fox.]*

Ms Primarolo: I beg to move amendment No. 33, in page 168, line 22, at end insert—

'4BA. A vehicle is a special concessionary vehicle if it is constructed or adapted to be used primarily for towing a disabled vehicle in such a manner (whether or not involving superimposition) as to cause a substantial part of the weight of the disabled vehicles to be borne by the vehicle in question.'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following: Amendment No. 30, in page 168, leave out lines 42 and 43.

Government amendments Nos. 44 to 47.

Ms Primarolo: I do not wish unduly to detain the House. These are important matters which we discussed earlier this evening. The amendment seeks to delete the new proposals which the Government have introduced in vehicle excise duty for road recovery vehicles and to

[Ms Primarolo]

maintain the status quo. These specialised vehicles are restricted by law as to the work which they can carry out, so the points made by the Minister earlier about multiple use do not apply.

The amendment is particularly important because the majority of those vehicles are partial-lift vehicles which are not used extensively, and for long periods are waiting for calls and emergency requests from the police. The Minister told us that he needed to deal with anomalies, but, as this evening has demonstrated, he is creating more than he is closing. The Minister told us that the measures will bring in only another 1 per cent. of extra revenue to the Government, an amount they could easily forgo pending the important review of services. It is a commonsense answer to a practical set of problems and it totally beggars belief that the Government are prepared to make every concession possible to farmers, to keep their Back Benchers and the farming industry happy, yet they will not take vital steps to safeguard public safety and safety on our roads. The costs are minimal, but the principle is important.

The Government have failed to respond to those arguments. While providing some concessions, their amendments do not go far enough. Some companies will still be adversely affected and a decline in the service will follow. We intend, therefore, to press our amendments to the vote at the conclusion of this brief debate.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Unlike the lighter vehicles used to recover cars and roadside rescue vehicles, heavy recovery vehicles are highly specialised, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) pointed out. They are used to recover fully laden heavy goods vehicles and have a very low annual mileage. There are few jobs over which to spread the costs. They represent a long-term investment, with a long-term payback period and an annual income per vehicle that is extremely sensitive to the cost of overheads.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South said, the Government amendment makes some concessions, but operators will still have to pay a nine or 10-fold increase in excise duty from the present standard £85, instead of the proposed fiftyfold increase. That will force some operators out of business and lead others to opt out of heavy vehicle recovery, which could mean that many parts of the country will end up with only a limited capacity for removing broken-down or accident-damaged vehicles. That will lead to longer delays in clearing roads and poses questions for public safety.

The proposals should be put aside, pending a review of the implications, and the standard flat rate should be retained meanwhile. Otherwise, heavy recovery vehicles will simply not be available to assist at emergencies when required.

I am thinking of a heavy vehicle recovery operation in my constituency adjacent to my home. It is at the junction of the M57 and M62 motorways. The junction of the M57 and M58 is 10 miles up the road, as well as access to the container depot at Liverpool docks. Believe it or not, just as much tonnage goes through the docks as it did in Liverpool's heyday, but nowadays it is in containers on heavily laden vehicles. The bottleneck of the Runcorn suspension bridge is 10 miles further away, leading to the heavy chemical industrial area of Runcorn and onwards, via the M56, to the bottleneck access to north Wales. The junction of the M62 with the M6 and the notorious Thelwall viaduct are 15 miles away and the junction with the notorious M61 and M63 is about 10 miles further away, in Greater Manchester.

The Government should take away their recommendation, or, when emergencies happen, no heavy recovery vehicles will be available for specialised roadside rescue, there will be inordinate delays and possibly life-threatening accidents.

10.15 pm

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I do not know whether the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) was here earlier today when we debated those matters extensively, but I made it clear then that the Government's amendments meet the concerns that he raises.

The heavier recovery vehicles will now be taxed at a much more favourable rate than if they were heavy goods vehicles. For instance, middle-weight recovery vehicles will pay only £450 duty and very heavy vehicles that may be used only occasionally will pay £750, compared with up to £5,000 a year for heavy goods vehicles.

The trade says that it is satisfied with that structure. The Retail Motor Industry Federation, which is important because it includes recovery vehicle operators, has written to me saying that it is satisfied with the proposals. If we have satisfied the trade, we should have satisfied the Committee.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 245, Noes 275.

Division No. 58] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John

Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and Deeside)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Birm S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Broadgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wythenshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lewis E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swn W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Estelle Morris and
Ms Tessa Jowell

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Billen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell,Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'hire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew

Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'ham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon. Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'td'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Salisbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, Cyril D *(Bexh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Waldron, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Simon Burns and
Mr. Michael Bates

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendments made: No. 44, in page 168, leave out line 43 and insert—

'10.—(1) Paragraph 5 of Schedule 1 to the 1994 Act (recovery vehicles) shall be amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraph (1) (annual rate of duty of £85) for the words "is £85" there shall be substituted "is—

(a) if it has a revenue weight exceeding 3,500 kilograms and not exceeding 12,000 kilograms, the same as the basic goods vehicle rate;

(b) if it has a revenue weight exceeding 12,000 kilograms and not exceeding 25,000 kilograms, 300 per cent. of the basic goods vehicle rate;

(c) if it has a revenue weight exceeding 25,000 kilograms, 500 per cent. of the basic goods vehicle rate."

(3) The following sub-paragraphs shall be inserted after sub-paragraph (5)—

"(6) In sub-paragraph (1) references to the basic goods vehicle rate are to the rate applicable, by virtue of sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 9, to a rigid goods vehicle which falls within column (3) of the table in that sub-paragraph and has a revenue weight exceeding 3,500 kilograms and not exceeding 7,500 kilograms.

(7) Where an amount arrived at in accordance with sub-paragraph (1)(b) or (c) is an amount—

(a) which is not a multiple of £10, and

(b) which on division by ten does not produce a remainder of £5,

the rate is the amount arrived at rounded (either up or down) to the nearest amount which is a multiple of £10.

(8) Where an amount arrived at in accordance with sub-paragraph (1)(b) or (c) is an amount which on division by ten produces a remainder of £5, the rate is the amount arrived at increased by £5.". '.

No. 45, in page 169, line 19, leave out from beginning to end of line 24.

No. 46, in page 172, line 51, leave out from beginning to end of line 6 on page 173.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I beg to move amendment No. 41, in page 173, line 13, at end insert—

'(13A) Notwithstanding the above provisions within this schedule, the rate of vehicle excise duty for vehicles in the Restricted Heavy Goods Vehicle tax class which are operating primarily within a region in which there has been previous exemption from plating and testing shall be £150 per year.'.

This amendment was tabled because I want the Government to think again about the enormous burden that they are about to impose on small businesses and contractors operating on islands off the west and north coasts of Scotland *[Interruption.]*

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I would be most grateful if hon. Members in the vicinity of the Bar would go further beyond it to continue their discussions.

Mrs. Michie: I make particular mention of the northern islands because my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) shares my concern.

I first raised this matter with the Department of Transport. I am sorry to see that there is no Minister from that Department in the House tonight. Formerly, island-based heavy goods vehicles paid a concessionary rate of £150 a year, because they are exempted from plating and testing. That is because there are no plating or testing stations on the islands.

But the Government now want them to pay according to the manufacturers' plated weight for each vehicle. As a result, island-based hauliers will have to pay between £1,280 and £4,250 a year per vehicle. As well as adding to the islanders' transport costs, that is likely to force many smaller firms out of business, with a consequent reduction in employment on the islands.

A concessionary rate should certainly be retained for the HGVs used only on the islands. The annual mileage is much lower than that of mainland HGVs, and the maximum payload is often limited by road restrictions. For example, a constituent of mine who runs a tanker to refuel fishing boats on the island of Mull does only 500 miles a year, yet he is threatened with an annual vehicle excise duty of £2,160. He will have to pass that on to the fishermen, and they cannot bear that sort of extra burden.

Some lorries never leave the island, and other contractors are based on, and operate from and to, the island. Arguably, a concessionary rate should also apply to HGVs used solely for deliveries to and from the islands, on condition that they do not ply for mainland business between island runs. That is a reasonable suggestion, because ferry timetables effectively impose restrictions on the use of such lorries. Their total annual mileage is less than 50 per cent. of the national average.

One of the busiest lorries on Mull does about 16,000 miles a year, compared with the national average of 47,000.

There is another category of vehicle that will be caught, with devastating consequences for the economy of the islands. They are known as shunt units. One of the main hauliers of goods to the islands in my constituency uses elderly cab units to marshal trailers on board Caledonian MacBrayne ferries and terminals. They are currently exempt from VED, but from 1 July of this year they will have to pay according to the manufacturers' plated weight. That will cost £3,150 per vehicle per year.

Although the contractor has been told that the increase will be phased in, with each vehicle paying £1,000 in the first year, I believe that the concession will last for only one year. Apart from travelling to and from the depot for occasional maintenance, shunt units do not use public roads; so why should they pay vehicle excise duty?

This haulier therefore faces a total extra cost of £15,750, which he will have no option but to pass on to his customers, thus adding to the cost of living on the islands. And he has already had to face increases in the ferry fares.

Mr. William Ross: The hon. Lady makes a powerful case for concessions to lorries that operate on islands—presumably she means islands that do not have a road bridge. Would she extend that same concession to the Isle of Wight? What will happen to Skye and Anglesey?

10.30 pm

Mrs. Michie: The Isle of Wight is quite a wealthy island, and many wealthy tourists go there. I am particularly concerned with the islands off the coast of Scotland, which struggle to survive with their farming and crofting communities. It is they who must be given help—indeed, they are given help in terms of ferry subsidies, so it seems ludicrous that the Government should give subsidies on the one hand and tax them on the other.

I contacted the Department of Transport, which last year started to tell owners of HGVs that it was removing the concessionary rates for road tax on certain islands, and that would mean that island-based operators would be faced with the sums about which I have already spoken. I am sure that the Minister can understand and imagine the shock and dismay.

The Minister responsible, at the time, however, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), responded in a worthwhile manner. He ended his letter by saying—*[Interruption.]*

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but there is a general hum of conversation. That is not polite to the hon. Member who has the Floor, and I must ask the Committee to be very much quieter so that I can hear, without straining my ears, what the hon. Lady is saying.

Mrs. Michie: Thank you, Dame Janet.

The Minister said:

"I am afraid that in some cases this will have significant cost implications, particularly for the heavier vehicles."

He continued:

"Because of the effects this might have on hauliers whose vehicles never leave the islands, I have asked my officials to review the position and will write to you in due course to let you know the result of the review."

I then had a letter in September 1994 from the Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Transport. He said:

"the law in this area is not as clear as it might be, and I have therefore decided that we will return to the criteria for qualifying for the basic rate VED for HGV's that applied before last April."

In fact, the licensing people in Swansea had already started to increase the licensing fees to the lorry drivers. Fortunately, the Minister interfered; told it to stop and asked it to pay back—indeed it did—the lorry drivers who had paid the cheques that it had requested.

The Under-Secretary of State went on the say—this is important—

"This is an interim measure while we carry out a review . . . We are continuing to examine the position of off-shore islands in this wider review, which I expect to be complete in the Autumn. We will of course make sure that we consider the views of all interested parties."

Perhaps the Minister can ask the Department of Transport if he does not know the answer. What was the outcome of the review? Whom did the Department of Transport consult?

I wrote again to him on 30 December 1994, but to date have had no reply. Then I found all this being slipped, as it were, into the Finance Bill. If the Government go ahead with these massive increases and penalise the islanders in that way, the consequences for the economy and for the people will be very detrimental, for it will put not just the small contractors out of business—the man with one lorry, which never leaves the island—but people out of jobs. It will increase the cost of living for everyone.

[Mrs. Michie]

Anyone who had heard tonight's speeches would think that the lorries were operating on mainland trunk roads. I wonder whether the Minister knows whether the roads involved are like: most are single-track, and some islands have only a few miles of roads—if they can be called roads.

Replying to a debate on an earlier amendment, the Minister said that he wanted to give special treatment to those who most needed it—those with a very good case. I believe that the island businesses qualify on both counts. The Minister also said that inevitably there would be winners and losers; I thought from the tone of last year's ministerial letters that the islanders would be winners, but if these measures are passed, their impact will be severe and out of all proportion to the return to the Treasury.

I feel badly let down, and my constituents will feel even more so. They believed what I told them, because I believed the Minister. *[Interruption.]* Some may say that that was a mistake, but I think that it is a shame. I genuinely believed the Minister, and I was sure that my constituents would understand the problem. On behalf of the islanders, I therefore ask the Ministers involved to reconsider the matter.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I support the amendment. I must say that it is encouraging—and very unusual—to see such a large demonstration of interest in Hebridean affairs on the Conservative Benches.

As the Minister to whom the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) has referred is present, I shall pay a small tribute to him. Unfortunately, he is in fact an ex-Minister. The then Minister who wrote to me in similar terms is the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key).

It was an unusual case, in which there was a specific constituency point for me—and for the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute, my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) and one or two others. We argued a fine intellectual case; we got through to the Minister and his civil servants personally, made the case and defined its peculiarities, and we made progress. We received a very good response from the hon. Member for Salisbury: he was sensitive, he was intelligent and he was sacked. If I may say so, in other contexts what has taken his place is certainly no improvement in terms of the criteria that I have defined.

Fragile island communities are heavily penalised by the current level of ferry charges. In those islands—including islands in my constituency—a concession on VED has historically been granted because its fairness has been recognised. I do not know what goes on in the minds of civil servants on cold grey winter mornings when they feel that they have to take it out on someone; perhaps, on the 6.30 am train from Chipping Norton, they decide that they are going to cancel an anomaly whereby island haulage operators benefit in comparison to others, and that in a vast Finance Bill they will incorporate a clause that, in financial terms, is probably not worth the time that has been devoted to it tonight.

But it is absurd that they should go to such lengths to cancel out a tiny anomaly for the sake of financial gain to the Treasury—an action that will have an entirely disproportionate effect on the small number of communities that we are discussing.

That is the curiosity of it. Of all the matters on which we can legislate and of all the sources of revenue, we adopt the absurd idea of going for a small number of island contractors. That is why I make no apology for detaining the Committee and arguing that case. If Conservative Members intend to vote for such legislation they might as well pay for it by spending a little of their time hearing just how absurd it is.

10.45 pm

There are three categories of island hauliers, and I am sure that hon. Members will be interested to hear each of them described in detail. As the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute said, the first consists of those who have lorries that never leave the island. I know that the hon. Member for Salisbury will confirm that it would be incredible and totally at odds with the representations and responses for those hauliers to be brought within the ambit of the clause.

There is a clear distinction to be made. The vehicles of those hauliers can travel only within their own island communities. On the island of Barra, which is represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles there is one circular road. Cumbrae in my constituency is exactly the same, and in terms of road distance, Arran is not much greater. I see someone to whom I am not allowed to refer who is familiar with the island of Coll.

The idea that such hauliers should pay the same taxation for road use as those whose vehicles thunder up and down the M1 and the M6 every day is such a patent absurdity that I hope it impacts upon some Conservative Members. There is a clear distinction to be drawn in terms of vehicles which never leave the islands.

There is also an important distinction to be drawn for the second category of vehicles—those which legitimately ply between the islands and the mainland providing an island and not a mainland service. In providing that service, it is necessary for them to travel to the mainland to deliver and bring back goods. During that process, they attract charges which are not imposed on other haulage operators because they pay substantial ferry costs, which the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute has mentioned. Those charges are reflected in the costs that the hauliers pass to their customers. There is a separate case to be argued for them.

The third category was not mentioned by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute, and it is at the root of why the legislation has been produced. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) is in his place and will recognise from another context the term quota hoppers. Such people recognise that they can gain advantages by registering on an island which has a certain privilege.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute and every Opposition Member as well as every Conservative Member, I hope, would say that such an abuse should be stamped out. That is the abuse against which the measure is directed, and it is practised by people who are not island operators but who can evade taxation by registering their businesses on islands.

Is it not possible for Conservative Members to stamp out an abuse, which we all agree should be stamped out, without penalising that tiny section of the community which operates legitimately and which should be the beneficiary of the status quo? With the might of the civil service behind them, Ministers should be able to find a way of striking against those who abuse the system, while protecting those who legitimately use it.

The Scottish Road Haulage Association feels that its members, who operate on the mainland, are at an unfair disadvantage with those pirate operators who use the islands as a kind of flag of convenience. That is the abuse that Ministers, in so far as they know anything about the matter, should strike against. In doing so, they should not discriminate against legitimate island operators. That is a fair argument that should transcend party boundaries.

I do not think that many of the operators I am arguing on behalf of tonight are my voters. I do not care or ask about that, but I suspect that they might not be Labour voters—employers in that industry do not traditionally vote Labour. I am arguing not from that point of view, but from that of fairness and of the legitimate interests of fragile island communities.

Make no mistake: if the measure goes through, some small haulage businesses will go bust. They will have to take lorries off the road, make people redundant and pass on costs to users, so for heaven's sake, let us in Committee have a common-sense solution and retain the advantage for small island operators and for people who legitimately ply between island and mainland. Let us unite and stamp out the abuse of using islands as a flag of convenience to avoid taxation.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): My hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) and the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) have deployed powerful arguments as to why the Government should rethink their decision to impose a substantial amount of vehicle excise duty on islands-based hauliers. I add my endorsement to their arguments.

As has already been said, we are dealing with islands that often have poor roads that add up to small amounts of mileage. They are being asked to pay the same amount as hauliers who are based, for example, in Birmingham, and who have immediate access to hundreds of miles of motorway. That in itself is an anomaly.

The Government have several times said that they are in favour of lifting the burden on small businesses. That does not square with the decision to impose on those businesses the financial burden that my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute illustrated. If the measure goes through, in the first year the increase for small islands-based hauliers has been limited to £1,000. Even that is a significant increase. In subsequent years, it could be even more.

I do not necessarily subscribe to the comment of hon. Member for Cunninghame, North that this is some conspiracy hatched by civil servants because they got out of the wrong side of bed or because the morning train from Chipping Norton did not arrive. I think that I am right in saying that there have been a considerable number of exemptions to the vehicle excise duty. That allows the basic rate of £150 to be paid. I suspect that the islands' case has been swept up along with the rest of the cases.

I hope that the Paymaster General has heard enough arguments to persuade him to think again. By imposing the burden on many islands-based hauliers, he proposes a financial burden that many of them will not be able to accommodate in their businesses. If they do, it will mean considerable extra costs for their customers. We are talking about people who serve islands of only a few hundred people. The position is not the same as that referred to by the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross).

In my constituency, the exemption is applied only to the smaller islands. It is not applied to the main islands of Orkney and Shetland, which, it is recognised, have historically had plating and testing stations. Therefore, they did not qualify. Equally, no pressure has been exerted for the exemption to apply.

People would be horrified to discover, however, that additional costs will be imposed in the smaller islands. I hope that the Minister will show some of the sensitivity and intelligence that was attributed to his hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), and that he will be prepared to reconsider the proposal and introduce a fair solution for islands-based hauliers.

Mr. Harris *rose—*

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): There are more of them.

Mr. Harris: Yes, there are more of them, and I am one of them. I also represent a group of islands—the Isles of Scilly—and I am horrified by what I have heard tonight. I thought that the issue had been settled by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). Like others, I had correspondence with him, and I thought that we had come to a completely satisfactory and sensible solution. If that is not the case—it is news to me that, apparently, it has all been upset—I shall be after my hon. Friend tonight. I do not say that as a threat, but I look to the Minister to reassure me.

Hauliers operating on the Isles of Scilly come into the first category. There are only a few hauliers there, and their vehicles never leave. Unlike the Scottish isles, the Isles of Scilly do not have a roll on/roll off ferry, and certainly do not have a subsidised ferry service to the mainland. It is a matter of great regret to my constituents, who look with envy at what their Scottish counterparts have.

In those circumstances, it would surely be extremely unfair if the three or four haulage firms that operate lorries on the small island of St. Mary's—the only island on which there are hauliers—were penalised as has been suggested. I look to the Minister for reassurance and await his comments with interest. I am sure that there has been a mistake, but if not, I suggest that my hon. Friend had better think again.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I shall not go into great detail, as the arguments have already been well made by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), whom I congratulate on moving the amendment, and my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), who I think was the first to support the move by the Department of Transport and pursue it with the Minister involved.

I shall make three points. The first is self-evident: islands, especially the Scottish islands, are a special case. A mark of good-quality legislation would be that it took into account the special needs and distinctive nature of the Scottish and other island communities.

It is ridiculous to think that one law and one regulation can properly cover all communities in the United Kingdom, from Tunbridge Wells to the Western Isles. There are clearly vast differences in the nature of the communities and the circumstances they face. We should be mindful of that fact and careful to reflect it in our legislation. That is why the exemption has existed for so

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

long. It is absurd to suggest that we should attempt to apply the same regulation uniformly the length and breadth of the British Isles.

Secondly, having emphasised that islands are a special case, we need to emphasise that our communications are almost by definition of crucial importance to island communities, not only communications between them and the mainland but communications among the islands themselves. Anything that strikes a blow at the viability of our communications strikes a blow at the viability of the island communities.

The third point is just as important as the first two. All of us who were in correspondence with the former Minister, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), received an assurance that the matter under discussion was to be reviewed. We then assumed that we would in due course receive a letter telling us the outcome of the review. It is outrageous that the Government have instead apparently reached a conclusion without having had the courtesy to inform us of what they intend to do.

Will the Minister not only reflect on the points that have been made and—hopefully—respond positively to them, but also explain why none of the hon. Members who raised the issue with the Government and who were assured by the Government were approached before this matter was introduced in the Finance Bill?

11 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I support the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie). I think that I understand why the Government have proposed this extra tax. It does not affect the constituency of any Conservative Member—until tonight. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) is an extremely valuable Member. If the matter were to affect his constituency, the Government would begin to worry.

At the moment, the Government do not worry about those constituencies that they cannot win. They are concerned only with getting money for the Treasury. The Government get that money through vehicle excise duties in a haphazard way every year. I will not accept the Minister's view that we have an imperfect system and that this year they are looking at it and that they may get it right next year or the year after that.

I want to bring to the Minister's attention a principle on which vehicle excise duty ought to be levied. It ought to be levied with some regard to track costs—the costs of road repairs that vehicles cause. The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute said that many vehicles covered by the amendment do not travel on roads. Therefore, presumably the track costs would be very light.

I refer the Minister to "The Allocation of Road Track Costs", a statistics bulletin issued by the Department of Transport. The 1995-96 edition is ready, and I have it. It says:

"Tracks costs for vehicles of over 3.5 tonnes GVW are covered by the ratio of 1.4:1."

Another category of vehicles consists of crown, disabled, other vehicles exempt from vehicle excise duty, haulage, machines, three-wheeled motor vehicles, special types, recovery vehicles and non-plateable vehicles. As I understand it, that category will catch all the vehicles which are the subject of the amendment.

Would we expect those track costs not to be covered? Would we expect them to be covered by a ratio of,perhaps, 0.7:1 or even of 1:1? That is not the case. The ratio is not even 1.4:1. Those vehicles are not covering their track costs by 1.4:1, they are already covering their track costs by 2.3:1. If they are already doing that, what on earth are the Government doing raising vehicle excise duty on those classes of vehicle? Is there any fairness in what they are doing? I do not believe there is. Is there any equity or justice in it? No. At best it is a muddle, and at worst it is mendacious.

The Government realise that there are no votes in the issue; there are no seats to be won. Therefore, they are trying to get money out of people they will never represent, who can least afford to pay. Even though the Government are collecting a very small amount, they are prepared to implement this proposal.

Instead of this proposal, if they had any integrity, they would put these extra charges on goods vehicles over 3.5 tonnes, which are covering costs on a ratio of 1.4:1, because those vehicles use the motorways and the roads on the mainland.

Mr. Salmond: I shall speak not to irritate Conservative Members, but to make two quick points. First, I endorse the comments of the hon. Members who represent island communities about the substantial injustice of this proposal. Secondly, I want to ask the Minister a specific question. The Minister heard the definition of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) of the three categories of vehicles involved. I want to make absolutely sure that, when the Minister replies, he will estimate the cost of the change on the first two categories, and not give us the overall cost of stamping out the abuse in respect of the third category.

Very precisely, when the Minister replies, will he give the Treasury estimate of the cost of imposing this unfair tax on the first two categories mentioned by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North—the vehicles that stay within the islands and the vehicles that ply an island trade—and not fob us off with the overall Treasury estimate of the cost of the third measure?

Mr. Barry Porter: On a point of order, Mr. Morris. Some little time ago, the House voted more or less with enthusiasm for something that I understand was called the Jopling reforms. What has happened?

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): The Jopling recommendations do not apply to Committee stages.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I, too, represent an inhabited island—the island of Rathlin. When I was appointed to represent that island in this House, there were no roads on the island, no running water and no lighting system. No public housing had been built for years, and the harbour did not exist.

After 25 years, I am glad to tell the Committee that a good harbour exists now. We have public lighting, public water and public housing. At last we have roads. However, if I have to go back to Rathlin island and tell the people there that, with regard to the new ferry, they are going to pay through the nose for the little track of

road to allow them to get their vehicles across to Ballycastle to have them reloaded to bring back their goods, they will cry out and say,

"Oh, that we had been left alone, for our estate now is worse than it was at the first."

Mr. Morris, in case you were not aware, that was a quotation from scripture.

The case has been made for people in the quandary about which we are speaking. It is not very late: I have sat in the House until 3, 4 and 5 am. Surely we should have enough sense tonight, and the Minister instead, of sleeping, should have enough sense, to be wide awake and say, "Yes. There is an anomaly here, and I must face up to it and see that justice is done." I make that plea.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Committee has heard that vehicle excise duty at a concessionary rate of £150 is payable on some islands, irrespective of the weight of the lorry concerned. The only requirement is that the operators concerned are registered on those islands. There is no legal provision for that concession under existing law. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency has granted and continued that concession because of the absence on those islands of a plating and testing station. That point was made by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie).

However, the introduction of revenue weight as the criterion for setting vehicle excise duty means that that consideration is irrelevant, as plating and testing are no longer going to be used for establishing the eligibility for vehicle excise duty or its concessions.

In addition, in practice there is no limit to the use that can be made of the vehicles elsewhere in the United Kingdom, because a vehicle that is validly licensed in one part of the UK can be used elsewhere. There is nothing to prevent them from competing directly with hauliers for services—

Mr. Harris: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I will finish the point that I am making.

There is nothing to prevent those vehicles from competing for services between the islands and the mainland. Indeed, there is nothing to stop them working wholly on the mainland. That might have been the issue of abuse which was raised. We have seen the ridiculous situation of a vehicle being advertised for sale "with the benefit of Scottish island registration". That is clearly unfair.

Mr. Harris: The Committee appreciates the point, but the Minister says that there is nothing to stop a lorry moving from one island to the mainland. My hon. Friend knows the isles of Scilly. There is everything to prevent a lorry from moving from the isles of Scilly to the mainland, because there is no roll on/roll off ferry. Does my hon. Friend therefore accept that the isles of Scilly at least should be treated as a special case in that regard?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is not quite right. A vehicle does not even need to be transported from the island to the mainland. It can be registered in the island, but bought and used entirely on the mainland. That is clearly unacceptable.

For both legal and practical reasons, I invite—

Sir Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Wallace: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am not giving way.

For legal and practical reasons, I invite the Committee to regard the United Kingdom, for taxation purposes, as a single unit, and to reject the amendment.

Mrs. Ray Michie: I thank hon. Members, not least the hon. Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), for their support. I know all about Rathlin island, and that we want a ferry to come from Ballycastle to Campbeltown in my constituency.

Mr. Wilson: And Ardrossan.

Mrs. Michie: As the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) says, and Ardrossan.

I am seriously disappointed by the Minister's reply. I hoped that he would say that he would discuss the matter with the Department of Transport, and would come back to the Committee with something worth while.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I had hoped to ask this question of my hon. Friend the Minister, but has she ever put to him the fact that the vehicles that are not causing the abuse should have a special registration number?

Mrs. Michie: That is a valid point. Perhaps the Minister will answer it. As for such vehicles being able to operate somewhere else, that is absolutely ridiculous. Many of those lorries are kept by farmers or builders. They work only on the island. They do not go off the island looking for work elsewhere. Like the hon. Member for St. Ives, I think that there has been a terrible mistake.

Mr. Wallace: My hon. Friend will have heard the Minister give as part of his main reason—indeed, it was almost the centrepiece of his resistance to the amendment—that there is no legal basis to distinguish between hauliers who are genuine and those who are causing abuse. Has it occurred to my hon. Friend that the Minister has been a Member of Parliament for eleven and a half years, and that it might not yet have dawned on him that part of our reason for being here is to make laws? That is what I thought we were doing. Therefore, the Minister's excuse is entirely fatuous.

Mrs. Michie: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We all know that, if the Minister and his Department want to do something, they have the political will to do it, and they can change things if they need to be changed. I am asking the Minister to change something on behalf of the islanders of Scotland.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Lady will know that I made a brief intervention to ask only one question of the Minister, which he totally failed to answer. Does the hon. Lady

[Mr. Salmond]

agree that it is a sign of weakness that a Minister sits down because his speech is so ridiculous that he is inciting the anger of Conservative Members behind him?

Mrs. Michie: The hon. Gentleman makes his point in no uncertain terms. I hope that we will be able to press—

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Michie: I do not want to detain the Committee. *[Interruption.]* I am happy; I thought that Conservative Members wanted to go to bed.

Mr. Steen: Will the hon. Lady give the House some idea of how many vehicles she is talking about? I have an island in my constituency which lies half a mile off the coast. It does not have a haulage contracting business but—from what the hon. Lady has said—I am quite sure that the last thing anybody would do would be to start a haulage contracting business on that island.

Mrs. Michie: One of the bigger contractors about which I told the House and which operates shunt units carries perhaps eight vehicles in a day's passage of ferries. Those shunt units are now to be subject to vehicle excise duty.

On the island of Islay, there are probably eight or 10 lorries used in the building of houses or by farmers for carrying hay and that sort of thing. If one includes all the islands of the Western Isles and Orkney and Shetland, there are plenty of contractors and small lorry operators.

We will put the amendment to a vote, because many Conservative Members have spent lots of happy holidays on the islands of my constituency. They know lots of people on the islands and the people know them, and they will be very interested to see who will vote against the islanders of Argyll and Bute.

11.15 pm

Mr. Macdonald: It is unfortunate that the Minister is detaining the House because of the inadequacy of his reply. The reasons that he gave in reply to hon. Members were shallow indeed. The notion that there is currently no way of distinguishing between those vehicles which remain within the islands and vehicles which abuse the system by being used on the mainland is no excuse.

I pointed out in my initial remarks that the Department of Transport had said to a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House that it was conducting a review to discover a legal basis for distinguishing between vehicles which are abusing the system and genuine vehicles. That review must have happened, because the Minister at the Department of Transport said that it would be happening. We need to know what conclusions were reached and what options were considered and discarded.

The Minister cannot simply stand up and say that there is no legal basis for distinguishing between vehicles, because the Government have said that they are looking at the matter. It is wholly inadequate for the Minister to sit on his haunches and leave it at that. Even if he does not answer tonight—he may not have the papers from the Department of Transport with him—the Minister ought at least to have the courtesy to say that he will reconsider the matter. Unless he can provide an answer to the questions—I shall be happy to give way if he wishes to do so—the Minister should ask his colleagues at the Department of Transport what the result of the review was, and then inform the Committee.

Most especially, the Minister should have the courtesy to inform those hon. Members who were promised by a former Minister at the Department of Transport that there would be a review. As hon. Members were given that promise, the Minister cannot simply wash his hands of the whole matter. It is a simple matter of courtesy, if nothing else.

Dr. Marek: I shall be brief. I listened carefully to the Minister, and he did not provide answers to any of the different questions which were put to him. I have searched my memory and, in the 11 years I have been a Member of Parliament, I have never heard such a wooden and stilted response from a Minister who saw common sense staring him in the face, and turned away. The Minister does not do the House, the people in general or the people on the islands a service by behaving in that wooden and disinterested manner.

Can the Minister consult his officials and the Department of Transport? He can see what the will of the House is. If he has any respect for it, instead of dragooning his hon. Friends, by inviting them to vote for a measure in which they do not believe, he should promise at the Dispatch Box to reconsider the matter and table amended proposals on Report.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I have considerable respect for my hon. Friend the Paymaster General. Can he answer one question? I had hoped to ask him while he was speaking, but he would not give way and I also mentioned the matter to the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie). Why cannot those vehicles that are restricted to the islands and never allowed to go anywhere else have a special registration number and a coloured plate, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) suggested? Why cannot they alone be exempt and given favourable treatment? It would cost very little, it would satisfy my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and most of the other hon. Members who have spoken, and it would show that my hon. Friend had listened to the arguments.

Mr. Wilson: I am speaking again not merely because of the inadequacy of the Minister's reply, but because of the bogus point of order raised by the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter). The House should understand one thing. We have heard hon. Members on both sides of the House state a rational case in defence of a small number of people and of fragile communities that do not have much representation in this House. It is completely unacceptable for an hon. Member to chastise us for making that case on the ground of the Jopling report and it is even more unacceptable for him to stagger out of the Chamber as soon as he has made that point. If anyone thinks that the Jopling report will be used as a device to stop the weak being heard late at night, they should relieve themselves of that view now. I hope that every hon. Member in every part of the House will agree with that.

The Minister's reply was grossly inadequate. The hon. Member for South Hams asked for numbers. He should not have had to do so because the Minister should have given them in his reply. If he had done so, the small number of hon. Members on both sides of the House who

are affected could almost have done the arithmetic on their hands and feet, and told the Government how many genuine operators are affected in each of our constituencies. We could guess how many operators are using the islands as flags of convenience and could say that the problem is, for example, 10:1—one is legitimate and 10 are illegitimate, or whatever the figure might be.

The Minister's incredibly inadequate answer revealed the fact that hon. Members on both sides of the House have argued a reasonable case and that he has no answer. Will the Minister tell me what part of Tory philosophy it is to penalise a small number of legitimate business men—small businesses in island communities—because the Government have not the courage, vision or skill to clamp down on abuse? Why should the people who engage in abuse win? They will do so, in the sense that the Government believe that the only way to deal with that abuse is to clamp down on the people who are not guilty.

Why should the big operator, who has never even had a lorry on the island in which he or she is registered according to the Minister's statement, be able to ensure that operators in the Isles of Scilly, in a marginal Tory seat, pay the full whack? Why should someone who runs their lorries out of Birmingham be able to discriminate against my constituents on Arran or Cumbrae because Ministers do not have sufficient interest to clamp down on abuse and would rather clamp down on the legitimate operator?

If the Minister can answer any of those questions, he should get to his feet. If he cannot answer them, he should withdraw the proposal for the time being, seek further advice from the people who have given him bum advice and bring back the issue later.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): Earlier in this debate, the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) made a carefully presented and thoughtful speech. Powerful arguments were put and questions were posed which have not been answered. The Minister does the House a great discourtesy and his reputation a disservice by failing to answer those specific questions.

If the House is being asked to decide and vote, questions should be answered honourably. The Minister should therefore come to the Dispatch Box and answer the questions before a Division is called.

Mr. Harris: I make an earnest and sincere appeal to my hon. Friend the Minister. He has shown great flexibility in handling the Bill and I am grateful for the changes that he has made. I went to see him with colleagues last week. I am sure that he appreciates the fact that there is real feeling on this matter. I plead with him to take it away and look at it again, otherwise he will put me in a difficult position.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The House and the Government have many ways of helping various parts of the United Kingdom, including the islands, which are the subject of this amendment. But it is not right to use the taxation system for vehicles as the amendment requires.

We have an opportunity to remove not just an anomaly but an abuse. Hon. Members who have spoken in the debate have described how and agreed that such an abuse takes place. It is right that island communities around the United Kingdom should receive differing amounts of help through various systems. Vehicle excise duty is a United Kingdom tax and, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Sir P. Cormack), I am not prepared to see various licence plates for different parts of the United Kingdom solely on the basis of concessions granted in those other parts of the United Kingdom.

We assert the unity of the United Kingdom for taxation purposes, which is why I invite the Committee to reject the amendment.

Mr. Macdonald: The Minister's response is as inadequate as the previous one, because it ignores the fact that several hon. Members were assured that the Department of Transport was looking at the matter.

The Minister said that he has ruled on principle that the exception is to close, yet that is not what the Department of Transport told us. It specifically said that it understood the point being made and would actively seek ways to deal with it. We have had no response from the Department of Transport or any other Department on that issue, so it is wrong for the Minister now to say that the matter cannot be considered in principle

The Department of Transport has already conceded the value of the exception and said that it would look at the mechanics of trying to achieve a solution. For the Minister now to turn round and simply say that the review should not have taken place is wholly inadequate. We were promised a review and still need to know what the review discovered.

I do not see the Minister's problem. The wheels of Government will not grind to a halt, nor will their revenues dry up if he takes this opportunity to consult the Department of Transport and return with full information on Report.

Ms Primarolo: Will the Minister reconsider his statement to the House? He conceded that certain island communities will experience difficulties because of the Government's decision to standardise vehicle excise duty. He also admitted that those communities require additional help because of their vulnerabilities and unique position.

So that the Committee can make progress, I suggest that we proceed with the Minister's proposals for vehicle excise duty, but I ask him to give an undertaking that we will deal with the question of concessions to the islanders—whose case has been put this evening—on Report. If he fails to give that assurance, the Committee will be deadlocked and I am sure that he does not want that to occur this evening. We must find a way of drafting solutions to meet the islanders' demands.

11.30 pm

Mr. Salmond: The Minister has been asked on several occasions to quantify the cost of exempting the proper cases which were outlined by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). I have listened to the Minister reply to questions about many Opposition amendments during the Committee stage of the Finance Bill and every time he has begun by saying that the amendment will cost the Revenue and the Treasury so much money that he cannot concede it.

Although he has been asked about the cost several times tonight, he has chosen not to reply to that question. That leads me to two conclusions: first, that the Minister does not know the cost of retaining the concession for those deserving cases, which means that the matter has

[Mr. Salmond]

not been considered properly and the Minister should withdraw it; or, secondly, he knows how much it will cost but he is not prepared to tell the Committee because the sum is so embarrassingly small that it will expose the Government as doing island communities a grave injustice for the sake of perhaps a few million pounds.

For the third time, I ask the Minister to quantify now the cost of retaining the concession in the category 1 and 2 cases that were outlined earlier by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): There are no inhabited islands off the coast of my constituency, but I have been following the debate with great interest. It is one of the most extraordinary debates that I have witnessed during my career in the House of Commons.

My hon. Friends the Members for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) and for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), the hon. Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) and for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) explained that they corresponded and had meetings with the former Minister for Transport, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who has been in his place during the debate. He assured them, as a Minister of the Crown and on behalf of the Government, that ways would be found to ensure that island hauliers were provided for appropriately in any future framework.

However, in responding to the debate a Treasury Minister has discounted all of those assurances and has tried to give the Committee the impression that the discussions never took place. That is a most intolerable position for hon. Members to be in and I do not think that the Committee should accept a reply like that from any Minister in any Government.

I hope that the Minister will return to the Dispatch Box tonight and demonstrate that he is speaking on behalf of a united Government, instead of the Department of Transport saying one thing and the Treasury saying something else. That is no way to run a Government and it is certainly no way to manage fragile island communities in the Western Isles or anywhere else. It will be to his eternal discredit if the hon. Gentleman does not reply to the debate sensibly.

Mr. Wallace: I endorse the proposal put by the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo); it is a sensible way to proceed. The Minister should give such an undertaking and we can then return to the matter on Report.

Judging from the way that he replied to the Committee this evening, it appears that the Minister was given a brief to deal with an amendment at the fag-end of a sitting which failed totally to address many of the substantive issues that were put to him from both sides of the Committee. No hon. Members on either side of the Committee have attempted to defend the abuse which has taken place; that point was conceded. We ask the Government to devise a means to stamp on abuse so that people who genuinely want to proceed with their businesses—and who do not have a basis for increasing their revenue or the turnover to withstand the amounts in question—can do so. I am not sure what would happen if, a year down the track, some businesses go under and valuable haulage services are lost.

It is no use the Paymaster General repeating the mantra of a united taxation system. That principle has already been breached by what has gone before. We heard that the Department of Transport is already reviewing the system and is prepared to countenance a different situation.

Mr. William Ross: The same taxation system has not always applied. I ask the Committee to consider what happened in respect of the community charge.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman makes a pertinent and obvious point. Some of us well remember that we had to pay the community charge long before other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. William Ross: Northern Ireland never paid it.

Mr. Wallace: As the hon. Gentleman says, Northern Ireland never paid the community charge. The Government's weak arguments have not addressed the substantive issues. It would be helpful and consistent with the mood of the Committee if the Minister would say that we can return to this matter after it has been given proper consideration and we know the outcome of the review promised by the Department of Transport to me and to many other hon. Members.

Dr. Marek: The Paymaster General said that he was responsible for United Kingdom taxation, and the implication was that if duty for a vehicle in central London is to be £500, the same duty would be payable for a vehicle in Canna or any of the other Scottish islands. That cannot be right. Taxation should be fair and seen to be fair. How can a comparison be made between a vehicle on a small Scottish island that can travel only in a circle, for a distance of 12 miles—

Mr. Home Robertson: Or less.

Dr. Marek: Or less, as my hon. Friend says—with a vehicle in London that might travel 10,000 or 12,000 miles a month? It cannot be right for both vehicles to be taxed the same amount.

The Paymaster General says that he is responsible for taxation as a Minister of the United Kingdom Parliament, but he is not weighing all the considerations properly. He must take into account equity and fairness, and appreciate that the public must be satisfied that his proposals are fair. I cannot imagine any member of the public in the British Isles arguing that because a vehicle on a small island in Scotland is to be taxed at £500, the same amount must apply to a vehicle registered in central London. That arrangement would be blatantly unfair.

We are not asking the right hon. Gentleman to make up legislation on the spot, at the Dispatch Box. Hon. Members on both sides of the Committee implored him to think about the points that have been made. Most importantly, the excellent point put by the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Sir P. Cormack) deserves consideration in the quiet solitude of the Minister's room, rather than in Committee.

It is clear that both sides of the Committee believe that a gross unfairness will be perpetrated unless the Minister does something. Unless we can be sure that the Minister will take cognisance of that, hon. Members in all parts of the Committee will be most disgruntled. I urge the Minister, as a matter of common sense, to think again.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Of course the House can return to this issue on another occasion—certainly on Report. But I ask the Committee to reject the amendment in the full knowledge that the procedures of the House allow the House to return to it another time.

Mr. Wilson: I make no apology for keeping the debate going. Why on earth should people legislate when they have not the slightest idea of the consequences of what they are legislating for? The moment the Minister rises to give us some information in response to the points that we have been making, I shall sit down. That will be the end of it.

How many vehicles are affected by the provision? How many of them never leave the islands? How many of them have never been on the islands in question?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman is asking me a question that is impossible to answer. How can anyone know whether a vehicle has left an island? We do not run a police state in which vehicles are followed from the islands to the mainland. It is self-evidently absurd to ask me for information that does not and cannot exist, either in my Department or in the public domain.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) asked me about three categories of expenditure on which no information exists. Indeed, they are not possible to identify. If they were, I would be the first to give the hon. Member the information that he requires—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The Minister is already intervening. We cannot have interventions in interventions.

Mr. Harris: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Can the House return on Report to a matter dealt with by the Committee, unless the Government move an amendment dealing with it?

The Second Deputy Chairman: It is a matter for Madam Speaker whether to select amendments or new clauses on Report.

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. How can we make up our minds when the Minister has told us that he cannot possibly give us the information? He says that there is abuse, but he cannot have it both ways. If he cannot give the numbers to the Committee, how does he know how many people are abusing the system?

The Second Deputy Chairman: The Chair is not responsible for the content of speeches.

Mr. Wilson: This is a rare parliamentary occasion. Every time the Minister rises to his feet, he exposes just how little he knows about what he is trying to put into statute. Is he talking about hundreds or thousands; about millions of pounds or tens of thousands of pounds? He can give us no inkling, because he does not know.

Even worse, the Minister does not know how many vehicles are involved, or how many of their owners abuse the system. The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) promised to explore the point when we contacted him. Surely the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency knows the answer to this problem. Let us say that 500 legitimate companies benefit from the islands allowance and 10,000 abuse the system—but the Minister does not know. He would then be under the impression that the number of firms affected by the provision was the total. The Minister has had no briefing on the substance of our point, which is that only a tiny number of firms is involved.

What the Minister is hoping for here is to brass-neck it through to a vote, to push it through, and then that would be the end of the matter. Opposition Members who represent island communities are not disposed to let him do that. He is being humiliated by his own ignorance and he should accept that.

He should withdraw the proposal. He should accept the fact that he has no idea about the amount of revenue or the amount of abuse that is involved, and therefore he does not know what he is legislating for. Afterwards, he can take it up with the people who failed to advise him, who told him that this was a little thing that would slip through late at night because of the Jopling report, who said that only a handful of yokels in the furthest periphery were affected.

I hope that the Minister has learnt a lesson tonight, because when he starts messing about with people on that basis, he will not get away with it. When he starts messing about with islands, the interests of which some of us work very hard to defend, he will not get away with it. He cannot tell us anything that he is trying to do tonight in any detail. Until he does, we shall make him talk. We shall make him explain. We shall continue to ask him for the statistics on which the proposed legislation is based. So the Minister had better bring some statistics to the Dispatch Box, or else recognise that he is in for a long night.

11.45 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I have been listening to the entire debate. I do not represent any islands, and came to the subject completely new. I do not think that the Minister has treated the Committee fairly. Having listened to the strength of the debate—hon. Members from six different political parties have spoken—I know that it is not a party issue. It is clearly an issue on behalf of a geographical minority.

When the Minister invites the Committee to reject the amendment and says that the matter can be raised at some later stage, he is not correct. He knows perfectly well that, if it is rejected, the chance of this issue being selected on Report is remote. We all know that. What he should do is invite my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) to withdraw the amendment, on the assurance not that he can solve the problem but that he will discuss it with his colleagues in the Department of Transport and come back to the House on Report with a more lucid explanation and, if possible, a solution. If he did that, we could make real progress.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In saying that the matter could be raised on Report, I meant that if it is the wish of the House to discuss the issue further on Report—you said, Dame Janet, that it is a matter for Madam Speaker—I shall certainly do what I can to ensure that the House has an opportunity to discuss it. I have no reason or motive to prevent fair discussion on a matter that is clearly of interest to hon. Members and their constituents. I am certain that I gave a reason for rejecting the amendment, which is based on studies of the existing situation—an anomaly that is not founded in law and that invites abuse.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

I gave examples earlier of people advertising that abuse of the system in newspapers. The precise number of people abusing the system is, by definition, unknown. It is rather like fraud. One cannot quantify it precisely because it is unmeasurable. I am very happy to give the assurance that, if the House wishes to discuss the matter later on Report, I will do what I can to ensure that it is given that opportunity.

Sir David Steel: The Minister has a deserved reputation for intelligence and courtesy. I think that he should go a little further and invite my hon. Friend to withdraw the amendment so that it could be raised again on Report. Having listened to the debate, he is under an obligation to discuss with his colleagues in the Department of Transport what happened to the review and to the assurances that were given in letters to various hon. Members. That is the least that the Committee is entitled to expect of him. If he would just go that far, I am sure that we could make progress and return to the matter again.

Mr. Macdonald: We are making a little progress, but we still need some clarification. The Minister said that the House could return to the matter on Report, but he knows as well as anybody that the procedure—the proper way to ensure that the matter is discussed on Report—is for him to invite the mover of the amendment to withdraw it. The Committee will then read that as an understanding, a commitment, that the Minister will genuinely look at the matter to try to find out what happened to the reports that were drawn up by the Department of Transport.

I hope that he will use the time between now and Report to meet hon. Members who raised the matter with the Department of Transport, to talk it through with us and to make available to us the reports that the Department drew up—or was thinking of drawing up at one stage—plus any additional material that he thinks germane to the discussion.

It is not right to leave the matter hanging by simply saying that the House can return to it at a later stage. If the Minister invited the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) to withdraw her amendment, we should all know where we stood. The Minister knows the forms and courtesies of the House as well as anyone; if he genuinely meant the offer that he appeared to be making—the offer to deal with the issue at a later stage—he would follow it through by inviting the hon. Lady to withdraw the amendment.

If the Minister proves not to have made such an invitation, however, we must conclude that he did not really mean what he said about the House being able to consider the matter on Report. He has left confusion in the minds of hon. Members, and I think that it is incumbent on him to clear it up.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Whether the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) presses her amendment must be a matter for her. I have said that, if she does so, I must invite my hon. Friends to reject it; but I have also said that the House is fully entitled to debate further issues on which it feels strongly, and I assert its right to debate issues of public importance.

I go further than that, and say that the proper procedure is for the matter to be returned to on Report. I shall certainly endeavour to ensure that that is done, if the desired result cannot be achieved simply by the hon. Lady tabling her own amendments. That would enable the House to take a further look at the issue by using its regular and proper procedures.

Mr. Macdonald: Another inch of progress has been made, in that the Minister has suggested that the proper procedure is for us to discuss the matter further on Report, thus implying that the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute should withdraw her amendment. He would clarify matters further, however, if he assured us that, if she does so, he will, before Report, meet all hon. Members on both sides of the House who have raised the matter. We have had letters from the Department of Transport saying that the matter would be considered; it would be only courteous of the Minister—the courtesy that I would expect of him—to agree to meet us before Report.

Mr. Home Robertson: Responding to an intervention from the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), the Minister referred to the existence of studies of the detailed implications of the concession and the amendment. It might be helpful to my hon. Friend and other hon. Members representing island constituencies if copies of those studies were made available: perhaps they could be placed in the Library of the House, in anticipation of further discussions of the subject.

Mr. Macdonald: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Before meeting the Minister, we would have to have whatever information he considers relevant.

The Minister seemed to suggest that he would not be willing to meet his hon. Friends, along with Opposition Members, to discuss the matter before Report, even after the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute had withdrawn her amendment. That is a startling and even shocking thing to say.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have never refused to meet hon. Members on matters within my public responsibilities. If the hon. Lady or any other hon. Member wishes to discuss the matter with me, I shall naturally accede to that request.

Mr. Macdonald: We are making progress bit by bit. My understanding is that the Minister is saying that the proper way to proceed would be to discuss the matter on Report. If the hon. Lady withdraws her amendment, all interested Members would have an opportunity to meet the Minister to discuss the matter in a more measured way and, hopefully, at a better hour. That is one way of proceeding with the matter. The Committee is disturbed that an issue, which in one sense is small but is nevertheless vital, is being dealt with in a way that does not do it adequate justice. I think that hon. Members in all parts of the Committee have recognised that simply to reject the issue out of hand would not be justice.

Sir Patrick Cormack: On my own behalf and that of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) may I appeal to the Minister and the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie)? The Minister need only recognise that it is virtually unprecedented for an issue that has been voted upon to be brought back on Report. He should show that he has some of the sympathy for

islanders that the House unitedly demonstrated in 1982. We need the hon. Lady to recognise that perhaps she may not have enough troops at her command and the only chance of the matter being debated again is if she recognises that she has many allies in all parts of the Committee and begs leave to withdraw the amendment.

Mrs. Ray Michie: If the Minister will tell me and the Committee that he will discuss the matter with his Department of Transport colleagues and will agree to meet me and other hon. Members from all parts of the House to discuss the issue further, and if he will present proposals, I shall be happy to withdraw the amendment. All that we ask him to do is to consult colleagues and meet us.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I do not propose to repeat myself. I have already offered to discus this matter or any other within my responsibility with the hon. Lady or any other hon. Member. I am happy to give that assurance again. If the matter borders on the responsibility of another Department, I shall endeavour to obtain from the Minister concerned the authority to discuss on his behalf the matter being debated.

Mrs. Michie: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Hon. Members: No.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Macdonald: On a point of order, Dame Janet. Hon. Members who are trying to represent their constituents have been treated twice this evening to a grave discourtesy. First, we received from the Minister with responsibility for transport letters saying that the matter would be considered. We never had any follow-up to that and the undertaking was not kept to. Secondly, we appeared to have an understanding from the Paymaster General that, if we withdrew the amendment, it would be considered at the third stage, and we would have a meeting.

Clearly, an orchestrated manoeuvre by the Government Whips pushed the Question on the amendment to be put. Therefore, when he appeared to make the offer, the Minister was either unaware of what his Whips were doing, or, if he was aware, he was misleading hon. Members, who understood him to be offering to reconsider the matter at the third stage. That is a grave matter.

12 midnight

The Second Deputy Chairman: That is not a matter for the Chair. I can operate only the rules that exist and a single dissenting voice is sufficient not to permit an amendment to be withdrawn.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Dame Janet. In view of what we have just seen, within the orders of the House, is it possible to emblazon on the Standing Orders the words, "Never trust a Tory Minister"?

The Second Deputy Chairman: That is not a point of order for the Chair. Mr. Brian Wilson. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Wilson: I am happy to give way.

Mr. Beith: On point of order, Dame Janet. Recently, within the hearing of the Committee, you advised the Committee that it was for Madam Speaker to decide what could be selected on Report. It was in the light of what you said that an exchange took place, involving hon. Members of all parties, my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute and the Minister, in which, after some considerable persuasion, the Minister agreed that it would be possible for Madam Speaker to exercise her discretion, so that the matter could be raised again.

Then it clearly happened—not within your sight, but within your hearing—that the Government Deputy Chief Whip called a vote to prevent the amendment from being withdrawn, with the obvious intention of defeating the understanding that the Minister had reached in the light of what you had said. Therefore, I ask you to consider whether that action should be deprecated by you because it sought to set at naught the advice you had given the Committee.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Let me make it quite clear. I do not have the discretion, but Madam Speaker has full and total discretion in selecting amendments or new clauses on Report. I have no doubt that she will take all matters into consideration.

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order, Dame Janet. Can we have your assurance that you will give a full report to Madam Speaker of what has just transpired? Tonight, we have seen the excreta of political life in the person of the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight), who has cheated the House—

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I know that the evening is late and that feelings have been running high, but we can conduct this debate in a civilised way? May I make the point again to all hon. Members: Madam Speaker has complete discretion. She is not bound by anything that may be said or done and, of course, she, as all other hon. Members, will be able to read a full account of the matter in *Hansard*.

Mr. Wilson: The Committee, which has listened in large numbers to the debate, heard the agreement that was reached between the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute and the Minister. Within minutes, one hon. Member cheated on that agreement. That is why we are still discussing the matter. If the Minister had a shred of honour in him, he would do what is within his power to rescue the situation, by saying now that the Government will table their own amendment on the subject to ensure that it is debated further. If what the hon. Member for Derby, North has done in the name of Government is followed to its logical conclusion, not only this small issue, but the whole arrangement for late-night proceedings of the House will be affected, because no one will ever trust those people again.

The Second Deputy Chairman: I have already made clear what the position is from the point of view of the Chair, and I have nothing to add to that.

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Dame Janet. The Committee has listened tonight to the debate. The needs of a special proportion of our community, which stretches from Northern Ireland to Scotland, England and Wales, were put and, after much exchange, the Minister gave a clear undertaking. We accepted in good will that an arrangement would be made, that the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) would withdraw her amendment, and that, at another time, we would have the

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opportunity to come back. We all thought that the hon. Lady would be permitted to withdraw the amendment. After 25 years in this place, I am staggered to see something that has taken us all this time to get established being destroyed in a matter of seconds. If there is no trust in the House, how can we represent the people who send us here?

The Second Deputy Chairman: I repeat that Madam Speaker retains full discretion as to how she may handle any amendment or new clause that hon. Members seek to table on Report—nothing alters that.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Further to that point of order, Dame Janet. You will be reporting to Madam Speaker on the conduct of business under your chairmanship tonight. As the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) has said, what is causing the Committee considerable concern is that we have this evening witnessed an unusual but proper use of this place, which is to draw assurances from the Government. The Government were not willing but we were making progress.

What concerns me is whether the Minister—reluctant as he was—knew in the very process of giving the undertaking that he would support the matter being discussed again on Report that the Government Whip was going to prevent the amendment being withdrawn. It is important that you find out, Dame Janet, and ensure that Madam Speaker knows exactly what happened.

The Second Deputy Chairman: I have nothing to add to what I have already said on that point.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): In reaching her decision—*[Interruption.]* I have listened to all the debate and I represent a constituency containing an island with three inhabitants.

If Madam Speaker is to judge fairly what happened and take everything into account, she will no doubt be extremely interested to know the attitude of the Minister in charge of the debate whose words induced my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) to seek to withdraw the amendment. It would be fair to the Committee if the Minister gave a sign at this stage, which Madam Speaker could read and which would help her to make up her mind, as to his intention.

The Minister will know that a motion voted against in the way that happened tonight is unlikely to reappear in the usual course of events unless he explains what the Government were seeking to do and that what the Deputy Chief Whip did was in the nature of a distraction, perhaps due to a lack of communication between the Minister and his colleagues further along the Bench. I therefore ask the Minister to tell us his intention; that is only fair to Madam Speaker and to the Committee.

The Second Deputy Chairman: The hon. Gentleman is repeating points that have already been made. It is very clear: Madam Speaker will have a full account of what has happened in *Hansard*, supplemented by answers to any questions that she may ask of me.

Rev. William McCrea: Hon. Members who have listened carefully to the debate heard the Minister promise that he would do all in his power to ensure that the matter could be raised again on Report. Does that promise still stand? If the Minister does not intervene to reassure the House that it does still stand, will you, Dame Janet, ensure that Madam Speaker will has that fact passed on to her?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My words will have been recorded in the *Official Report* and I do not retreat one inch from what I said. I am certainly content, as I hope is the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), to let the matter rest with Madam Speaker.

Amendment made: No. 47, in schedule 4, page 189, leave out line 6.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question proposed, That the schedule be the Fourth schedule to the Bill.

Mr. Wilson: Dame Janet, I am delighted to be informed, as I trust that you will confirm, that the schedule is debatable. That, of course, gives us an opportunity to return to the question of vehicle excise duty affecting island communities.

I think that I can reasonably lay claim to a fairly comprehensive knowledge of the islands affected by the amendment in the schedule. I shall, of course, be anxious to take hon. Members through each of the islands affected. I am sure that Conservative Members will be very willing and interested to listen to the precise implications of their proposed legislation.

The terms of the schedule are especially important as they affect islands in my constituency and, therefore, I shall start with them. As you would expect, I shall move on to talk about islands in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), in which I have a certain journalistic interest, islands in the constituency of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie)—

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): Name all the islands.

Mr. Wilson: No, not yet. I feel that it is far too early in my speech. I had the privilege of being born and growing up in the constituency of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute. Indeed, I am a frequent visitor to the islands in the constituencies of other Opposition Members.

Unfortunately, I have not yet had the opportunity to visit the islands in the constituency of the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), who spoke so eloquently in support of amendment No. 41. I am sure that he feels every bit as cheated by the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) as I do. I am sure that the hon. Member for St. Ives will understand that the Conservative interest will read at least as badly in his local press as it will in the local press in the areas represented by the rest of us. That is something with which he will have to learn to live. I hope that he will manage to secure a meeting with the Minister in which the hon. Gentleman will understand that treating little people in this way is not very clever. To paraphrase words that could be used by hon. Members behind the Minister, "Even as you do unto the least of our children, so you do unto me."

That is the basis on which we set out to discuss the schedule and the impact on island communities of what is being proposed. Nobody should be in any doubt about the economic impact of the proposal. To talk about £4,000 vehicle excise duty on a vehicle which runs up and down the motorways—I could mention many roads along which vehicles run—is, of course, a reasonable charge over a

year. When one applies—I think that every hon. Member in the House will understand this—that same principle to vehicles which operate in very small island communities, it is easy to see the absurdity of such a proposal.

If any Conservative Member, including the shamed Minister, cares to come to the Dispatch Box and tell me that it is right for a vehicle which circulates round an island which may have 10, 12, or 20 miles of road to pay the same as a vehicle which operates throughout the length and breadth of Britain, I shall be willing to give way. I suspect that they would have some difficulty in saying so. There is no logic in such a case. The reason that is coming forward is nothing to do with the islands which are being punished by the proposal and everything to do with the rigid bureaucracy of the Treasury and of the people who have advised Ministers.

At this stage, I want to stress how badly let down Opposition Members feel about the way in which we have been treated—not, I should stress, by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who acted honourably. He listened to the case which we put on behalf of the island communities and he responded reasonably. Then this great hiatus appeared. The hon. Member for Salisbury lost his job and we heard no more about it. The promise that the Government would come back to us to discuss the reasoned case that we had put forward was ignored.

It was a source of astonishment to me, as it was to Conservative Members and other Opposition Members, when out of nowhere I received a letter from a haulier in my constituency, Mr. Bannatyre of Arran Haulage, in which he said that he had heard on the grapevine that the proposal was coming back through the Finance Bill.

Hon Members who had dealt with the matter received no notice. The promised review had not been carried through. We heard nothing about the proposal until it appeared in this form in the Bill.

12.15 am

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): On a point of order, Dame Janet. The annunciator system in the Chamber seems to have gone down. I am concerned that hon Members who may wish to come in and listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) and many of my colleagues who wish to take part in the debate may not know that the Committee is still sitting and is likely to sit for some time yet. Although I see that the time—12.15 am—now appears on the monitor, the name of the hon. Member speaking is not revealed. It is important that the annunciator system should be functioning and I am glad to say that it is functioning once more. I am grateful to you, Dame Janet.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): It is obviously more convenient if the system is working, but it is not beyond the capacity of any hon. Member to walk to the Chamber to discover who is speaking.

Mr. Wilson: I am grateful for the fact that the annunciator is working, because it will allow me to keep an eye on the time as the hours go by.

I have not yet begun my tour of the islands. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) in the Chamber. Not only was he born on the island of Islay, his middle name is Islay. It is not often that I regret the departure from the House of a Tory Member, but instead of the present pretty ghastly hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), it would have been helpful to have the former Member for City of Chester here because he owned half of Islay—

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. Although the hour is late, I deprecate adjectives of that kind. I ask the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) to guard against such language as he deploys his case.

Mr. Wilson: I apologise for my crude Celtic tongue. If the former Members for Devizes and for City of Chester were here, we would have a pair of Morrisons and between them they would own most of Islay. No doubt they would have argued with us this evening.

I do not want to intrude on the territory of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute, but Islay is one of the most beautiful Hebridean islands. It is quite significantly different in terrain from the others, but it is economically very similar. It depends on its agriculture. Hon Members on both sides of the House will appreciate that the economic prospects of the distillery industry on Islay depend on the freight industry.

If I have time tonight, I will break Islay down into nine separate entities and talk about them in terms of the distilleries.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): My hon. Friend will be aware that Strathclyde regional council carried out a poverty survey in the islands some years ago which showed that folk in that area desperately needed help and support. The welfare rights scheme showed that people were entitled to claim millions of pounds worth of unclaimed benefit. The terrible poverty was clear. The Government's proposals will create further poverty and the people on the islands will have to pay through the nose to buy food, groceries and all the rest because of the dramatic increase. As my hon. Friend will know, that increase will probably cause a repeat of the clearing of the highlands under the Tory landlords.

Mr. Wilson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He rightly highlights the reality of rural poverty in island communities. It is too often perceived that poverty is an urban phenomenon, whereas hon. Members who are familiar with island communities know that there is great poverty there, not least because of the disgracefully low wages paid by the estates and the people who subscribe to that philosophy.

The major factor—this point takes us back to the schedule—in conditioning the economy of the islands is freight costs and freight charges. That is why the issue is so important. To many hon. Members who live in large urban communities, the idea that £4,000, £10,000 or £20,000 in vehicle excise duty is a major economic factor within a community might seem absurd, but if one is running a fragile business within such a community and one is incurring extra costs, it is a major factor.

In terms of Islay, I remember the campaign by Strathclyde region. My hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) is absolutely right. However, I return to the point about the distilleries. In the old days, everything which came into Islay—the supplies for the distilleries—and everything that went out again in terms of the finished product went by puffer or by small cargo ships—namely, Caledonian MacBrayne cargo

[Mr. Wilson]

ships. I was saddened recently to receive a letter which told me that, because of a cut in Government subsidy, the very last puffer has disappeared from the whole of the western isles. The decline of the puffers, which is an interesting subject in itself, could—

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): Before my hon. Friend thinks about leaving Islay, he will realise that the island beside it is Jura, which one gets to by going through the roads of Islay and then taking a small ferry, which, incidentally, is not a MacBrayne ferry. How will the tax affect the people on Jura? My hon. Friend knows that there is a small section of road. That produces particular problems, my hon. Friend will agree, for those on Jura. The economy depends on tourism and people climbing to the top of Jura, and so on. If they have to face a terrific charge, what will that do for an island as beautiful as Jura, which is threatened by the tax?

Mr. Wilson: I am some way from Jura yet, despite its being very close to Islay. Indeed, many times from Islay I have looked across to Antrim. I have a family connection with Rathlin isle, which I might discuss some time with the hon. Members for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) and for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea), who have been very supportive tonight.

It will be interesting to have the views of the distillery industry on Islay, because the tax will significantly increase costs of incoming grain and everything else that has to be brought in, and also outgoing products. With the decline of the puffers and MacBrayne's cargo fleet, everything has moved on to roll on/roll off ferries. They are primarily affected by the measure.

I bow to the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute, because I did not know until she said so tonight that the little shunting vehicles which take trailers on and off ferries are also to be covered. I can think of nothing more absurd. Where does anyone go with a shunting vehicle? Would a Conservative Member like to tell me where those little vehicles which are used on piers at ports operated by Caledonian MacBrayne go? They never go outside the marshalling area, never mind on an exotic journey down the M1. I see that we have now been joined by the Chief Secretary—

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): The next Prime Minister.

Mr. Wilson: I will not go down that road. In view of Dame Janet's strictures, I had better not say too much about that, even to prolong the debate—not that that is my purpose. I mean enrich the debate.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman will enrich the debate by sticking closely to the schedule.

Mr. Wilson *rose—*

Mr. Salmond: I am puzzled by the narrowness of the speech of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). Is he aware that the schedule includes paragraphs on electrically propelled vehicles, road construction vehicles, roadrollers, snow clearing vehicles, street cleansing vehicles, power wagons used solely in connection with street lighting and vehicles used for short journeys between different parts of a person's land? When will the hon. Gentleman deal with those important topics?

Mr. Wilson: I do not want to be selfish and deal with them all myself. By the time I have dealt with the islands issue comprehensively, someone else may feel the muse upon them. My hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) invited me to refer to Jura, and there is no more appropriate place to move to than Jura.

At every isle we mention, I regret the passing of Conservative Members. Is there no longer an Astor in the House? If there were, surely he would be putting the case for Jura because that family owns half the island.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): He is in the Lords.

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman speaks for them all—the entire British aristocracy is epitomised in his beatific form. If the hon. Gentleman cares to intervene about Jura and its requirements, I shall certainly give way.

The metaphor that springs to mind regarding Jura is that what we are dealing with tonight is positively Orwellian. Orwell lived in Jura and wrote some of his greatest works there. The House is debating a taxation measure for which the Minister responsible cannot give the remotest estimate of the amount of money involved. The entire might of this great institution is devoted to an issue where the Minister cannot tell us how many vehicles are involved or what proportion of them are believed to be operating fraudulently.

If the Chief Secretary cares to intervene where his colleagues signally failed, I would be pleased to hear from him. There is plenty of time. The right hon. Gentleman can send out for the information which is somewhere in the files of his Department. I am shocked and astonished that the Chief Secretary has not been provided with the information, and that he has not been made aware of the previous correspondence of hon. Members with the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). It is an Orwellian situation, in which the little people are supposed to accept what is happening to them because some mighty machine has told them.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that it is not just the hon. Member for Salisbury who has given an undertaking? My hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) has said that she has had a similar undertaking from the present Under-Secretary at the Department of Transport. It appears that the Department of Transport has been wholly persuaded by the argument and recognises the case, but it has not communicated with the Treasury. The Department of Transport seems unwilling even to ask the Treasury while the issue is still being dealt with. Is not the position even worse than the hon. Gentleman describes?

Mr. Wilson: I am genuinely grateful to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), because I did not know that. To be honest, I have not corresponded on the issue with the present Under-Secretary. I was asked about the matter recently, and I told my constituents—I thought in good faith—that the matter was pending, because I had an assurance from the hon. Member for Salisbury that it was under review.

I wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport two or three weeks ago and I passed on the renewed concern of my constituents. I congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute if, in the interim, she has been in touch with the present Under-Secretary. It is obvious either that none of the information has been communicated to Treasury Ministers, or that they have just brushed it aside, saying that it is all nonsense and that nobody cares about promises given in the House any more.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Surely my hon. Friend is not surprised at the Government's indifference to those highland communities. About eight or nine months ago, he and I met the Minister of State at the Scottish Office to discuss the real fears surrounding the Glenlight shipping company, which has now ceased to trade largely because of the Government's failure to provide the subsidies that it needed.

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and the problem is compounded. Not only did the Glenlight shipping company—a privately operated company—go out of business because that arrangement was ended, but at least two of the other coaster companies that operated at that time and whose existence Ministers used as a justification for not supporting Glenlight, have also gone out of business since. The Easdale Island company was the most recent. It operated the last puffers in the western isles and it too has gone out of business. The relevance of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that, as coastal shipping declines, everything else is piled on to the roads and on to the car ferry system, and vehicle excise duty becomes crucial to all trade between the islands and the mainland.

12.30 am

Mr. Graham: My hon. Friend will be aware that the headquarters of Caledonian MacBrayne, which services most of the isles, is in my constituency. Tonight's announcement will create terrible stress and problems for my constituents who service the islands. They will be wondering whether the change in duty will mean a reduction in jobs because there will not be enough money to go around. Does that mean that, once again, my constituents will have to suffer further unemployment? Does it mean that the islands will suffer further unemployment because there will not be enough money to invest?

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend's concern for the employees of CalMac is well known. Indeed, we and my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) once jointly fought quite a successful campaign to keep CalMac's headquarters in Gourock. More recently, we fought a successful campaign to keep the company in the private sector.

I do not want to disturb the Minister responsible for cricket, who is nodding off—

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): I am impressed by my hon. Friend's comments about the effect of the coastal trade in Scotland. Our Scottish heritage has a great impact on our tourist trade. Is it not ironic that many hon. Members on both sides of the House have been very attracted by the stories of the Vital Spark and the history of Scotland that is connected with the puffers? When we study the background to our coastal trade and the effect that this schedule could have on it, we realise that we are losing a vital part of our community, of our heritage and of what makes Scotland different—a vital part of our vital spark.

The Chairman: Order. This debate is about vehicle excise duty, which is not part of Scotland's heritage, or indeed that of any part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

The Chairman: Order. I am the Chairman this evening.

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) makes a vital point, Mr. Morris. Our national heritage has many dimensions. I contend that the economic well-being of island communities is a very important part.

The Chairman: Order. I am not denouncing that, but we are dealing with schedule 4 of the Finance Bill and heritage is not a part of that.

Mr. Wilson: I accept the fine distinction, Mr. Morris, but if there are no people on the islands, there is very little heritage. Dead communities are—

Hon. Members: "Dead?"

The Chairman: May I help the hon. Gentleman? He obviously has important matters to raise on schedule 4 concerning vehicle excise duty. Perhaps he will deal with those rather than worrying too much about the dead.

Mr. Wilson: One of the major conditioning factors of the economic well-being of island communities is freight and transport costs, which is why we are talking about island communities.

Mr. Macdonald: Will my hon. Friend reflect on the principle which the Minister announced to us tonight, that taxation must be absolutely uniform throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, and must apply to Lewis in the Hebrides as it does to Lewes in Sussex? Where does my hon. Friend think that that law—if it is a law—comes from? Does he agree that it is absurd to apply it to the Scottish islands?

Mr. Wilson: I agree entirely. It is not a law. If we were here long enough, and if you, Mr. Morris, allowed us to deviate far enough, we could give several examples of exceptions and anomalies that are allowed in recognition of geographical circumstances. I do not blame the Minister for what he said on the ground that he did not know what he was talking about. It was an ad hoc response.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It was not ad hoc at all. I referred to vehicle taxation. If the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. MacDonald) wishes to quote me, he should get that correct.

Mr. Wilson: The Minister should do his homework even on that narrow point. He will then find that he is not right about that, either.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that a number of exemptions apply even to vehicle taxation. For example, police vehicles are exempt from vehicle taxation. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) says that the lorries on the islands could be fitted with blue flashing lights, which

[Mr. Salmond]

would enable them to be exempt. Alternatively, they could be reclassified in some way. There is no uniform vehicle excise duty for police vehicles.

Mr. Wilson: There is no need to go as far as fitting vehicles with blue flashing lights.

My hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde mentioned Caledonian MacBrayne. It is a dreadful confession from the Minister that he has no idea which vehicles commute between islands and mainland and which are fraudulently based on the mainland. It would not be difficult to check the returns of the ferry operators to find the activity pattern of each of those vehicles.

The Minister has consistently failed to say why he refuses to distinguish between fraudulent and legitimate operators. *[Interruption.]* Now he does not even have the courtesy to listen to the debate. Will he make some effort tonight to distinguish between those who operate fraudulently and those who operate legitimately, or are they all part of the same picture in the Tory book?

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend mentioned fact that the Minister had not the decency to listen to what he was saying. I suggest that he was not listening to my hon. Friend because the Tory Whips were in a huddle proposing that, despite the fact that my hon. Friend has been speaking for a relatively few minutes, they try to move a closure on this specific debate. The plan is that the Tory Whip will ask the Chair, Mr. Morris, to have a closure. It will be argued on the basis that, as there has been an important debate on the amendment beforehand, that time and this should be added together in order to gag my hon. Friend or anybody who follows him. That is the plan.

Mr. Wilson: I am always grateful for my hon. Friend's parliamentary insights. If that is the Government's ploy, I had better hurry on.

I wish to return to a serious point which the Government must answer. This debate has now been going on in correspondence with Ministers for about nine months. Why have they never sought to identify vehicles that are genuinely island-based? Why is the Tory party the party of legitimate fraud? Why have the Government allowed people to act fraudulently and advertise island licences when they know perfectly well that they are not island operators? Why have the Government done nothing about that? Why is their only solution based on a refusal to draw a distinction and therefore discriminate unfairly against the island operators?

The Minister has not made the slightest effort to answer any of those questions. I think that that is a discourtesy to the Committee—more than that, it is a disgrace—although it is a very minor discourtesy compared with the sleazebag activities of the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight).

The Chairman: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman might like to rephrase his earlier statement.

Mr. Skinner: He said "sleazebag activities"; he did not call him a "sleazebag".

The Chairman: Order. Will the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North rephrase his statement?

Mr. Wilson: I will use the phrase "grossly disreputable", Mr. Morris.

Mr. Graham: My hon. Friend will be aware that the vehicle excise duty will affect snow ploughs. There were blizzards in Scotland the other day and if snow ploughs are taxed to the hilt it will affect the lifeline to the islands. Will the roads be cleared or will Scotland suffer once again because the Government have not seen fit to recognise the difficulties of island living? Snow ploughs are essential to living on the islands and we must ensure that the roads are clear and free of snow. I ask my hon. Friend to consider that point in his deliberations on the schedule.

Mr. Wilson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, although I do not want to get on to the subject of snow ploughs. Many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate tonight, and in light of the strictures of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), I will bring my remarks to a close.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): No.

Mr. Wilson: I know that the hon. Gentleman wants to hear a bit more about the islands. I was going to ask him if there is any particular island that he would like me to dwell upon, but that might be a dangerous invitation.

Mr. Home Robertson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. There is a lot of meat in the schedule. I think that paragraph 23, which refers to "false or misleading information", is particularly relevant to the position tonight. Sub-paragraph (3A) states:

"A person who, in supplying information or producing documents for the purposes of any regulations made under section 61A—

(a)makes a statement which to his knowledge is false or in any material respect misleading or recklessly makes a statement which is false or in any material respect misleading . . . is guilty of an offence".

Does it occur to my hon. Friend that the Minister, and more specifically the Government Whips, were "recklessly misleading" in their conduct in relation to an earlier amendment to the schedule? If people will be guilty in future of an offence under the terms of the schedule and subject to legal sanctions, why are Ministers not prepared to live up to those same standards?

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend makes his own point. I believe that the little things which happen in the Chamber have much greater reverberations outside it. The story of what happened earlier this evening will be told for months and years to come. In one fell swoop, the hon. Member for Derby, North wrote off any chance that the Tories had of winning back the marginal seat of Argyll and Bute. He has also made a significant contribution to doing in the

hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), and there may be an effect on other seats because many people who do not live on the islands are interested in them.

The Tories will pay for their actions earlier tonight in one way or another. They do not have the wit to realise it when the events are taking place—they think that everything can be stitched up in here. If they can cheat and deceive and use those sorts of tactics—

The Chairman: Order. Firstly, the hon. Gentleman is not talking to the schedule; and, secondly, I would be grateful if he would again rephrase the word that he used. Does he know which word I am referring to? The hon. Gentleman used the word "cheat", which is not appropriate.

Dr. Godman: How about "sleekit"?

Mr. Wilson: That is a very seasonal word. Would "sleekit" be all right, Mr. Morris? It is used in a well-known poem by Robert Burns as an adjective to describe vermin, so I will halfway compromise on it and we will bear in mind Bevan's famous maxim.

Rev. William McCrea: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a strange philosophy is being advanced tonight? The Government, instead of taking action against people who act fraudulently, intend to put legitimate island operators out of business to solve the problem.

Mr. Wilson: I agree. That is something for which the Paymaster General should answer, but he refuses. The Government's philosophy is that it is easier to use a sledgehammer than to make sensible adjustments, to separate the wheat of legitimate island operators from the chaff of fraudulent operators who are abusing the system.

12.45 am

Dr. Godman: Does my hon. Friend agree that the sleekit behaviour of Ministers tonight may damage the interests of people who are attempting to bring some prosperity to remote communities? I refer to the importance of transport costs to fish farms in remote island communities. The measure could damage not just hauliers but fish farms and the employment that they offer.

Mr. Wilson: I could talk at length about fish farms but will not do so. The same argument applies to distilleries. Island economies are dependent on transport and transport costs. The Government are gratuitously heaping an additional cost on transport, which will affect the cost of everything else.

Mr. Home Robertson *rose—*

Mr. Wilson: I will not accept any further interventions because I do not want to prolong my speech, and I do not want this debate to descend into farce. It is not a farcical matter, but a serious one. This speech is not a ploy. I am making it because I care passionately about the well-being of the islands and particularly of those in my constituency.

Even after seven years in the House, I was naive enough to believe that, if one argued a good non-political case—which in this instance concerns communities in my constituency that generally do not vote for me—one could win it, because virtually nothing is at stake. I was encouraged by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who encouraged a good dialogue—but out of the blue, the whole thing was dashed in a most insulting way.

I am not sure whether the Minister acted alone or in a conspiracy with the hon. Member for Derby, North. They dealt with the matter in a way that I am not allowed by you, Mr. Morris, to describe. The judgment will out, and this debate will have its reverberations. Hell mend those responsible.

Mr. Macdonald: My hon. Friend said that Tory Members will pay for their activities this evening. They are already beginning to pay, because they could have been home a long time ago if their Whips had not scored an extraordinary own goal, trying to scupper the possibility of returning to this debate on a future occasion. They did not succeed in that either, because—

The Chairman: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Committee is debating schedule 4 stand part, not something that occurred earlier this evening.

Mr. Macdonald: I was reflecting, Sir Michael—

The Chairman: Order. I am not yet Sir Michael.

Mr. Macdonald: After this evening's activities, Mr. Morris, you deserve a knighthood.

I will not confine myself to the topic touched on earlier, because schedule 4 concerns many other relevant matters.

I cannot refrain from mentioning what the Minister described as the principle involved in not allowing the exemption for island vehicles. The schedule itself offers a simple way of resolving the problem, which is how to identify vehicles used only on the islands and not misused by being taken to the mainland. The Minister said that this could not be done because the Treasury does not make geographical or regional exceptions in the matter of vehicle taxation.

Part II of the schedule, paragraph 2(h), mentions

"vehicles used for short journeys between different parts of a person's land".

Why not rephrase that to read "vehicles used for short journeys between different parts of an island"? That would offer a good definition of the sort of vehicles for which we are seeking an exemption. It does not refer to the Scottish islands, so it does not pose the regional problem that the Minister says goes against the Treasury grain.

Vehicles used for short journeys within islands could then be marked to ensure that they could not be taken to the mainland, thus putting an end to the abuses that the Minister is so keen to stamp out.

The Minister has been unable to give us a single statistic to show the extent of a problem with which he is clearly obsessed. He is willing to deal this heavy blow to fragile island communities in order to get rid of the problem, yet he has told us that he has no idea of how great the problem really is. That is quite extraordinary.

The Minister thought that the abuse was so considerable that he had to take action against island communities and ignore the work being done by the Department of Transport. We might have expected him to make an effort to ascertain the scale of the problem first: how many operators are abusing the exemption? How much money is being lost to the Treasury—thousands or tens of thousands of pounds?

[Mr. Macdonald]

The Minister has no answer to these questions, yet he is willing to detain us all here—

Mr. Home Robertson: My hon. Friend is being unfair to the Minister. Surely the Treasury must know how many vehicles are covered by the current exemption. By the simple process of calculating the difference between the discounted rate and the top rate, and multiplying by the number of vehicles covered by the exemption, even this Minister should be able to work out the answer. Is my hon. Friend telling us that the Minister and the Government do not even know that?

Mr. Macdonald: The Minister told us all earlier that he had no idea of the total number of vehicles claiming the exemption, or of the total revenue lost to the Treasury thereby. He could not even hazard a guess as to what proportion constitutes abuse. If he had an idea of the total number, he could have simply given us some kind of ceiling, above which the abuse could not be said to take place. He could say that the amount being lost because of the abuse was a certain figure below that amount, because there would be a total amount involved in terms of vehicles claiming the exemption.

I do not want to press that particular point with the Minister, but he must go back tomorrow morning and ask those who advise him in the Treasury how we came to be discussing the matter at this hour of the morning, when it could all have been settled and resolved with a little foresight and thought, a little consideration, a little bit of communication between his Department and the Department of Transport, which is currently considering the issue. Does he believe that the principle of uniform vehicle taxation throughout the United Kingdom is so important that it cannot be deviated from in this specific instance, which has the support of both sides of the Committee? Is it threatened at all as a principle by the exemptions that we propose?

I suggest that, if the Minister asked the civil servants to exercise a little bit of ingenuity and brain power, they would soon come up with a form of words that would achieve the purpose that hon. Members on both sides of the Committee wish to achieve, but which would also not break the principle that he so cherishes.

I would like to move away from that specific topic in case hon. Members believe that it is becoming exhausted, bearing in mind the strictures of the hon. Member for Bolsover about the two debates potentially being added together.

Mr. Home Robertson: Before my hon. Friend moves on from the Minister's cherished principle, I would like to clarify one point, because I studied very carefully the manifesto issued by the Conservative candidate in East Lothian at the last general election and I can assure my hon. Friend that nothing was in it about an undertaking to get to the root of the vicious problem of islanders freeloading on the mainlanders because of the exemption. Did the Conservative candidate in Western Isles promise in his manifesto to do away with the exemption?

The Chairman: Order. That has very little to do with schedule 4.

Mr. Macdonald: What my hon. Friend said is hardly surprising given that we could not believe what the Minister was apparently telling us a few seconds before the conclusion of the debate, and given the actions of his hon. Friends the Whips in undermining the commitment that he had apparently made to hon. Members about being able to return to the matter on Report.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No undertaking has been undermined. I stand by the remarks that I made, which were that the House clearly wishes to return to the issue. It is most appropriately done later on Report. If there was any procedural difficulty about the matter being raised by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), I would use the Government Benches to ensure that the matter was raised on Report. I gave that undertaking, but I also indicated, in response to a question, that I would be happy to meet the hon. Lady or other hon. Members to discuss it, because I have never refused to meet an hon. Member about an issue of public concern.

I am very happy to repeat those points for the benefit of the Committee. At this late hour, I do not think that it is very fruitful for me to continue to debate the issue with the hon. Gentleman, but in the light of the assurances that I have given, I hope that he will agree that it is my full intention—as it has always been—to return to the issue in due course.

Mr. Macdonald: That is a welcome announcement, which makes it all the more extraordinary that the Whips should have forced a Division in the first place. They have saved themselves no time tonight, nor have they precluded a subsequent return to the issue. This is the most self-defeating action that I have ever witnessed on the part of a Whip.

Mr. Skinner: I think that the Minister now appreciates the political significance of what the Government Whips have done tonight. The consequences could be very severe.

Does my hon. Friend agree that double standards are operating here? A Tory Minister says that it is wrong to have variation in relation to taxes for the islands, yet the Government are prepared to attack the Labour party when it talks about devolution because they say that it will put up taxes for Scotland. They cannot have it both ways; this really is hypocritical.

I am

Mr. Macdonald: I thank my hon. Friend for reminding the Committee of that, but I should like to return to the Minister's offer. He said that the matter could—indeed, I think he said "would"—be returned to on Report following a meeting between the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) and other hon. Members.

Dr. Godman: In the light of the Minister's offer, may I ask my hon. Friend whether he believes that schedule 4, suitably amended, would meet the needs voiced by him and the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute?

Mr. Macdonald: I have not been a Member of Parliament as long as the Minister, but one thing that puzzles me is how the matter can be returned to on Report when a vote has already taken place.

The Chairman: Order. Let me make it clear that that decision rests entirely with Madam Speaker: there is no point in debating it now.

Mr. Macdonald: I am grateful for your clarification, Mr. Morris. It would be helpful to all hon. Members if

the Minister suggested that, if a proposal emerges as a result of meetings that he held with the hon. Lady and others, the Government might be willing to consider tabling such an amendment on Report. I must consider the impact of schedule 4 on certain operators in my consituency: it is likely to drive them out of business. If the Minister suggested that the Government might table amendments as a result of meetings with hon. Members, that would relieve my constituents and, I am sure, many of his hon. Friends who are present tonight.

I remember a parallel case—almost—in last year's Finance Bill, involving the passenger tax. A similar principle was invoked then. It might have been more applicable then because some people were seeking regional exceptions. However, I do not see how the principle applies in this instance. It should be easy to find a simple way to define the matter in a manner that does not breach Treasury guidelines.

The matter is hugely important to my constituents because transport communications are crucial to the livelihood of people in the Scottish islands. Communities there are fragile and average incomes are considerably below the United Kingdom average. Car ownership is proportionately high precisely because communications in remote rural areas are impossible by any normal means of public transport and car ownership is a necessity. Any measure that increases the costs of transport to my consistituents and other island inhabitants strikes at the very root of those communities and their ability to survive.

I hope that when the Minister meets the hon. Lady and other hon. Members he will be open-minded, will look at the issues afresh, and will have requested a report from the Department of Transport. I hope that he will ask his Treasury officials to look as hard as they can for a means to achieve this exception.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am glad that I waited until the end of this debate, because if what the Minister said had been said a little earlier, we would not have reached such an impasse. I am critical of what the Whips did but I shall look carefully at what the Minister does. He has said that he will use the Government's power to return the issue to the Floor of the House. Time will tell, but I accept that assurance. As I have said, if it had been given sooner and more fully we would not have reached the impasse.

Question put and agreed to.

Schedule 4, as amended, agreed to.

Bill (Clauses 2, 5, 8, 15, 52, 64 and 91, Schedules 1, 4, 11 and 14, and any new clauses first appearing on the Order Paper not later than 19 January and designed to continue the statutory effect of the Ways and Means Resolutions of the House of 13 December) as amended, to be reported.

To lie upon the Table.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

COUNTY COURTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft High Court and County Courts Jurisdiction (Amendment) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 29th November, be approved.

That the draft County Court Remedies (Amendment) Regulations 1994, which were laid before this House on 29th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft Milk Development Council Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 30th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

INTERNATIONAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft World Trade Organisation (Immunities and Privileges) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 1st December, be approved.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organisation) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 1st December, be approved.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

SUGAR REGIME

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 11141/94, relating to the Common Agricultural Policy sugar regime; and supports the Government's policy to press for reductions in sugar prices to bring them into line with those for other arable crops, to defend the United Kingdom beet sugar quota and to support measures which ensure the viability of cane sugar refineries and provide additional access opportunities for developing country suppliers.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

Association Football

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

1.8 am

Ms Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): It gives me no pleasure whatever to initiate this debate. Everyone who really cares about the good name of football and about its future must be distressed about the variety of allegations, scandals and corrupt practices which have surrounded the game in recent years.

In the past few days, the newspapers have been full of one incident—the attack on a Crystal Palace supporter by the Manchester United player Cantona. Shocking as that incident was—and I congratulate the Football Association on taking immediate action—it is less significant than what has been happening off the field. At least the Cantona incident was in full view of the public via television.

I want to talk tonight about the many allegations that have yet to be proved or disproved. It is commonly agreed that a great deal of evidence exists. I have seen some of it, and the Minister should have as well. I want to raise with the Minister with responsibility for sport a demand for more action to get to the bottom of these matters.

Some people, both within and outside football, have stated that football has nothing to do with Parliament, and that politicians should not be sticking their noses into "private business". I heard that some people in football have a view, which I hope and believe the Minister does not share, that it is especially shocking that a mere woman Member of Parliament is getting involved in what is clearly an industry run by men, for men. I make no apology for that involvement.

Football is our national game. It gives pleasure to millions of men and women, and its future is much too important to be seen as the private preserve of a few. Crucially, it is an industry that receives millions of pounds, both directly and indirectly, from Government. In the past year, it received £23 million via the Football Trust from a specially reduced betting tax on the pools industry. That special reduction was granted in 1990, and was recently extended for another five years to the year 2000. A sum of £14 million comes into the Football Trust from the pools companies' special deal on the spotting the ball competition each year.

Privileged loans are approved by the Department of the Environment from local authorities. There is money to help with the young trainee footballers scheme. Money will be going to help with the staging of the European Championships in 1996. The Government have rightly given the football industry special privileges, unlike any other leisure activity. Special privileges using taxpayers' money mean special responsibilities, which the Minister must ensure are carried out.

In response to my letter before Christmas asking for an independent inquiry, the Minister shared my concerns about recent allegations of financial irregularities in professional football. I welcome that. He also said that the issue of transfer irregularities was primarily one for the governing body of the sport to pursue. He said:

"The FA Premier League has set up a Commission of Inquiry and I await the outcome with interest."

He continued:

"So far as there are any tax implications, the Inland Revenue will and are taking close interest."

He ended:

"My officials are in touch with the FA Premier League and will continue to monitor the situation."

Fifteen months ago, on 4 November 1994, the Premier League Commission was set up to inquire into allegations of undercover payments during "transfer deals" and into the role of agents in an attempt to restore the public's faith in the propriety of football. Members were Steve Coppell, the former Crystal Palace manager and England international, and secretary of the newly formed Managers Association, Rick Parry, chief executive of the Premier League, and Robert Reid QC. At the time, Mr. Parry said that his aim was to have a short, sharp exercise. So far, they have failed to report.

The inquiry, however, is entirely concerned with the laws and regulation of football. The Government should be considering the whole tax evasion scam that is taking place in football. The Inland Revenue involvement is limited both by scope and time—the limits is two years in time, one year to be chosen by clubs and one by the Inland Revenue, and only six players. Customs and Excise, the collector of VAT, is taking no specific steps and is conducting no specific investigation of the transfer turnover of some £70 million a year.

From the information that I have had from Customs and Excise, it was, to put it in football parlance, "shown the yellow card". In other words, it was warned off, not just from delving too deeply, but from delving at all. Why is the Inland Revenue not passing information on to the VAT commissioner, to the financial reporting review panel or to the Director General of Fair Trading?

Perhaps the Minister can tell the House why the Government are stopping a full inquiry into the evasion of taxation by some football clubs. We know that 15 premier division clubs have, under the Government's formula, already paid £16 million in back tax and penalties. That is for only a two-year period—what would be owed if the process were extended to cover all clubs for perhaps 10 years?

Will the Minister confirm that there is an under-the-counter deal being done, and that guilty clubs are being told unofficially, "Co-operate, pay up and we will not pass on any information, not to other tax bodies or, where there is criminality, to the police or, crucially, to the football authorities for their further action"?

The important thing for the House and the Minister to understand is that, not only is the taxpayer being ripped off, but the supporter is being forced to pay more as a result of the dirty deals which cause money that should be in the game to be siphoned off in back-handers, bungs and fixes. Indeed, it has been suggested that the figure could be as much as £1 a ticket.

The particular problems of player transfers and illegal payments are not confined to deals done within this country. In the past few years, increasing numbers of players have been imported to play here. They originate from Scandinavia, eastern Europe, Spain, Africa and Australia. One of these transfers—that of Jensen from the Danish club Brondby to Arsenal—is currently under investigation.

It is alleged that the Danish club took only £900,000, and that the rest of the total price of £1.57 million paid by Arsenal went to the Guernsey company Interclub, run by the Norwegian agent Rune Hauge. Therefore, some £600,00 was paid needlessly by Arsenal, and George

Graham has not denied that he admitted to the Inland Revenue that he received an unsolicited cheque—a gift—for £285,000, which he subsequently handed back to Arsenal. Other clubs are involved with the same agent and all of them bought Scandinavian players. Those clubs include Liverpool, Manchester United and Oldham. More than 60 foreign players were being investigated before the even bigger influx of players last summer.

In Spain, using a British agent, two players were transferred back to Aston Villa from Real Sociedad. That transfer—a £2 million deal in total—is subject to Inland Revenue and other inquiries. The manager at the time of the deal was Ron Atkinson. Two east German players transferred from German clubs and played fewer than 30 games before returning to their home country. I understand that the Inland Revenue is investigating.

It is to Australia, from where the Minister has just returned, that I wish to draw his particular attention. An internal inquiry by the football authorities, which took some time and found very little evidence, was superseded by a Parliament Senate Committee of inquiry which, using its judicial powers, is conducting a wide-ranging investigation into, among other things, the transfer of football players to England. So far, the inquiry, which is currently meeting, is concerned with two English clubs—Blackburn Rovers and Brighton and Hove Albion—which used the services of an English agent, Mr. Tom Lawrence.

Commenting on the Brighton FC transfer of David Clerkson, who has returned to Australia, the report said:

"the English FA became involved, but does not seem to have clarified anything."

As for Blackburn Rovers and the transfer of goalkeeper Frank Talia, the inquiry reports that the Talia transfer is an example of what happens when an agent acting for the transferee is involved, and that the Australian club Sunshine George Cross does not believe that it received the full moneys due to it. Blackburn paid £115,000, whereas the Australian club received only £8,500, which means that more than £100,000 has gone walkabout. It is interesting that the Australian Parliament seems to know more than the Minister about what is happening in respect of transfers of footballers to England.

As for internal transfers, the original reason for setting up the Premier League commission of inquiry was to investigate an allegation of wrongdoing and bribes involving the transfer of Teddy Sheringham from Nottingham Forest to Tottenham. That involves the England team manager Terry Venables and the former Nottingham Forest manager Brian Clough. Does the Minister know whether any evidence of financial fraud has been passed on to the police authorities in this case—or, indeed, any other? Is it not only fair to everyone, especially Brian Clough, for someone, somewhere to say whether he is guilty or not guilty?

The Commission has already in front of it much information, including an invoice regarding the transfer of Paul Gascoigne to Lazio for £200,000, and an invoice from First Wave Management for £58,000. Those should be dealt with by the Department of Trade and Industry under the Companies Acts 1985 and 1989.

The problem of money and its misuse is far too big, far too difficult and far too close to home for the football authorities to cope with by themselves. Can we expect club chairman to find themselves guilty? Can we expect club managers to judge themselves objectively, especially in a culture which has turned a blind eye to wrongdoing?

It must be remembered that all the allegations and investigations now being discussed come from outside the game, or from newcomers to the game. Particular credit must be paid to the consistent investigative reporting of Harry Harris of the *Daily Mirror*, to Patrick Barclay of the *Observer*, and to *The Mail on Sunday*, among others.

The evidence in front of the Commission relating to Terry Venables is, I believe, damning. Leaving aside his business dealings, the evidence present in the order 14 application in the case when the agent Eric Hall sued Tottenham for £23,500 for

"public relations and commercial activities on the Club's behalf",

raises grave questions at the least about Mr. Venables's judgment. Indeed, it is possible that he could have contravened the Prevention of Corruption Act 1906. There is certainly clear evidence of the breach of Football Association regulations, in that Venables knew that Eric Hall was acting for him, while at the same time acting for the players.

In simpler terms, the Prevention of Corruption Act means that a football agent cannot take money from a club which at the time is in negotiation with that agent's clients. Eric Hall was an agent for three Tottenham players: Justin Edinburgh, Paul Moran and John Hendry. Tottenham's lawyers discovered that Hall took money from those players while acting as their agent for new contract negotiations. Unbeknown to those players, he also took money from Tottenham for the same reason.

Section 1(1) of the Act contains similar provisions regarding persons who agree to give any such gift or agree to pay a fee. Terry Venables swore an affidavit to help Eric Hall in his fight against Tottenham. In that affidavit, he fully admits that he asked Hall to convince the players to sign contracts. Venables knew that Hall was the agent for those players, because players always have to notify their club in writing of their agent. To me, the evidence speaks for itself; no wonder the Minister awaits the commission's report with interest.

The Premier League commission of inquiry has already been overtaken by evidence and new allegations. The commission has narrow terms of reference. It is not looking into things such as the free use of credit cards valued at £2,000 a month, subsidising the purchase of houses with unreported capital sums, and cash payments to parents when signing on school-age footballers.

The reality is that most sensible suggestions to monitor financial dealings of clubs have been rejected by the Premier League chairmen. The Professional Footballers Association suggested a compliance unit. Why does the Football Association not insist on that? Indeed, Graham Kelly of the Football Association has said that that is a difficult area.

We cannot wait for them to sort themselves out. The situation is too important. But let us not forget that there are many decent, dedicated men and women involved in the football industry. They also want to clean up professional football. As a long-time Arsenal supporter, I know the pain it has caused, not only to me but to other supporters, when we hear of wrongdoing in our favourite clubs.

The Minister for Sport will not need reminding that this is the game we gave the world. Hosting the European championships in 1996 is a special honour. With it goes the responsibility of the Government, the FA and all those in football to ensure that the financial aspects of the game are seen to be perfectly honest.

[Ms Kate Hoey]

There is a real danger that what is being discovered is so widespread that any admission of guilt or breach of the rules would bring the whole edifice of the football establishment down. No one wants to be the first person to pull his finger out of the dyke.

It is important that the football authorities do not pick on one person as the official scapegoat. The only way to counter that is for the Government to set up an inquiry along the lines of the Taylor report or other reports into football, independent of the cosy relationships in football and with the power to subpoena evidence, to examine accounts and to make a full and impartial report. That is what the country wants and that is what is needed if we are going to get back that confidence in football—the national game.

1.25 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I must begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms Hoey) on securing this debate, and on her persistence in pursuing allegations of improper payments and behaviour in the sport.

I welcome this debate entitled "Government Policy on Association Football", and the opportunity it affords to discuss a number of important questions which have been raised as a result of recent speculation about the conduct of certain clubs and individuals. Those are issues which worry a lot of football supporters, and the hon. Lady has set out her concerns very thoroughly.

Although football is, of course, privately run and administered by independent governing bodies, there is a legitimate public interest involved, and for that reason, both my Department and the Inland Revenue have been monitoring those issues very carefully, and I will respond to the hon. Lady's specific points about financial irregularities in a moment.

Given the title of the debate, let me begin by explaining that the Government's role in football, as in other sports generally, is to encourage the development of, and participation in, the game through appropriate policies and expenditure programmes.

The Government do not, and indeed should not, attempt to run football itself. That is the responsibility of the properly constituted governing bodies, such as the Football Association, the FA Premier League and the Football League, and my Department does not have any jurisdiction over their day-to-day affairs. That is not to say, however, that the Government do not take firm action when that is appropriate.

The title of the hon. Lady's debate is "Government Policy on Association Football", so, although I will come to the issue of financial irregularities in a moment, I must start by looking at our policy in the round. Following the terrible tragedies at Bradford and Hillsborough, the Government passed the Football Spectators Act 1989 and stipulated that all clubs in the Premier League, and the First Division of the Football League, must convert to all-seated accommodation.

In addition, the Government established the Football Licensing Authority and funded the Football Trust through a 2.5 per cent. reduction in pool betting duty. Government funding of the Football Trust, which began in 1990, was originally due to end this year, but, as hon. Members will know, it was decided in August 1993 to extend the arrangement for a further five years.

As a result of those actions, football grounds have been transformed. From old, dangerous and uncomfortable grounds, often with inadequate facilities, and uncovered terraces, we have moved to a position where our stadiums are among the finest in the world.

Also, £387 million has been spent so far on major ground redevelopment projects, of which £121 million has been contributed by the Football Trust, which assesses all grant applications to take into account the club's own resources. Together with smaller ground improvement schemes, that represents a major investment in the future of football, and it was a significant factor in UEFA's decision to award the finals of the 1996 European championships to England.

Responsibility for organising the championships rests with the FA, but my Department has been fully involved and has provided advice and assistance as necessary. As I have said on a previous occasion, the decision to award the finals to England was a vindication of all the work that the clubs have put into upgrading their stadiums to provide the facilities and comfort which spectators are entitled to expect as we enter the 21st century. It was also a vindication of the Government's policies on football.

Financial assistance from pool betting duty has not been limited to clubs in the top divisions. Clubs in the second and third divisions have received more than £14 million, and that does not include the funding provided to those clubs, and those in the GM Vauxhall Conference, from the Football Trust's income from the 'spot the ball' competition.

Now that the all-seating policy has largely been implemented, we can look forward to increasing the resources available to clubs in the lower divisions to achieve improvements in the safety of terracing and the quality of facilities. As can clearly be seen, the Government are concerned to help the modernisation and development of all football clubs, not just those at the top. That support extends right down to the grass-roots level, with the sportsmatch scheme, which is funded by my Department, providing grants worth more than £900,000 to football, and stimulating an equivalent level of support from private sponsorship. Without a healthy and thriving base, no sport can flourish, and I am very keen to support and encourage that base.

The Football Licensing Authority, on behalf of the Department of National Heritage, is responsible for licensing grounds at which designated football matches are played, and for ensuring that safety certification under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 is properly implemented, to avoid any repetition of the tragedies that we have seen in the past. Looking ahead, the Sports Council is responsible for distributing sport's share of the money which the national lottery will contribute to good causes, and I have no doubt that football will be one of the beneficiaries.

My colleagues in other Departments are responsible for other aspects of football. The Home Office, for instance, has a very important role in ensuring public order, and I am sure that hon. Members will agree that the police have been very successful in reducing the level of violence associated with football games, and will join me in welcoming that improvement.

The reduction in violence can be seen from the fact that, over the past five seasons, arrests at league games have fallen by 30 per cent. I have no doubt that that has played an important role in the rise in attendances, and particularly the increasing number of families who now go to football games.

Having set the framework within which football can operate safely and successfully, it is right that private clubs and governing bodies should be allowed to operate freely without Government interference—as long, of course, as they are seen to be acting in a responsible manner.

Complaints that increases in admission prices are driving spectators away and that clubs are exploiting their supporters by over-frequent changes of their strips are not new, but they should also be seen in the proper context. For example, attendances at football matches have risen every year since the 1986-87 season. Again for example, supporters are not obliged to buy replica kits and all the other souvenirs on offer at clubs these days.

It is also an interesting fact that 70 per cent. of replica kits are sold in large or extra-large adult sizes, which shows that, at least in the majority of cases, it is not children who are being targeted. Besides, a club's commercial activities help to keep admission prices down. It must also be remembered that football is not only a sport but a business, and that, if clubs are to be successful on the field, they must also be successful financially.

As well as paying for the essential ground improvements which I mentioned earlier, clubs must be able to buy quality players, which will enhance their teams' performance and attract more supporters. There have been complaints that transfer fees and players' wages are too high, but, although multi-million-pound transfer fees may seem like lottery money, clubs in this country must compete not only with each other but with those in other countries.

If we want British clubs to be successful in Europe, they must compete for the very best players with the likes of AC Milan and Barcelona. It is also worth remembering that footballers have very short playing careers, and that the majority of the money paid in transfer fees stays within the game.

Complaints about the role of television should also be seen in context. I know that a number of hon. Members are concerned about premier league matches being shown live exclusively on satellite television, but it is for footballing bodies to decide how to market their sport and where best to strike a balance between income and television viewing figures. BSkyB and the BBC are paying the FA over £200 million over five years, which is almost four times as much as television was previously paying, and that is without taking into account the ITV contract with the Football League. It is again worth remembering that these moneys all help keep down the cost of football to the supporters who go and watch their teams on Saturday afternoons.

The hon. Lady listed a number of concerns involving financial irregularities. I would urge her to send all the evidence she has to the appropriate authorities. As she is aware, the Inland Revenue is responsible for these matters, and for some years now it has had a special team which has looked at payments in football.

These are very wide-ranging inquiries covering football clubs, players, management and agents, and involving teams at all levels of the game. The hon. Lady and other hon. Members can be assured that, if there are cases which merit prosecution, this will be done, as it was in the case of Swindon Town in 1992, when the chairman, secretary and treasurer were all successfully prosecuted.

Ms Hoey: Why is the Inland Revenue saying—at senior levels—that it has been told that what the Minister says should not happen?

Mr. Sproat: I do not know if that is true. I can assure the hon. Lady that I will speak to my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Treasury. I shall find out the answer, and send it to her.

Football is not helped, however, by exaggerating the problem—I am not saying that the hon. Lady is, but it has been known—and it is very important to note that Premier League clubs have agreed voluntarily to commission independent accountants to prepare reports for the Inland Revenue, which has agreed the scope and content of these reports with the Premier League. The aggregate cost of this exercise will be half a million pounds. I am happy to see that the clubs have decided to put their own house in order, and the Inland Revenue is very pleased with the co-operation it has received from the Premier League.

The FA Premier League is conducting its own inquiries into allegations of financial irregularities, and have set up a commission of inquiry whose membership includes an independent QC, who is also a recorder and deputy High Court judge. I am sure that the inquiry is conducting a thorough and rigorous investigation.

The inquiry had already been set up before the latest allegations of transfer irregularities were made, and it was quite rightly decided that it should look into those allegations too, rather than having a separate FA inquiry. The inquiry's terms of reference give wide-ranging powers, and I am confident those powers will be fully used.

The FA Premier League has made it clear that there will be no cover-up, and that it wants to produce long-term solutions, which will prevent a recurrence of these problems. The priority is to complete the inquiry properly rather than quickly, but I understand that the findings in the Arsenal case will be available very soon. I certainly agree that it would help public confidence if the findings of the inquiry were made public, and I urge the Premier League to ensure that this is done.

The serious allegations concerning Bruce Grobbelaar are being investigated by the FA and the police.

I see no need for a public inquiry. The Inland Revenue is looking into the financial aspects. I am satisfied that the—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 31 January 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BIRMINGHAM ASSAY OFFICE BILL

Read a Second time and committed.

QUEEN MARY AND WESTFIELD COLLEGE BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday next.

SAINT PAUL'S CHURCHYARD BILL.

Read a Second time, and referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Fox Hunting

1. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy on fox hunting for the armed forces.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): The demanding standards of horsemanship required in the hunting field help service men of all ranks with mounted ceremonial roles to maintain their high standard of equitation. Provided no additional public expense is incurred and there is no detriment to military or ceremonial commitments, hunting may be undertaken at their commanding officers' discretion.

Mr. Hutton: Given the widespread public opposition to the hunting of wild animals, what possible justification can there be for allowing members of the armed forces to participate in fox hunts during duty hours? When will the taxpayer stop subsidising that appalling and barbaric sport? Why does not the Minister act now to end the waste of public money?

Mr. Soames: I hope that my hon. Friends will acknowledge that, when more than 50,000 service men and women are deployed on overseas detachments—7,500 of whom are supporting United Nations operations overseas—the only defence question that the Opposition can ask concerns fox hunting. That shows a fantastic order of priority. No public funds are used to subsidise hunting. Salaries and the cost of the upkeep of the horses would have to be met regardless of participation in hunting and all other costs are met privately. The activity is undertaken at the discretion of the commanding officer.

Mr. Duncan: Does the Minister accept that mob rule and class war should not be allowed to stop the Army doing something that is perfectly legal throughout the country? Does he further accept that the Army is popular in my constituency, that hunting is good exercise for horses and that there is something inherently noble and nothing cruel in the great and glorious death of a fox in the field?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who represents the Elysian fields of fox hunting. I wholly endorse his point. Hunting is a legal and perfectly honourable recreation and there is no reason why members of all ranks of the armed forces, if they have the time and inclination, should not take part in it.

United Nations Peacekeeping

2. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British personnel are currently involved in United Nations peacekeeping activities; and what percentage this represents of the United Kingdom's total armed forces.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): Some 3,840 personnel are deployed on peacekeeping operations under United Nations command, and some 3,550 more on operations in support of United Nations Security Council resolutions. That represents 3.4 per cent. of the trained strength of the United Kingdom's armed forces.

Mr. Williams: As we look forward to the next 50 years of the United Nations, does the Secretary of State agree that its peacekeeping role should become ever more important, and that each country, particularly Britain, should assign a growing proportion of its armed forces to the United Nations?

Mr. Rifkind: Peacekeeping is certainly important, but the capacity to take part in high-intensity combat must remain the prime role of our armed forces. Consistent with that, it is desirable that they should provide a useful contribution to the United Nations and other such international operations, but we should never forget their primary role.

Mr. Viggers: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that today is the last day on which the 23 members of Partnership for Peace can, if they wish, give information about their peacekeeping activities and availability? Will he further confirm that our armed forces are maintaining a good dialogue with the Partnership for Peace forces that have chosen to register, and that that is a very good way of registering our military co-operation?

Mr. Rifkind: It is indeed very important. An excellent example of the United Kingdom's contribution is the training that we are giving the Baltic battalion that is being set up by the three Baltic states as their own contribution to United Nations peacekeeping: that will help to increase the status and reputation of the new independent Baltic states.

Mr. Gapes: Does the Secretary of State share my concern about the attitude taken by the President of Croatia to the continued presence of UN peacekeeping forces on Croatian territory? Is it clear to the right hon. and learned

Gentleman, as it is to me, that that poses a great threat? The withdrawal of UN forces in March could lead to an increase in the conflict, and put at risk the lives of other British personnel in the area.

Mr. Rifkind: We are concerned. One of the significant achievements of the United Nations over the past three years has been the containment of fighting in Bosnia. The withdrawal of UN forces from the protected areas in Croatia could lead to a resurgence of the fighting there, with very dangerous implications for the former Yugoslavia as a whole.

Reserve and Cadet Force Expenditure

3. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the expenditure during the current year on (a) the reserve forces and (b) the cadet forces.

Mr. Soames: In the current year, we expect to spend about £140 million and £16 million on personnel costs for the reserve forces and the cadet forces respectively.

Mr. Thompson: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Is not that money very well spent, particularly as we get seven Territorial Army soldiers for the cost of one regular?

Is my hon. Friend aware of the disappointment in my area about the reductions affecting the Royal Anglian Territorial battalions? Can he give some good and positive news about proposed legislation to update the role of the reserve forces and to strengthen links with local communities?

Mr. Soames: I acknowledge the concern felt in East Anglia about the new arrangements for the Royal Anglian regiment and the re-roling of one of its battalions. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments on the volunteer forces, which have a strong presence in East Anglia, with units based at more than 40 locations and 292 cadet units or detachments in the area.

I further thank my hon. Friend for giving me an opportunity to endorse the new Reserve Forces Bill, which we hope to publish shortly. It is essential for the new role of the Territorial Army, which is extremely relevant and important to our modern armed forces. We plan to consult widely, and I should be glad to hear from my hon. Friend if he has any views on the matter.

Mr. Trimble: Will the Minister assure me that the cadet forces will be sustained? May I remind him that, as well as providing a source of recruitment to the armed forces, the cadet forces have played a valuable role in educating people in the broadest sense? I speak as one who spent 10 years in the Air Training Corps. I can tell the Minister that, in Northern Ireland, the cadet forces were one of the few youth organisations that were genuinely integrated and, in my time, provided a useful basis for people to meet across the community.

Mr. Soames: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman, whom I have always understood to be an Air Training Corps man. I believe that the cadet forces give excellent value for money; as the hon. Gentleman has said, they offer young people outstanding opportunities for character development, adventure and play, and fulfil an important role in the community. All our activities are under financial review, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that we acknowledge that the cadet forces give value for money and play a vital role.

Mr. Couchman: Further to the last question, may I ask my hon. Friend to think again about proposed cuts in the Air Training Corps budget for the coming year? The unit in my constituency is particularly worried about proposed cuts in air experience.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The costs of the Air Training Corps are clearly not immune from scrutiny, and we shall want to achieve some savings. We intend to achieve them by increasing efficiency, which we believe we shall be able to do, and to minimise the effect on cadet activities. I am a tremendous supporter of the Air Training Corps, and propose to visit two detachments next week. I look forward to hearing what they have to say.

Mr. Martlew: Will the Minister clarify whether the Reserve Forces Bill, when it is published, will be the Bill or a draft of the Bill? Will further consultation take place? We have already had four years of talking. One of the serious problems is that employers have grave reservations about giving people time off to carry out their duties in our armed forces. That applies particularly to multinational companies based in the far east.

Mr. Soames: I was not aware that we were intending to recruit a great number of reserves from multinational companies based in the far east, but, plainly, we shall be looking to recruit reserves and looking for co-operation from industry and from the corporate sector, because that is important to us and we value it very much. The Bill will be a draft Bill. We will publish it as soon as possible and it will be subject to the fullest consultation. We can but hope, although possibly in vain, that we shall have the support of the Labour party.

Mr. Lord: Is the Minister aware of the considerable concern among the Territorial Army and cadet units in East Anglia about the moving of their command headquarters from Colchester to Nottingham? Is he satisfied that those new arrangements will work as well as the old ones?

Mr. Soames: We certainly would not propose such a move unless we were so satisfied, but I shall be happy to reconsider that matter. If my hon. Friend would care to talk to me about it, I would be happy to explain the arguments to him.

Chechnya

4. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will next be meeting the Russian Defence Minister to discuss Chechnya.

Mr. Rifkind: I currently have no firm plans to meet the Russian Defence Minister.

Mrs. Mahon: Does the Defence Secretary feel ashamed that the west and the Government have continued to look the other way as the much-discredited Russian President has bombed a small nation into the dark ages? What, if any, humanitarian aid will the right hon. and learned Gentleman offer the tens of thousands of Chechens who are without food, water and the basic essentials?

Mr. Rifkind: We consider Chechnya to be an internal matter for Russia. We are, however, concerned about the

way in which the crisis has been handled, and, in particular, about the appalling number of civilian casualties. We have pressed the Russian Government to end the fighting, to allow humanitarian relief and to work towards an agreement that allows the Chechen people to express their identity in the Russian Federation.

Mr. Elletson: Will my right hon. and learned Friend make clear to the Russian Defence Minister and to the Russian Government the utter abhorrence of the British people at the involvement of Russian armed forces in attacks on civilians, both Chechen and Russian, in Chechnya?

Mr. Rifkind: I think that we have all been appalled, as my hon. Friend rightly says, at what appeared to be the indiscriminate bombing of civilians, and at the way in which, despite various assurances to the contrary, those attacks have continued over a considerable period, leading to many casualties in Grozny.

Dr. David Clark: Does the Secretary of State agree that the extent of Russian use of military force, especially in Grozny, is beyond all that is reasonable? Has he considered any plans to suspend bilateral military activities that we undertake with the Russian Army to show the displeasure of the British people??

Mr. Rifkind: On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, clearly one must wonder whether the current military action will bring an end to the conflict in Chechnya. Many of the Chechen fighters have already retreated to the hills and will continue some form of attacks on Russian forces. Breaking links with Russia would be an unwise decision to take. No western interest would benefit from isolating Russia at the moment. In Russia, a vigorous, public debate has taken place, which has included condemnation of the Russian Government in their Parliament and by their people. That shows that Russia has become a much more open society than would have been conceivable in the days of the old Soviet Union.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: I deplore the loss of civilian life in Grozny, but does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that as Russia, even after the strategic arms reduction talks process has been completed, will have no fewer than 3,500 nuclear warheads, it is not in the interests of either this country or of the west to witness the disintegration of the Russian republic, which might happen if Chechnya is allowed its independence?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend has put his finger on a crucial consideration. As long as Russia remains a nuclear power with many thousands of nuclear warheads, it is very much in the interests of the west and of the world as a whole that the Russian Government should have sufficient authority to ensure that those nuclear weapons are kept under proper and effective control.

Representative Entertaining

5. **Mr. Byers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the findings of the review into representative entertaining.

Mr. Soames: Sir Peter Cazelet is due to submit his report in February; we expect to publish it as soon as possible thereafter.

Mr. Byers: Will the Minister confirm that 114 serving officers have their own personal cooks, at a cost of £2.5 million a year, and that the 77 official service residences cost £5 million a year to operate? Is the Minister content that, at a time of defence cuts, there is a regiment of batmen whose duties are to iron and lay out uniforms, make beds, clean shoes and serve drinks? Is that really putting the front line first?

Mr. Soames: Plainly there is no such thing. A cook is provided for a number of senior officers to enable them to carry out their extensive and important representational duties, which add to the dignity of the United Kingdom and its armed forces. Sir Peter Cazelet is examining the provision of domestic assistants, including cooks, for senior officers. The Army had already begun to consider the matter in the wider context of Army catering. What the hon. Gentleman said is correct but, if there is any practice that we should examine more closely, Sir Peter Cazelet will make proposals. We anxiously await his report and look forward to acting on its recommendations.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that senior military officers, like senior civil servants, senior members of the Government and senior members of industry, are required by the nature of their job to entertain individuals of importance? Senior military officers cannot respond to personal attacks on them, so will the Minister tell *The Mail of Sunday* and other newspapers that senior military officers cannot and will not respond publicly?

Mr. Soames: As my hon. Friend says, a number of senior officers, who have important public duties to fulfil, are required to provide representational entertainment. The rank dishonesty of some newspapers' fanciful reporting speaks for itself.

Mr. Fatchett: Does the Minister understand that his weak defence of such extravagance will go down badly with British troops around the world? How can he justify expenditure of £9 million on drinks parties, £500,000 on carpets and £2.5 million on chefs? We are now told that the investigation into this waste will cost a further £100,000. Is not it about time that Ministers took a grip of the waste and extravagance in their own Department? What will it look like to ordinary British troops when they learn of such waste and extravagance and hear that the Minister is happy to justify it?

Mr. Soames: That is a travesty of a response to what I said. The Government have instigated a report by Sir Peter Cazelet into how the services should entertain and on what basis they should do so. As part of the study, he is looking into the provision of official service residences, entertainment allowances and domestic assistants. The line that the hon. Gentleman takes is not a good one. We acknowledge that there is a problem but we intend to resolve it.

Rapid Deployment Forces

6. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for rapid deployment forces arising from the United Kingdom's peacekeeping role within the UN in Bosnia.

Mr. Rifkind: We are developing a joint rapid deployment force to strengthen our existing capability to

intervene speedily and effectively. Our planning will take account of a wide range of contingency operations, including peacekeeping.

Lady Olga Maitland: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the purchase of planned new equipment for the rapid deployment forces has been made possible only by the efficiency savings programme in "Front Line First"? Does he agree that the savings would be seriously jeopardised if the Government were ever to be reduced to falling in with the Labour party's planned programme of £6 billion of cuts in defence spending?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is certainly correct. The Labour party conference proposed a £6 billion cut in defence expenditure and the official Labour policy of promising a review would, if it were to take office, create an aura of instability. Either proposal would be bad for the stability craved by the armed forces at the present time.

Mr. Barry Jones: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that he could guarantee the rapid deployment of men, armour and artillery if he had available the future large aircraft? Is he prepared to say that the Government will purchase and join the project for the future large aircraft? Is he aware that when his Minister of State visited my constituency and the Airbus factory he made a very good impression? A written guarantee from the Government that they will enter the future large aircraft project is now required.

Madam Speaker: Order. That would have been a perfectly legitimate question if it had been asked at the right point—after Question 15 or 17. The hon. Gentleman is pushing his luck a little, but I am sure that the Minister will want to make some response.

Mr. Rifkind: The future large aircraft will not come into operation or even be available for at least 10 years. It may be the practice of the Labour party to give promises before knowing the price of what is being purchased or when it will be delivered, but that is not the policy of Her Majesty's Government.

Sir David Steel: Does the Secretary of State agree that much of the recent criticism of the United Nations machinery is misplaced? As one who saw the excellent work done by British engineers in the peacekeeping force in Rwanda, will he accept that the development of rapid deployment forces would mean more timeous intervention by the UN and would prevent the build-up of tragedies such as in Rwanda?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that if the United Nations is to be involved in a crisis that either has erupted or could erupt it must be able to respond quickly and effectively. It can thus make a valuable contribution, preventing loss of life and benefiting crisis-torn areas of the world.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the Third Reconnaissance Regiment, which is being created at Bovington in my constituency, have a rapid-reaction capability? What progress has been made in that excellent development of our armed forces?

Mr. Rifkind: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his words of welcome. The initial focus of the joint rapid redeployment force will be light airborne and commando brigades, along with associated air and maritime support.

Land Mines

7. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the use of land mines.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Roger Freeman): The United Kingdom is concerned at the suffering caused by the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel land mines and is working positively towards strengthening international means to control those problems. The United Kingdom signed the United Nations weaponry convention in 1981 and we want to see the convention improved and signed by more countries.

Mr. Cohen: Is not the Government's alleged support for the United Nations moratorium flawed by exemptions for self-destructing and self-neutralising mines and other established criteria, whatever that may mean? Do not self-neutralising mines still kill and maim innocent civilians and are not they costly and dangerous to remove? Should not the Government stop the export of all anti-personnel mines, irrespective of whether they are self-neutralising, and sign the 1981 inhumane weapons treaty? Would the Minister tread boldly on a field of self-neutralising mines? I think not.

Mr. Freeman: I think that the whole House shares the sentiment expressed in the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question: that where the indiscriminate use of mines, self-destruct or otherwise, causes danger to civilians it is to be deplored. That is why we shall work with our allies to control the export of all mines, including self-destruct mines. It is important that the British Army retains some capability. The hon. Gentleman is at least consistent. He is a unilateral nuclear disarmer, along with 39 other Opposition Members. He may wish to disarm the British Army of land mines, which are a perfectly justifiable weapon to use in defence of these shores, but he is wrong to sign the early-day motion calling for a ban on nuclear weapons, as did many of his colleagues.

Mr. Robathan: Yet again, we have the sad spectacle of Opposition Members sniping at the British armed forces and blaming the British Government for everything that goes wrong in the world. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he has no evidence of any British anti-personnel mines that are harming civilians? Can he confirm that the Hazardous Areas Life-support Organisation, which is employed to clear mines by the Overseas Development Administration and the United Nations, among others, has never come across one British mine in Afganistan, Cambodia, Angola or Mozambique?

Mr. Freeman: I am glad to confirm what my hon. Friend says. The House will be interested to know that in the past three years the British Government have spent £7 million helping mine clearance in some of the countries to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr. Home Robertson: What information does the Minister have about the number of land mines which remain on the former confrontation lines between Bosnian Government forces and Bosnian Croatian forces in the area covered by the British battalion and UNPROFOR? Is the British Army giving assistance or advice on the clearance of minefields?

Mr. Freeman: Certainly, the British Army and the British Government will do all that they can to advise on clearance. The parties in the conflict in the former

Yugoslavia have indiscriminately sown anti-personnel land mines. That may be in direct contravention of the United Nations weaponry convention, which we signed in 1981, and which we will ratify next month.

Mr. Cohen: In view of the Minister's unsatisfactory reply, I give notice that I will raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Academic Research

8. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what funding his Department proposes to provide for academic research in 1995; and what was the figure in each year since 1990.

Mr. Freeman: Expenditure on military defence research in universities and further educational establishments has averaged approximately £30 million per annum over the past five years, out of a total military defence research budget currently at approximately £600 million per annum.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I welcome my right hon. Friend's answer. Does he agree that his recent announcement of a second five-year funding tranche for the London-based Centre for Defence Studies will provide stability and reassurance for the academics who work with that institution in providing some excellent worldwide strategic studies?

Mr. Freeman: Yes. I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I congratulate London university on its work on non-scientific research for the Ministry of Defence. I am grateful also to my hon. Friend for his support for our research effort. One of the Government's main aims this year is to share the benefits of military research with the private sector and with industry to improve the performance of our economy.

Mr. Wigley: Will the Minister ensure that part of the research budget, particularly that which is available to universities, is used to investigate the environmental effect of burying bombs and possibly chemical bombs at sea, as alleged by the Russians in the conference last week, and indeed in land locations such as in my constituency? Does he accept that there could be potential continuing dangers arising from such disposal methods? Does he understand the need to undertake further research into those dangers?

Mr. Freeman: I share the hon. Gentleman's view. That is an important aspect of research and effort. We have learnt from the mistakes made by many countries, including our own many decades ago, in the disposal of munitions. We observe the highest possible standards now, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that that matter will be one of the aspects of the research.

Mrs. Gillan: I recognise the need for value for money in defence research, but will my right hon. Friend undertake to look more closely at possible co-operation between the civil and defence space programmes? With the increasing commercialisation of space and the opportunities available, there are more opportunities now for our defence forces to co-operate with civilian space programmes.

Mr. Freeman: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is not just a question of co-operation in our space programme, particularly the military communications satellites, between the public and the private sectors, but with France, Germany and the United States. Defence collaboration in procurement is very much the theme that must run through any Government's policies over the coming decades.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Does not the Minister understand that the real need is to transfer money from defence research into civilian research? Will he consider making a large contribution to research council funds, so that money can be used in genuine civilian research?

Mr. Freeman: No, I cannot give the hon. Lady that assurance. We spend £600 million on military research, and it is important that that is directed at the needs of the armed forces. Civilian research—and its funding—is the responsibility of other senior Ministers. I can assure the hon. Lady that the benefits of military research will be shared with the private sector.

Armed Services

9. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the purpose and functions of the armed services.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom's armed forces operate in support of British defence policy, which is a key component of our wider security policy, the purpose of which remains to contribute to maintaining the freedom and territorial integrity of the United Kingdom and its dependent territories, and its ability to pursue its legitimate interests at home and abroad.

Mr. Evans: If the lot opposite ever got away with devolution and broke up the United Kingdom, would the Scots and the Welsh be expected to defend themselves with leeks and haggis, or would the Scots ask the English to defend them out of English taxpayers' money?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend, as usual, poses a difficult conundrum. The armed forces are, of course, the forces of the Crown, and the Crown is the golden chain which binds and secures the United Kingdom. The service of the Scots and Welsh regiments has been historic and heroic over the ages, and it would be difficult to contemplate any other arrangement.

Mr. Galloway: Is it a part of the proper purpose of the armed forces to send reserve Army officers, trainers and semi-detached military operatives to dictatorships such as the royal dictatorship of Bahrain so that they can observe people who are demonstrating for the democratic right to elect their own Government and to establish their own Parliament being gunned down or tortured?

Mr. Soames: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would want to know that Bahrain, about which he speaks in a such a loose and ignorant manner, is a force for moderation and good sense in the Gulf, and also that I was at Mons officer cadet school with the crown prince.

Mr. Gallie: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in the recent review, "Front Line First", Scotland—perhaps with the exception of the Rosyth naval base—came out relatively well with respect to the retention of bases? If the Labour party were to attain its wish and establish a tax-raising Assembly which would create additional tax

burdens, would it influence the Ministry of Defence with regard to the establishment and maintenance of bases in the future?

Mr. Soames: As my hon. Friend knows better than anyone, the Scots have for generations been the most marvellous providers of service men and women to the Crown. Plainly, Scotland remains an important and integral part of the defence establishment of this country, as it has important naval, air and Army bases. I can see no circumstances under which that could possibly alter. What matters to most of the people in this country is that the United Kingdom remains united.

Dr. David Clark: Has the Minister had the opportunity to see the recorded television interview with his right hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement, in which the right hon. Gentleman says openly and honestly that in the future there will be

"fewer ships and fewer aircraft"?

How does that square with the solemn pledge by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence that there will be no further defence cuts?

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend certainly said no such thing. The new public expenditure plans—announced, endorsed and warmly welcomed by my right hon. and learned Friend—mark the end of upheaval in defence. We are now able to preserve our front-line capabilities to sustain and enhance our equipment programmes and the armed forces look forward with confidence to a brilliant future.

Exhibition, Esher

10. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next intends to visit the covert and operational procurement exhibition in Esher; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Neither I nor my ministerial colleagues at the Ministry of Defence have ever visited, or have any plans to visit, the COPEX exhibitions.

Mr. Mullin: That is a pity because, if the Minister had been able to get there, he would have found himself rubbing shoulders with representatives of some of the world's most unpleasant regimes, including military attachés from China, to whom I did not think that we were supposed to sell arms, and a delegation from Iran. What on earth was he doing to allow such a delegation to attend arms fairs here? He might also have found equipment capable of use in torture on sale, or available, through that exhibition. Does the Minister think that sponsoring events of that kind is the best use of British taxpayers' money?

Mr. Freeman: It is a private exhibition. No taxpayers' money is involved. The hon. Gentleman knows that any arms equipment that could be used for torture or violating human rights is not exported under licence from this country. I sometimes wonder whether he and the other 39 unilateral disarmers should not pay a little more attention to the United Kingdom's excellent defence record on exporting the most excellent equipment, including some that is manufactured in his constituency.

Mr. Wilkinson: Did my right hon. Friend decide not to attend COPEX in part because he believes that it is more important to attend premier exhibitions and shows such as the Paris air show? Is it because he wants to view at such occasions British equipment in which the British taxpayer has invested a large amount of money, such as the European fighter aircraft? Is he sanguine that, in view of the German Parliament's decision not to continue funding the development of that aircraft, it is likely to appear in Paris?

Mr. Freeman: There is no threat to the Eurofighter programme. I very much agree with my hon. Friend that we Conservatives very much admire the efforts of British Aerospace, Rolls-Royce, GEC and many others with a magnificent record of defence export sales—£5 billion expected this year. I wish that the Labour Front-Bench team would not be so grudging and would welcome that excellent achievement.

Bosnia

11. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the defence requirements to protect safe areas in Bosnia from violation by Serb forces.

Mr. Rifkind: The provision of United Nations troops, in regard to safe areas, is a matter for the United Nations Secretary-General and for United Nations protection force commanders.

Mr. Griffiths: For how long will the Secretary of State wash his hands of that problem and of the responsibilities? Does he not realise that when no-fly zones become free-fire zones for the Serbs and when safe areas become unsafe areas for slaughter, Orwellian language is alive and well and thriving in the Ministry of Defence here?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman might feel better for the use of such language, but it bears no relationship to the excellent work that the United Nations is doing in Bosnia, which has led to a cessation of hostilities and has meant that British forces are able to carry out their responsibilities, throughout the vast majority of Bosnia, without the risks and dangers that they faced there a short time ago.

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that those people who think that there are simple, surgical and overnight solutions to some of Bosnia's problems would do well to consider the Russian experience in Chechnya?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise that if one wants to take part in a war, one has to send a war-fighting capability. The United Nations has not gone to Bosnia to fight a war, but it carries out its responsibilities with all the professionalism that we would expect.

Dr. Reid: The Secretary of State must agree that there must ultimately be a political solution in that tragic theatre of war. Within that context, does he accept that the presence of the United Nations protection force in Krajina is not only a vital prerequisite to a peaceful solution there, but an integral part of our military contribution to peacekeeping? Will he assure us that he and his colleagues in the Cabinet and the Ministry of Defence will

use their good offices to ensure whatever pressure possible for the continuation of the UNPROFOR presence in Krajina after the present mandate expires?

Mr. Rifkind: It is, indeed, highly desirable that the United Nations should be permitted to continue its work in Croatia as, otherwise, there could be a recommencement of the fighting in that country, which could have dangerous implications for the whole of the Balkans.

Trident

12. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to scrap Trident.

Mr. Rifkind: We have no plans to scrap Trident, which is the ultimate guarantee of our national security.

Mr. Streeter: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that his reply will greatly reassure all right-thinking people, particularly the 4,000 people in Devon and Cornwall whose jobs rely on the Trident contract? Will he resist calls for a further defence review from the leader of the Labour party and the Labour defence team, all of whom are former members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament? Is not a review led by such people unlikely to support Trident?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is correct because every defence spokesman on the Opposition Front Bench has been a declared opponent of Britain's nuclear deterrent. We would all be grateful to know whether the shadow Defence Secretary is still a member of CND or has left that organisation because, until now, he has declined to inform either Parliament or the country as a whole.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 31 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further meetings later today.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Has my right hon. Friend read the remarks by the chairman of Daimler-Benz in Germany, who has warned that he will move his firm out of Germany if the social chapter continues to pile costs on his business? Does not that show that my right hon. Friend's stand in safeguarding the British opt-out is absolutely right and beneficial to British business? If Daimler-Benz decided to come to this country, would my right hon. Friend welcome it? May I suggest that there are many suitable sites in north-west England?

The Prime Minister: I did see the remarks by the chairman of Daimler-Benz. I would, of course, be delighted to welcome Daimler-Benz to the United Kingdom, just as we welcomed Honda, Black and Decker, Samsung, Toyota and many others. My hon. Friend may not yet know that a survey today found that job prospects in Britain are better than in any other country in the European Union. Ironically, on this day of all days, socialist Members of the European Parliament, including Labour MEPs, have called for an end to our opt-out of the social chapter. I suggest that they speedily seek an audience with the chairman of Daimler-Benz.

Mr. Blair: On rail privatisation, does the Prime Minister accept that it is a necessary consequence of setting a guaranteed level of service below the existing levels of service that private operators will have the right and the power to cut existing services, and that he will be powerless to stop it?

The Prime Minister: I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that, this afternoon, the operators will make it clear that they do not intend to cut services. However, they do intend to exercise their freedom to increase services. Unless one is to sterilise the British rail system in its entirety, they need that flexibility. They will provide additional services and will say so this afternoon. If the right hon. Gentleman were serious about improving the service, he would not stand in the way of those reforms for his own ideological reasons but would join us in modernising a railway that can and will provide a better service for people in the future.

Mr. Blair: First, on the point about additional routes that operators are seeking today, will the Prime Minister confirm that those who are making those bids today are wholly owned British Rail subsidiaries, and that that will not bind the private operators? Secondly, if he is so certain that they will keep or increase existing services, why not specify and guarantee that in their contracts?

The Prime Minister: I made that point in terms of directing the improved services at the times and on the tracks that people want. The right hon. Gentleman might be reassured by what the chairman of Railtrack will also be saying today. He makes it clear that it is on the cards that the operators may want to increase their services still further and want additional track agreements with Railtrack to enable them to do so. It is becoming clear that those interested in running the service are interested, as are the Government, in improving the service and not leaving it in its present inadequate state.

Mr. Blair: The right hon. Gentleman wants to improve the service, but is not it true that, under privatisation so far, some services have been cut, some are to be removed altogether, through ticketing is to be reduced and, today, he cannot even guarantee the existing level of service? In those circumstances is it any wonder that the public would prefer to keep British Rail as a public service, not break it up and sell it up to satisfy some faction in the Tory party?

The Prime Minister: I know that the right hon. Gentleman wants to continue his political campaign against private ownership of British Rail. But he might make himself a little better informed about the existing situation before he begins to spread such scare stories. Under the present nationalised service arrangements, no service is protected—nor was it under any previous Labour Government—and never has been. The passenger service requirements to be unveiled today will, for the first time, underpin minimum contractual guarantees. The service provided will be in two components: the minimum guarantee to ensure that those services cannot be cut and the additional service that the private sector has already

indicated that it will run in addition to the minimum guarantee. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will now look at the reality and stop spreading scare stories.

Mr. Sims: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the responsibility for both the manner and pace at which the European Union develops lies with the Governments of the member states, individually and collectively, not with the Commission, which is the Union's servant, not its master?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can confirm that to my hon. Friend. I think that there will be a number of members of the European Union at the forthcoming intergovernmental conference who will wish to ensure that the primacy of the European Council itself is enshrined and improved. I do not believe that the United Kingdom will be alone in seeking those particular changes. We all wish to see the European Union develop in a satisfactory way that is compatible with the interests of the people and the nation states across Europe. We have a number of positive proposals to make to that end, and we shall set them out in the weeks ahead.

Q2. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Clarke: Given that the American Congress and Senate have accepted that there is evidence to confirm the existence of Gulf war syndrome and given that 421 former British service personnel have been identified as suffering in a similar way, does the Prime Minister agree that there is an urgent need for an inquiry? Does he accept that, as those people were willing to give their lives when he asked them, he has a moral responsibility to ensure that such an inquiry takes place?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman may know, the Medical Research Council has thus far found no evidence of Gulf war syndrome. We have told people who believe that they are suffering from any ailment as a result of the Gulf war to come forward and be examined so that we may determine the position for ourselves. I believe that the hon. Gentleman is wrong in the way that he refers to the American Government. I do not believe that they have made the statement that he attributes to them.

Q3. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Marshall: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Hendon school in my constituency was the first school in London to become a grant-maintained school? Since then, it has been transformed and is now heavily oversubscribed. Will my right hon. Friend welcome the increased popularity of grant-maintained schools, particularly among the Opposition? Does he agree that it is disgraceful double standards for those who seek to deny others the freedom of choice to then exercise it themselves?

The Prime Minister: I think that we all look forward to the day when the Opposition preach what they practise—it is self-evident that that has not been the case with education in the past. Of course, all parents want what is best for their children, and they are right to do so. We wish to ensure that the freedoms which are exercised quite correctly by Opposition Members in the interests of their own children are not denied to other people by Opposition policies.

Mr. Ashdown: Given that the Prime Minister has already said, quite rightly, that education is the key to the country's success, how does he justify cutting—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Just a moment, Mr. Ashdown. Order. I call Mr. Ashdown.

Mr. Ashdown: Given that education is the key to the country's future, how does the Prime Minister justify cutting the allocation for education to local education authorities by a sum equivalent to £50 less for every primary school pupil and £200 less for every secondary school pupil in the land?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman knows what the funding increases have been over recent years. I also give the right hon. Gentleman credit for appreciating that, quite apart from the increased resources that have gone into education in recent years, we have improved the quality and standard of education significantly through our reform of the curriculum; the opportunity that we have provided to schools to become grant maintained; the opportunity for testing children and for parents to know what that testing is; and through the publication of the performance tables, which ensures that there is peer pressure on bad schools.

It would be more gracious for the right hon. Gentleman, who claims to be concerned about education—and I am sure that he is—to acknowledge those reforms which are now accepted in practice even by the official Opposition.

Q4. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pawsey: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that he has no plans to abolish grammar schools, grant-maintained schools, city technology colleges, the assisted places scheme or the charitable status of independent schools? Can he further confirm that he has no plans to introduce a graduate tax? All of those ideas are being actively promoted by Opposition Members.

The Prime Minister: I am certainly pleased to confirm that to my hon. Friend. In recent years we have set out a series of education reforms which have now been accepted by the trade unions and teachers and welcomed by parents and many others. I believe that we can now look forward to a period of improvement and stability in education. The changes proposed by the Labour party will recreate unnecessary chaos. We have stability in education and we must retain it. We do not want the denial of choice that is proposed by the official Opposition.

Mr. Shore: In view of M. Santer's speech at Davos last weekend calling for early progress toward a single European currency and for reducing the voting power of

the larger member states, does not the Prime Minister agree that, far from being the right man in the right place at the right time, he is in fact the wrong man in the wrong place at the wrong time?

The Prime Minister: It would be extremely difficult to find a Commission President candidate who, on those two points, would not take the same position as the present President. If the right hon. Gentleman cares to plough through the rest of the Commission President's speech perhaps he will welcome the fact that the President said that many people perceive a

"bureaucratic, byzantine, technocratic Brussels maze."

The right hon. Gentleman will no doubt agree with that.

The President also gave top priority to tackling Europe's declining competitiveness, completing the single market in telecommunications and energy, ensuring the proper performance of single market rules, free trade and a strong common foreign security policy. Each and every one of those are British priorities in the European Union and they have been endorsed by the President of the Commission.

Q5. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bellingham: Will my right hon. Friend find time this afternoon to have a word with Department of Social Security Ministers? They will tell him that since last August, 10,500 non-British residents have been refused income support. That is a great saving to the DSS, despite opposition from Labour and the Social Affairs Commissioner. Does not that vindicate Government policy of concentrating benefits on people who need them most, in stark contrast to Labour which, in respect of benefits, is prepared to turn a blind eye to fraud and abuse?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree about the nature of changes introduced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. I do not believe that any British taxpayer is happy subsidising people who have no close ties with the United Kingdom but who have been receiving benefit payments without having made contributions. The changes we made bring the United Kingdom more in line with our European partners, whose safety-net benefits are not normally available to our nationals freshly arrived in their countries.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: Is the Prime Minister aware that as the result of the botched introduction of reduced junior doctors' hours, the accident and emergency unit at Broadgreen hospital in my constituency is being forced to close its doors sooner than planned? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that that means patients presenting themselves for emergency treatment will suffer greater anxiety and pain, and that doctors and nurses will face greater stress? Will the Prime Minister accept that nothing less than the resignation of the Secretary of State for Health will satisfy the people whom I represent?

The Prime Minister: I think that even the hon. Lady's hon. Friends felt that she did not get the last part of her question right. I will not take lectures on health from the hon. Lady. As she is clearly aiming at what is happening in the health service, perhaps she will say whether she agrees with statements by Labour's official health spokesman and other Labour Members as to the level of health spending. There are substantial differences. The Labour party is utterly split on that issue, as on so many others. One day, the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends will concentrate on the remarkable improvements achieved by people in the national health service, not carp and criticise week after week after week, and seek to undermine the service.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance on what appears to have become a conspiracy to cover up an hon. Member's voting record. The question is whether or not the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), Labour's Front-Bench spokesman on agriculture, voted for the export of live animals in 1975.

Hansard shows that, after the debate on 17 January 1975 following the O'Brien report, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East, on a free vote, voted for the restoration of the export of live animals. Furthermore, on 17 April 1975 in an Adjournment debate—[HON. MEMBERS: "What is the point of order?"] The point of order is that it was not just in one free vote that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East demonstrated his support for the export of live animals, but in his subsequent actions. In those circumstances, what can be done by the House to establish the truth and to expose what appears to be a conspiracy?

Madam Speaker: First, I take it that the hon. Gentleman informed the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) that he intended to raise that matter today.

Mr. Marland *indicated assent.*

Madam Speaker: That is as it should be.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. This is an abuse of the time of the House. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] If Conservative Members have any doubt about that, they should read the remarks of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who accepted the position. We reached agreement on what actually happened.

I will briefly state the facts. In 1973, I voted to stop the export of live animals, on a Labour motion. The Conservative Government, who opposed that motion, set up the O'Brien committee. By the time that a Labour Government were elected in 1975, of which I was a member, the O'Brien committee had recommended increased safeguards and resumption of the trade. I might add that the trade then was in cattle and pigs, and was small compared with now. I, as a member of the Labour Government, voted with those on the Conservative Front Bench and with the Labour Government for a resumption of the trade.

It is nonsense to make such a meal of this. I have never sought to misrepresent the position. It is the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) who, at Prime Minister's questions a fortnight ago, misrepresented it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I will hear no further points of order on that matter. Points of order on it are becoming far too frequent. It has now been cleared up once and for all.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Last week, I tabled a series of questions for written answer regarding incidents of fire, crimes of violence, unannounced station closures and train cancellations on London Underground. Such questions had been answered in some detail in the *Official Report* in June 1994.

The reply that I received from the Minister for Transport in London on 27 January of this year was that these are operational matters for London Underground. Surely that constitutes an abdication not only of Government responsibility but of accountability to this House and to Londoners. I should be grateful for your advice on how to proceed in this matter.

Madam Speaker: As far as I am aware, there has been no change of policy. Ministers are responsible for the answers that they give. As far as I know, and as the hon. Lady has told the House, these are day-to-day matters of an operational nature. I am sure that she would want to find other ways of pursuing them, possibly with London Underground direct—or she may even try to get an Adjournment debate.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &C

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

SEX DISCRIMINATION (ARMED FORCES)

That the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Application to Armed Forces etc.) Regulations 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 3276) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

Motor Vehicle Insurance Certificate Display

3.36 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require all registered owners of motor vehicles to display prominently on each vehicle owned a valid certificate of insurance and for it to be an offence if no certificate is so displayed.

This is a straightforward Bill with a single aim: to reduce and eliminate the problems created by the uninsured motorist for the insured motorist—problems of personal tragedy, financial difficulty and abuse of the law.

As the House knows, the law requires vehicles to be road-taxed, to undergo Ministry of Transport testing when of a certain age, and to be insured. On that last requirement, estimates vary, but it is reckoned that at least 1 million motorists currently drive without insurance. Other estimates whose accuracy I have no reason to doubt place the figure nearer 2 million or over 2 million.

The House will accept that this involves a cost, as all hon. Members will testify, knowing the cases of real hardship and personal anxiety that cross our desks from time to time. There is a cost to the insured, honest motorist, as recognised by the Association of British Insurers in a paper issued last year, which states, among other things:

"The cost of uninsured motoring has risen by an unacceptable extent over the last few years, and continues to rise."

Motorists who do insure are entitled to be protected against this cost. There is no reason why they should pay a surcharge on their premiums to meet the obligations of motorists who are not insured. But the honest motorist is paying a surcharge to pay for claims dealt with by the Motor Insurers Bureau, set up in 1946 by the industry with the aim of meeting judgments in respect of third party personal injury claims—and additionally, since 1989, of third party property damage claims.

In 1988, the Motor Insurance Bureau paid out £26 million in claims. But for 1994, the figure seems likely to be in excess of £100 million. The final figure for that year, including other categories, may well be in excess of £250 million. My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) pointed out, in an excellent trail-blazing speech last year:

"The failure to tackle the problem vigorously is expensive, because uninsured motorists give rise to claims bills of some £250 million a year. Thus, a £250 million subsidy is paid by honest motorists to dishonest motorists. The Motor Insurance Bureau is funded by a 2.5 per cent. levy on motor insurance policies, which is not much different from the insurance premium tax, on which so much objection has been expressed."

My hon. Friend later pointed out a parallel with the vehicle excise duty, and said:

"Some important parallels can be drawn with vehicle excise duty, for which the display of valid cover is mandatory. There are 140,000 convictions a year for failing to display a road fund licence. They are not displayed because they have not been bought; but the chances of identifying 140,000 evaders without a requirement to display would be minimal."

He continued:

"So the need to display enhances compliance. I submit that, were not the tax disc required to be displayed, the level of evasion would be much higher. It therefore follows that, if an insurance disc were required to be displayed, the number of uninsured motorists would be likely to decrease or the number of evaders apprehended would increase."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 1446-48.]

We have international comparisons to draw on. In 1986, the Government of the Republic of Ireland went over to an insurance disc display system. Prior to that, 20 to 25 per cent. of Irish drivers were uninsured. Yet one year following the introduction of the display disc, the percentage of uninsured motorists fell to less than 10 per cent. Similar systems are in operation in France and the United States.

My interest in the matter first started in the days when my noble Friend the Baroness Chalker was Minister of State, Department of Transport. I raised the issue with her—I was treated kindly—but to no effect. Other colleagues in the House have raised the matter over the years, and it is time that something was done. To have between 1 million and 2 million uninsured motorists driving on our roads is unacceptable.

I believe that this simple measure, which requires the owner of a motor vehicle to display a valid insurance certificate on his or her windscreen or vehicle, in a prominent place, would ease the burden that I have described. There is a cost to the insurance industry and to the Treasury, but more importantly to the motorist and the road user.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Bob Dunn, Sir Jim Spicer, Mr. Jacques Arnold, Mr. Douglas French, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Sir Anthony Grant, Mr. John Marshall and Mr. James Pawsey.

MOTOR VEHICLE INSURANCE CERTIFICATE DISPLAY

Mr. Bob Dunn accordingly presented a Bill to require all registered owners of motor vehicles to display prominently on each vehicle owned a valid certificate of insurance and for it to be an offence if no certificate is so displayed: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 3 March, and to be printed. [Bill 41.]

Opposition Day

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY]

National Health Service

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.44 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I beg to move,

That this House views with alarm the growing evidence of dangerously inadequate patient care and of overstretched staff and facilities in the National Health Service; takes heed of the testimonies of those senior staff who are still free to speak, who say that the very existence of a nationwide service in health care is at risk; rejects the drive to replace it by local health businesses; and calls for a moratorium on bed closures in London, and on the Government to reassess their dogma-driven policy changes and to foster co-operation, not competition, between staff and institutions.

We move the motion today at a time when the Conservative party's "huge national experiment", as the chief executive of the NHS has described it, is turning health care into health chaos. Many of those who work in the health service would view with considerable irony the wording of the Government's amendment, since they think that the Government have already created chaos out of the health service as it is.

We move the motion at a time when those charged with responsibility for the public health of our nation are held in ever-rising contempt by lifelong Conservatives who are also distinguished consultants. The British Medical Association's "News" reported in October 1994 that half of consultants surveyed believed that the standard of care had declined in the last five years and 63 per cent. believed that the NHS as we know it will disintegrate. The Government are held in contempt by staff at every level of the health service, by journalists on newspapers that span the political spectrum, but, above all, by the wider British public.

There is today a threat to the sheer existence of the NHS that the Government and the Prime Minister claimed was safe in their hands. The threat shows in the evidence: in a growing catalogue of difficulties and problems—in the events. Problems can and do arise under any Government, but not on the scale, for the duration or with the consistency with which they are arising under this Government.

The threat shows too in the testimony of staff of the health service—privately, for those in fear of the sack, publicly, for those who feel that they are still free to speak. The threat shows in the stark evidence that, whatever the Prime Minister said last October at his conference, the NHS is being privatised, by stealth, before our eyes and with intent, and the only people who are not supposed to be in on the secret are the people of Britain.

Let us begin with the evidence of decay. This debate is taking place after a week in which the corpse of a patient was found under piping in St. Thomas's hospital, parents in Truro found a hypodermic needle under their baby's skin, a woman in Sheffield's Royal Hallamshire hospital left her bed for five minutes, I believe to go to the loo, and returned to find that it had been taken away for use in another part of the hospital.

Nor are those isolated incidents. There is other evidence too of decay and decline in the health service. The latest final figure of 1,071,000 is the highest published total of people on waiting lists since records of in-patients and day cases waiting have been available. When the provisional waiting list was published, Ministers boasted, and have gone on boasting, that their reforms have delivered shorter waiting lists, but when the corrected final figures showed a record high, Ministers were uncharacteristically silent. They did not even issue a press release.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I recognise that the right hon. Lady is relatively new to her job, but the Government have consistently talked about waiting times. Does the right hon. Lady recognise that the average length of time that an individual has been on a waiting list has just about halved since the reforms came in? What is more, does she recognise that the new patients charter, for the first time ever with a standard for out-patients, means that not only has a dramatic improvement in long waiters been achieved, but a limit has been set on out-patient waits?

Mrs. Beckett: The Secretary of State need not disturb herself. I propose to come later to the Government's waiting list figures, and to put them in context.

It is noticeable that on this as on so many other occasions, the right hon. Lady chose not to refer to the point that I made but to raise some other point entirely. That is a characteristic habit of hers, and one which does not contribute to the public's trust in her. As for the length of time that I have been in my post, indeed it has been very short. If I had been in the Secretary of State's post as long as she has, I would be ashamed of myself.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is now a waiting list to get on to a waiting list? As I have pointed out twice before in the House, I waited 14 months to see a specialist before I was placed on a waiting list for treatment—and I needed that treatment. That is the position in the north-west, writ large.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right. As I hope to show later, that is widely true in the country as a whole—which is why what the Secretary of State says so often seems irrelevant.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): In fact, there are now three waiting lists. There is a waiting list to get an appointment, followed by a waiting list to get a consultation; then, and only then, are patients put on a waiting list to obtain treatment.

Mrs. Beckett: That is quite true, and highlights what could be described as a question mark. I believe that it was in yesterday's *Daily Telegraph* that a journalist observed that the Secretary of State gives plenty of statistics, some of which are correct and some of which bear more than one interpretation.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I hate to correct my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes), but there are not three but four waiting lists. Having eventually gone through three waiting lists at my local hospital, the daughter of one of my constituents was given an appointment for an operation and was then kept waiting for six hours. She was told to telephone at 7.30 the following day; there was no bed. She was told to

telephone again at 8.30, then at 9.30, then at 10.30. At 11.30, she was told again that there was no bed for her. She is going back next March.

Mrs. Beckett: This has been an interesting exchange. The same thing is happening throughout Britain. Ministers, and the Secretary of State in particular, trot out statistics which, although not necessarily inaccurate—they are inaccurate sometimes, however—are relatively meaningless. One hon. Member after another can rise to contradict them from his or her own experience.

I have never regarded *The Daily Telegraph* as a socialist rag, but, according to yesterday's edition, this is why the Secretary of State is so distrusted and disliked.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow) *rose—*

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester) *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: I advise the hon. Gentlemen, both of whom represent very marginal seats, to be wary of associating themselves with such perceived deceit of the country.

Mr. Hayes: Is there not a fifth waiting list—the longest of all? How long have we been waiting to hear the Labour party's health policies?

Mrs. Beckett *rose—*

Mr. Brandreth: The right hon. Lady spoke of decay. How does she square that with the increase of some 8,000 in the number of doctors and dentists over the past decade, and the fact that there are 3,000 more general practitioners? Most patients in my constituency are now looked after by fundholding GPs, and they seem to like the service they are getting.

Can the right hon. Lady tell us the cost and the implications of her proposals to abandon GP fundholding, which is working well in my constituency? My constituents believe that those proposals would increase bureaucracy and the number of local committees, and would reduce the amount of patient care, which has been improved by the introduction of fundholding. More doctors and better service: that is what we seem to be getting in Chester.

Mrs. Beckett: I am familiar with some of the claims that are made for the advantages of fundholding—*[Interruption.]* There is no need for the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) to scream at me; I can hear her quite clearly.

Patients are almost always happy with the service they receive from their GPs—and a very good thing, too—whether or not the practice involved is fundholding. Let me, however, say two things to the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth). First, it is far from proven that the advantages to patients of fundholders are linked with the fundholding system itself. Secondly, let me recommend to the hon. Gentleman—who has talked of costs and bureaucracy—an article published, I believe, last week in the fundholders' own magazine. It suggested that the administrative and knock-on cost of each fundholding practice was some £80,000.

I have been in the House, and studied the present Government, rather longer than the hon. Gentleman.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Too long.

Mrs. Beckett: May I remind the hon. Lady that it is I who am making the speech? She says that I am speaking for too long, but I am making a speech and not an intervention.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I said that the right hon. Lady had been in the House for too long.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Lady has succeeded: I have finally forgotten what I was going to say. I am sure I shall remember shortly.

The main point that I am making to the hon. Member for City of Chester is that the advantages that he claims to exist are not necessarily related to the system of fundholding. Many doctors who have taken it up do not actually support the system as it now exists, but believe that they are wise to take advantage of the money while it is there.

I have now remembered what I was going to say to the hon. Gentleman. Long scrutiny of the Government's policies tells me as clear as day that, once the costs of fundholding become apparent, GPs who hold funds will be squeezed and squeezed and squeezed. They have been bribed into the system, as they are aware, by the use of public money. I assure the hon. Gentleman that it will not last. The more of them there are, the less generous the Government will be to them.

I have been diverted from my speech, and I had better return to it.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham) *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way. I am sure that he will have an opportunity later. I know that he is one of the Government's avant-garde when it comes to interventions. *[Interruption.]* I hope that I am not complimenting the hon. Gentleman too much.

A survey of English regional health authorities showed today that more than 10,000 operations were cancelled on the day of or after admission to hospital, and that about 10 per cent. of the people involved were not readmitted within a month. The number of hospital complaints has risen 300 per cent. in the past 10 years. That is a good example of how different interpretations can be put on the evidence.

In *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday, the Secretary of State said that the 300 per cent. increase in hospital complaints was evidence of how well the system was working, because it was easier for people to make complaints. The *Daily Telegraph* reporter asked her, if she judged such an increase in complaints as evidence of success, by what measure she would judge failure—a pertinent point, and one that I have yet to hear the Secretary of State deal with. I am sure that she will come to that matter in her speech.

Hospital and ward closures are continuing. The NHS lost more than 10,000 beds in 1993.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: There have been increases in day cases.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Lady is right. The number of hospital beds has decreased partly as a result of day case

[Mrs. Beckett]

treatment, and partly because of the advantages of medical technology. Will she explain, however, why, side by side with reductions in the number of beds in the public sector, the number of beds in the private sector has increased? It is clear to us that what is happening is a matter not simply of medical advance, but of changing direction in the provision of health care in Britain. That is especially striking when it comes to psychiatric beds, where the position is even more crystal clear.

A study, which I think was carried out by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, suggests that many units, especially those in London, have a so-called bed occupancy rate of more than 100 per cent. The study states that some units in inner London have a bed occupancy rate of 120 per cent. because of the disappearance of long-stay beds. The number of people needing care far exceeds the number of beds in which to treat them.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: The right hon. Lady referred to anecdotes from her colleagues. She might like to hear the anecdote of a constituent of mine who rang up to say how pleased he was with the treatment that he had received in our local NHS—a treatment that was not available on the NHS only a few years ago, and especially not under the Labour Government. The only reason that he is receiving the treatment is the more than 50 per cent. real terms increase in the Government's spending on the health service.

Mrs. Beckett: As I said in our previous debate—I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was here on that occasion—in all honesty, people in the NHS and the British public find few things more offensive than Conservative Members taking the credit for medical advances, for the work of health service staff, or for anything else that has gone right in the health service, especially when they so patently refuse to take the blame for anything that has gone wrong. I am delighted to hear that his constituent—

Mr. Arnold: That will not wash.

Mrs. Beckett: Public reaction suggests that that is exactly what the British people believe, and they are right to believe it.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): All too often, because of financial restraints and financial considerations, patients are discharged from hospital far too quickly, purely on financial, rather than medical, grounds. Is not that one of the ways in which the Government reduce the number of beds, and one of the factors that lead to complaints? Even worse, on some occasions those patients do not even have the back-up so that they can be looked after when they get home.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is right. Real concern exists about whether we respond adequately to the changes with discharge procedures, and about whether we are considering readmissions and other matters. We continually press the Government on that matter.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): The right hon. Lady focused on psychiatric care, a subject in which the Secretary of State has some professional expertise. Does the right hon. Lady agree that it is not only the shortage of psychiatric beds in London that is a scandal but the fact that some patients are being shunted 100 or 200 miles from their homes although their families are an essential element in their psychiatric treatment?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. and learned Gentleman is entirely right. It is especially worrying that this most vulnerable group of people are being treated in that way. No one who knows the position is at all happy or satisfied with the level of care that it implies.

A survey carried out by the Royal College—

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, I am sorry, but I had better get on. I have given way a great deal already; I may give way later if I have time.

A survey carried out by the Royal College of Radiologists was cited in a *Which?* survey of the Government's health care changes—I know that the Government always approve of consumer surveys. The *Which?* report states:

"A survey carried out by the Royal College of Radiologists in 1993 found that 14 out of 29 cancer units reported waiting times for radiotherapy of four weeks or longer. In some cases the delay is seven or eight weeks"—

which no one can think desirable in terms of health care.

The *Evening Standard* has done a great deal of work on health care, and it is noticeable—this pattern occurs not only in London but across Britain—that it has more health stories that worry reporters, editors and readers than it can readily print. On 25 January, the *Evening Standard* stated:

"This winter, there have been several occasions when not a single intensive-care bed has been available anywhere in the capital for either an adult or a child."

Despite that fact, seven of London's 48 intensive care units are said to face closure.

I refer now to the Secretary of State's use of statistics. *Which?* states:

"It simply isn't true"—

as the Secretary of State said yesterday—

"to say that no one is waiting more than two years. The figures published by the Government under the Patient's Charter"—

which I regard as a cone hot line for the health service—

"reflect"—

they should do so, but they do not—

"the experience of people".

The article draws attention to the fact that the top priority in the NHS since the Government's so-called reforms has been to reduce waiting times and how much money the Government have put into it, but it also states that the targets and proposals represent only half the story. It finishes by saying:

"The only national figures"

for waiting times

"that are currently published are compiled by the independently-funded College of Health. These show that some patients wait well over a year or more to see a specialist, who then decides whether or not to put them on a waiting list."

It goes on to state that some of the longest waits are of three years for general surgery and more than two years for orthopaedic care.

I am struck by the fact that the Secretary of State used to imply—I do not want to misrepresent her, but it may even be that she used to say—that the issue to which my

hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) drew attention—that of people waiting to go on waiting lists—was not a problem. Suddenly, however, a standard has been set in the patients charter, which suggests that the Secretary of State was perhaps being less than forthright with us in the past.

The Prime Minister's local hospital is this month turning patients away because of a bed crisis. People are having to be sent 70 miles away, and the hospital has twice closed its doors to all admissions, once for a full 24 hours. A three-year-old girl in urgent need of treatment for asthma was turned away from St. Thomas's before Christmas and eventually had to be taken to Addenbrooke's in Cambridge.

In another incident, a war veteran had to wait at King's. After he had waited several hours in casualty, his family asked whether a private bed was available, and one was found within 50 minutes. There has since been a dispute, as it seems that the family had apparently misunderstood that they might be asked to pay, but of course the hospital did not intend them to pay, at least once the press got on the case.

The Hull Royal infirmary has recently had difficulties with staffing, and asked that patients with minor injuries should, if possible, care for their own injuries rather than go to the accident and emergency department.

A leaked report from the King's Fund draws attention to a range of problems, such as lack of privacy, inadequate early pain relief and the lack of information given to patients waiting for beds. It says that Government policy should have been based on well-researched facts rather than "anecdotal evidence" before accepting the Tomlinson committee's hypothesis about London. It continues:

"It might have been possible to predict the current increase in patients waiting long periods on trolleys in London's A and E departments as the level of hospital resources in the capital continues its ever-downward spiral."

Earlier this week, a report was published by the—

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, I really must get on.

A report to the Secretary of State was published by the Clinical Standards Advisory Group about the problems caused by people having to wait for treatment in accident and emergency departments. We discovered that, although that report was published this January, it was sent to the Secretary of State last January. The Secretary of State has been sitting on it for a year, until—presumably—she could come up with some proposal for a trolley standard for her new patients charter.

The report says—*[Interruption.]* I do not know if Conservative Members think that that is funny. I certainly do not think that it is funny at all. The report says that NHS market changes—the changes that the Government have made to the structure of the health service—are causing hospitals to concentrate on non-urgent work, on which their income depends, at the expense of work to treat accidents and emergencies. The report also says that, in hospitals where people have to wait the longest times to be treated in accident and emergency units, the highest rates of death in those accident and emergency units occur.

My final quote from the press in this section of my speech is of the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), who said to the *Evening Standard*:

"Every week I fight to get people into hospital within the year."

Perhaps some of his hon. Friends should have a word with the right hon. Gentleman.

In considering the evidence of problems in the health service and how widespread those problems are, I shall refer to the Casualty Watch results of 30 January. Under that procedure, people go into different casualty departments and ask people what is happening, why they are there and how long they have been waiting.

In Queen Mary's, someone with heart failure was being seen and was to be admitted, but had already been waiting for almost two and a half hours. In Bromley, someone of 81 years of age with pneumonia was awaiting treatment for three and a half hours. In King's hospital, someone who had collapsed with hypothermia was waiting for more than three and a half hours. Also in Bromley, someone of 77 who had had a heart attack was awaiting a bed for almost four hours. In King's again, someone who had diarrhoea and vomiting had to wait for almost four hours for a bed. Also, someone of 95 years old who had infectious diarrhoea was waiting almost four hours for a bed.

There is a whole string of such cases. They are all a snapshot of what is happening in our national health service accident and emergency units in one day. The worst cases included those in Chase Farm, where someone of 78 with diarrhoea and bed sores had been waiting for almost seven hours, and someone with gastritis, who had previously arrived at 4 o'clock in the morning and who reappeared at 10 o'clock in the morning, had been waiting for seven hours.

Someone in Newham of 75 years old had heart failure and had been waiting for eight hours to be admitted. That is the health service in which the Conservative party says its reforms have solved all the problems, and that there is no need for the Secretary of State to continue to address them.

I turn now to the testimony of the staff.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): What a sad catalogue.

Mrs. Beckett: Yes, it is a sad catalogue, but it is the state to which the Government have reduced our national health service. The very least that the Government can do, when patients in that service are waiting seven hours to be admitted—elderly patients, people who fought in the war and who were in this country during the war—and the very least that the Minister can do is listen for 40 minutes to what his Government have done.

The chairman of the BMA—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mrs. Beckett: I am more interested in the testimony of the staff of the health service at the moment than that of Conservative Members. The chairman of the BMA, Dr. Macara, said:

"There is despair in the air today . . . despair about the mood of alienation and demoralisation in the NHS."

He talked about the Government's changes being

"to serve a perverse philosophy of winners and losers."

[Mrs. Beckett]

There also is the testimony of Dr. Lee-Potter, a self-described lifelong Tory voter, but perhaps not for much longer. He says that the Government's changes in the health service are dogma driven, and that the Government may claim that what they are doing is not privatisation, but it

"is the next best thing."

He hopes that people will recognise that, if someone such as he is saying how disastrous the changes are, matters really must be bad.

Five professors, world-renowned experts in molecular genetics, resigned from the health service in the summer. Four more are considering their positions. They talk about Government policy forcing them

"to engage in a competitive destructive conflict"

and how the Government's changes have

"poisoned the environment between research groups who should be collaborating with one another and instead are being forced into competition."

In a letter to *The Guardian* on 28 January, the professor of diabetic medicine at the Royal Hallamshire hospital in Sheffield said that people

"should realise that they are sitting on a medico-legal time bomb . . . The image created is of an improved modern NHS . . . The reality is stress and dangerous practices relating to the pressures and it has become worse in the past year".

He went on to say:

"Five years ago our wonderful NHS was reasonable but had some problems. Now reason has gone out of the window and problems dominate."

Earlier this week, Charles Clarke, a distinguished neurologist, said:

"As a neurologist I can no longer offer effective emergency care at either hospital in the trust to the district general hospital I serve . . . in the last six days I have been unable to admit six out of seven patients I regarded as emergencies".

He talks about there being fewer beds available in future.

There is also the testimony of London's leading cancer experts, who are finding it increasingly difficult in the market-based NHS to obtain permission to undertake trials and to become involved in research, because that is not the priority of those who control the purse strings.

I shall finish by quoting an anonymous contribution from a junior hospital doctor who wrote—again—to *The Guardian*. It is sad, is it not, but people will write to and read that newspaper, much though Ministers dislike it and much though they object? He or she said:

"I work as a junior hospital doctor in a typical district general hospital. Over the last 18 months I have seen the hospital spiral into crisis."

That person talks about patients waiting in casualty for up to 10 hours before being transferred to an outlying ward, and calls the patients charter a sick joke. He or she finishes by saying:

"Patients are already suffering unnecessarily, and some have died . . . The situation continues to deteriorate and soon the NHS will have sunk altogether."

[Interruption.] One hears just about barely sotto voce comments from Conservative Members about how awful and terrible it is to quote all those newspapers.

In our previous debate, the Minister of State accused me of simply talking from the point of view of what the Labour party thought about the health service. He demanded evidence. He asked for testimony as to whether there were any problems in the health service. I am giving him testimony in spades. I assure the Minister of State and the Secretary of State that there are shovelfuls more where that came from. All of it is the real experience of patients and doctors of the problems in today's health service, under the Government and resulting from the changes that they have made.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I will give way shortly. *[Interruption.]* How dare the Under-Secretary of State for Wales? It is not a lazy speech to quote extensively from the experience of patients and doctors. It requires great work, study and collaboration. The hon. Gentleman hates and resents it because I have given him the authentic voice and experience of patients, the authentic voice and experience of the medical profession, of the nursing profession and of everybody else. The Government's stupidity and insensitivity will ultimately bring them down.

Mr. Tracey: The right hon. Lady has read us rather a lot of press cuttings, and I accept that she thinks that those are making her case. Will she comment on the latest edition of "Social Trends", which reports that our population is healthier now than it is has ever been? Presumably that also includes the time of Labour Governments.

Mrs. Beckett: Factually, what the hon. Gentleman says is extremely questionable. There is a sharp disparity in health standards across the population. Those at the bottom of the heap in terms of income, housing and all the other policy factors which impinge upon health care are certainly doing very much worse under the Government; again, there is a great deal of testimony to that.

The Minister will be delighted to hear that I shall now quote from the Government's own document. I presume that he will not object to that. I have given evidence and testimony as to the state of the health service and the opinions of staff, and I want now to turn to the Government's purpose, which I believe is clear.

The Government are intent on ensuring that the NHS will no longer be national. They are intent on fragmenting the service and—through a failure to plan, destructive competition and profound demoralisation within the service—they are intent that the NHS shall no longer play a major role in maintaining the nation's health. Finally, by starving the NHS of resources, the Government are intent on transforming the public service into a private market.

Ministers openly advocate the privatisation and commercialisation of the NHS. The Government's own document—the NHS executive's document called "Managing The New NHS"—states that their capital investment manual

"makes it clear that private finance alternatives should be viewed as a standard option . . . Approval will not be given to business cases unless there is a clear demonstration that private finance alternatives have been adequately tested."

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): We have waited 32 minutes to hear a single word of policy from the right hon. Lady on behalf of her party. This is the big moment for which

we have all been waiting. She mentioned that resources had been starved. Is she confirming the pledge made by her predecessor, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), that Labour would increase spending on the NHS by £6 billion?

Mrs. Beckett: Nobody has ever said that. The Minister is perfectly well aware of that, although the Secretary of State continues to pretend that it has been said. We have always said that, on coming into office, we would examine the state of the NHS, see what money was available, where it was being used and whether it was being used as it should be—

Mr. Bowis *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: The Minister need not get up, as I will not give way to him again. We would see whether the money was being used properly for patient care. We would also, of course, have to assess the state of the economy and what could be afforded.

I must say that, in my day—in terms of the years of experience in the House which the Minister has had—it was usually left to Back Benchers to put the kind of point which the Minister has just raised. The Minister is obviously under-worked at the Department. I do not intend to be diverted further, but I might say to the Minister that the length of time which I have taken for my speech has been primarily due to my giving way to interventions from Conservative Members.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, as the hon. Gentleman will only make the same point.

Ministers are now openly advocating the privatisation and commercialisation of the NHS. The Government have already fragmented the service into almost 500 individual businesses competing for the profits to be made from sickness and disease.

I am asked frequently—I am sure that the Secretary of State will ask again today—why the NHS, or parts of it, should not be privatised. There is a tendency for those of us who believe in a public health service to think that that question need not even be addressed, as it is too self-evident. However, after the week that we have just had in the NHS, we should spell it out again. I shall do so briefly.

The national health service should not have been privatised, for the same reasons that British Gas should not have privatised—because a privatised service skimps on public service. Privatised services enrich executives with barrowloads of cash, and it is only about a week since we heard the figures for the huge salary increases that some of them are being paid. While such services enrich executives with cash, they threaten to cut services to the elderly and the blind.

Privatised services do less, and their public relations people make it sound like more. In a privatised service, money talks; where money is absent, and in consequence there is silence, the sick, the poor, the frail and the dying wait on trolleys in corridors, in long queues in waiting rooms, or in the frightening isolation of their homes.

At the Conservative party conference, the Prime Minister said that, while he lived and breathed, the national health service would not be privatised. He is, I suppose, living and breathing, but yet again he is being, at best, economical with the truth, because the evidence shows that the health service is being privatised.

The National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts issued an "Update" leaflet headed "Private Finance and the NHS", in which it talks about a "mixed economy" in the health service, and says that that would

"also allow for the increased participation of the private sector through the development of joint ventures."

It concludes that

"control of the joint venture must be in the hands of the private sector partner".

The Secretary of State has said:

"Private finance should be the rule and not the exception."

In a recent survey carried out by the *Health and Social Service Journal*, health service managers express their concern and say that they are unhappy about the process of market testing being driven by the Government because they fear that it is

"so time consuming that any benefit gained would be offset by the costs . . . In addition, scarce resources might well be diverted into unprofitable procedures for the sake of quasi-political dogma."

Yet the Government have spent almost £1 million market-testing NHS services. They have tended to talk as if market testing were unimportant—merely for catering, or whatever, although people may have a different view about whether that is important or not.

A recent parliamentary answer to me by the Under-Secretary of State for Health clearly revealed that we have moved way beyond ancillary or support services, and that the Government have market-tested no fewer than 30 clinical and clinical support services in England during that time—services that range from anaesthetics to nuclear medicine, ophthalmology, pharmacy, and radiology, and take in a range of other core NHS clinical services on the way.

The private insurance industry is identifying those opportunities and trying to move into those fields. A conference organised by a string of private insurance companies was held in early December. They say—

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Name them.

Mrs. Beckett: Certainly. They are Norwich Union Healthcare, Friends Provident, Employers Reassurance, Guardian Health, Private Patients Plan and a whole string of other involved and interested parties. In the brochure to encourage people to attend the conference, they highlight a statement that they clearly believe will draw people there:

"As the UK population becomes increasingly receptive to the concept of private healthcare insurance . . . every player must ensure that their business strategy will increase both profit and market share."

In the lectures listed, someone was to speak on

"which methods are most effective when convincing traditional NHS clients to take private insurance cover".

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), as the shadow Health Minister, was to address the conference, and was supposed to speak on

"how far are the Labour party willing to reverse the privatisation of the healthcare industry"—

a privatisation that the Government say is not taking place.

[Mrs. Beckett]

For helpful illumination, let us turn yet again to Mr. Roy Lilley, the chairman of the Homewood trust, in whose opinion the Secretary of State places such value and whom she is so keen to defend. Mr. Lilley wrote a long article about privatisation. He said:

"Could we—or should we—'privatise' the NHS? . . . The question is more likely to be whether you could get away with it.

Technically, privatising the NHS would be easy. Trusts are tailormade for the job."

He goes on to say:

"So let us not pretend the NHS cannot be privatised, because it can—with a minimum of upheaval."

That is because of the structures which the Government have put in place, and which they keep telling us we may not disturb.

But what does it matter, because, as Mr. Lilley says in his closing paragraph:

"after all, the NHS is only a concept".

The NHS is a concept of such huge value to the British people that the Government have consistently denied the real effect and direction of their policy. But it does not stop there.

BUPA proposes to offer people lifelong disability cover policies in the near future. The reason BUPA is thinking of making that offer and moving into new areas is because it believes that the Government will reduce the disability living allowance next year, making private insurance against disability more attractive.

Whether BUPA's insight into what the Government have in mind is to do with the fact that a past chief executive of the NHS executive is now on its board, I am sure the Secretary of State can tell us. But it is interesting that what it sees as a further cut in the welfare state may be designed to create a market for private insurers.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Along with that creeping, or perhaps galloping, privatisation and greater reliance on companies such as BUPA, has my right hon. Friend noticed the increased reliance on charitable fund-raising? She may have seen in the *Nursing Times and Nursing Mirror* recently a spirited debate among nurses about whether they should spend their time fund-raising or caring for patients. Surely everyone in the House should want them to care for patients, not rattle tins on the street.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right. It is particularly alarming that they must spend time doing so when staffing levels and service in the NHS are already under so much pressure.

At the Chelsea and Westminster hospital, there is an example of a national health service ward being converted into a luxury private ward. In another case in Epsom, a ward previously closed to NHS patients because the hospital could not afford to run it then reopened to the private sector. All that is an on-going process. We are already seeing it in mainstream health care; we now see it in disability.

I was recently contacted by someone working in medical market research, who told me that insurance companies have undertaken, on the street and no doubt in the home, research to test the market for privatised general practice. People are being invited to comment on various packages of general practice which they might find attractive: a relatively straightforward core general practice service for a monthly fixed fee of £20; a more widespread service including physiotherapy and dentistry for a higher fee; paying a further fee for a full range of treatment, including hospital care; and so on. All that would be for a fully privately run and operated general practice service, rather than a public sector service.

The National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts pointed out that the only way to get privately financed primary health care centres built in inner London would be to allow private health providers to both build and operate them. So we are seeing a steady encroachment of the private sector into the national health service, which is why we say that the existence of that service is being put at risk.

I draw a parallel to the attention of the House. In the early 1980s, the Government began to squeeze funds for all the services that local authorities provided, just at a time when demography and changes in national health service care were producing increased demand for residential and nursing care for growing numbers of elderly people. They began to squeeze local authority funding and places. They began to allow—indeed, to encourage—public funds to be used to subsidise the purchase of places in the private sector to fill the gap because the public sector could no longer provide enough places for the perceived and evident need. As the bills began to grow, the Government began to rein in that level of public support, but continued a steady process of attrition—squeezing, cutting and discouraging extra alternative local authority facilities from being provided, even though the need continued to grow.

Now, we have reached the point where those in private sector residential and nursing care receive allowances that are withheld from those in local authority homes—who face a financial penalty. Local authorities are forced to spend by far the greatest bulk of the money that they have available for community care in the private sector. Increasingly, there is little or no availability of community care in the local authority sector. There is simply private sector care—the local authority is restricted to providing inspection of that care. In effect, community care is being and has been privatised.

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): Would my right hon. Friend be interested to know that my local authority of Stockport plans to charge elderly people for community care provided through the public or private sector that comes to more than £350 a week—incidentally, the price of a place in a private home? I am sure that my right hon. Friend knows that £350 a week does not provide much community care.

That policy will drive people into private sector residential care, when the object of the Government's policy is to keep them in community care. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is simply a way of local authorities trying to recoup money that they are having to spend on private nursing homes because they cannot provide community care?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. It is an example of how the process is developing still further.

The end result of the steady process of attrition that has taken place over 12 years is that people are being moved out of the shelter of the welfare state. They no longer have access to public places; they have access to limited public

funds—they have no choice but to be in a private sector place. Individuals and their families have to provide the funds to meet the costs of private sector places. It is a process of privatisation by stealth.

The existence of the national health service is being threatened. We are seeing not only a decline in standards and damage being done by Government structural changes, but a steady and deliberate process—a parallel process—of attrition of publicly funded health care.

Ministers are already talking about being neutral in their approach to public and private sector provision, which is exactly what they said about community care. Already, as I told the hon. Member for Lancaster, the number of national health service beds is falling, at the same time as the number of beds in the private sector is increasing. As a result, the number of people treated in the private sector is rising because there is no choice—there is nowhere else for them to be treated.

A conference—"Strategic Market Testing—Clinical and Clinical Support Services"—was held by a range of private sector interests. In the blurb telling people why they should attend the conference, the organisers state:

"New government guidelines on Market Testing of clinical and clinical support services are due to be published next year and there is increasing speculation that it may become a compulsory procedure for pathology services."

We are seeing exactly the same process—a neutral approach to the public or private sector, increased use of the private sector because the public sector is squeezed, then use of the private sector starts to become compulsory. All that is happening despite the fact that, on the waiting list initiatives—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, I am sorry, but I have almost finished. I would have given way earlier, but not now.

We are seeing the steady attrition of the public sector and the steady growth of the private sector irrespective of the cost involved. Take the Government's waiting list initiative as an example. There is no question but that, on average, it costs more to treat patients in the private sector than in the public sector, yet the Government continue to insist on private sector treatment.

There is no doubt that private health insurance can cause continuing problems. Lord Lawson, a former Chancellor of the Exchequer, refers to private health insurance in his book:

"There are in practice only two ways in which health care can be financed. One is by the taxpayer, and the other through the individual taking out an insurance policy"—

that is the course to which the Government are seeking to drive the British public—

"The latter method, which is the basis of the US system, inevitably results in a massive further escalation in the cost of health care".

It is not a question of value for money; it is dogma-driven policy, which was identified by Dr. Lee Potter and which has so disillusioned people like him. Speaking earlier this year, Dr. Macara said—[HON. MEMBERS: "What is Labour's policy?"] I will tell Government Members what the Labour party's policy is. Our policy is to recreate a public health service which is national in its scope and equal in its access. *[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Gentleman wish to intervene, or is he simply bellowing from a sitting position in a rather ill-mannered way?

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North-East): I am grateful to the right hon. Lady. I did not intend to intervene, but as she insists, I will do so. She has spoken very eloquently for 50 minutes, but she has not even hinted at a Labour policy. All she is giving us now is a description of the Opposition's aims. Do they not have a single policy? It is not too much to ask: just one policy to go on with.

Mrs. Beckett: I can only commend previous debates on the subject to the hon. Gentleman. We have made it very plain that we remain committed, not just in theory but in practice, to the provision of a public health service which is national in scope and which gives access to people across the country on the basis of clinical need and not on the basis of ability to pay. We are concerned that that objective is being put at risk by the Government.

We have also identified three elements in the Government's health reforms which we believe are directed specifically towards privatising the health service. Those elements are: market testing, the use of the internal market and the introduction of competition; the introduction of individual trusts, tailor-made, as Mr. Lilley said, to be moved to the private sector as individual health businesses; and the introduction of general practitioner fundholding, which has created a two-tier system. We have made it clear that those structures must be replaced, and that we are consulting on how that can be best achieved.

I know that Government Members do not like consultation—frankly, I do not think they know what it means. In a previous debate on the Health Authorities Bill, the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) drew attention to what the Government consider to be consultation. In referring to the consultation process on the changes that the Government are at present pushing through, he said:

"I am not entirely sure who has been consulted . . . myself and my hon. Friend . . . had a meeting with the health authority chairman . . . It was certainly not a consultation . . . I understand that the chairmen of the health authorities were not consulted. The general managers . . . were summoned . . . and told what was to be the case".

He went on:

"What will be the value of so-called consultation if, as I perceive, decisions have already been made and written on tablets of stone"?—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 659.]

I assure the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) that we shall publish some proposals in the early summer. When it comes to a question of detail, I commend to those hon. Members who are not fortunate enough to serve on it the proceedings of the Committee considering the Health Authorities Bill. They will discover that the Government are pushing through legislation to finalise quite sweeping changes in the structure of the national health service without the faintest idea of their impact.

What will happen to the contracts of junior hospital doctors? The Government say that they might be held at regional level, but nobody really knows. The Government have not decided what will happen to nurse education. What will happen to community health councils? The Government say that that is under consideration. The

[Mrs. Beckett]

Government are pushing through legislation without settling those details. Why on earth do Government Members expect me to give them details of our proposals which will take effect in two years?

If the hon. Gentleman can tell me today how many hospitals will be in the national health service in two years, he knows more than the Department of Health does today. If he can tell me how many accident and emergency units there will be, he knows more than Ministers do today. They do not know the answers to those questions.

Mr. McLoughlin *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: I will not give way, because I am almost at the end of my speech, and have given way frequently.

Recently, Dr. Macara said that he was concerned about the existence of almost a plot—although those were not his words—against the national health service. He stated:

"I am categorical about this. I did not want to believe it for a long time, but I now have every reason to believe it is deliberate policy on the part of a number of senior people".

He believes that there is

"a political agenda to break up the NHS."

I drew parallels with the process of attrition and privatisation by stealth in community care. I quote finally from the document "Managing the NHS", published by the Office of Health Economics and written by William Laing, who is a well-known commentator on the role of the private sector in the NHS:

"The relatively streamlined administrative model for community care may prove to be the model towards which the NHS internal market evolves in the future, if the NHS follows the path of community care, in the sense of contracting out the bulk of services to independent providers, the principal function of the NHS Management Executive, or any successor organisation, may change to one of monitoring quality through inspection and registration."

That is exactly what happened in community care.

Our task today and in the months ahead is to ensure that the British people realise the real threat to the national health service's existence; lead the resistance to privatisation and, as we did with the Post Office, prevent privatisation if we can; and work to restore to the British people that which the Government's folly and incompetence has put at risk—the health service, whose worth the people of Britain know and, knowing it, value. The Government's continued existence places in jeopardy the continued existence of the national health service. They must go if the health service is to survive.

4.41 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates National Health Service staff in hospitals and in the community for providing ever more and better care for patients with 122 patients being treated for every 100 four years ago; welcomes the health reforms which have provided a coherent structure to enable them to do so; recognises the challenges faced by the National Health Service resulting from medical advance, the ageing of the population and rising public expectations and believes that the new National Health Service is better placed than ever to meet these challenges; welcomes the 68 per cent. real terms increase in National Health Service spending since 1978-79 and the Government's manifesto commitment to further real terms increases; and condemns Her Majesty's Opposition for its ill-thought-out commitment to abolish the reforms, an act which would inflict chaos and confusion on the health service, deprive patients of the benefits of National Health Service Trusts and general practitioner fundholding and prevent the health service from responding to the changing needs of the public."

I am almost at a loss to know where to start. It is clear that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and her colleagues have got rid of their policy groups and instead have taken on a selective cuttings service. The right hon. Lady covered a great number of newspapers, and started to read conference agendas as the substance of her speech. My hon. Friends were waiting to hear anything that resembled policy or approached a practical way forward.

If one is to deliver a comprehensive service available to all, young and old, regardless of ability to pay, in the face of medical advances and rising expectations, great pressure will be placed on the service. That is why it is important to devise a framework of coherent policies that address those issues. I urge the right hon. Lady to consult independent commentators, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the London School of Economics—which I visited last week—about the significance of the changes that we have been putting in hand.

Changes in scrutiny and balance, and in the outcomes that the health service is now delivering, are being followed by health care experts throughout the world. As ever, we heard endless smears and innuendos about privatisation. It is hard to understand whether the right hon. Lady dislikes someone ever paying for something or private sector involvement in any provision. In our party, if the private sector can deliver a service of higher quality and good value, we have no vendetta against it. Of course, we are not sponsored by health unions. We do not have one hand tied behind our back, knowing that whatever we say about patients, it is jobs for the boys and girls that must come first. That is not our problem.

It is well understood that the greatest recruiting sergeant ever for private health care was the industrial dispute in the final days of the last Labour Government. If one wants to drive people into the private sector, the most powerful argument is to have shop stewards on the hospital gate deciding whether someone is an urgent case and volunteers manning the kitchens.

The right hon. Member for Derby, South may be interested to know that there has been a decline in the number of people taking out private health care insurance in recent years. That is an interesting reflection on public confidence that the NHS is delivering a quality of care in which they could never have confidence in the past. That reflects the effectiveness of our reforms.

Mrs. Beckett: Does not it strike the Secretary of State that the recession is having an impact on the ability of people to afford private health insurance premiums—let alone loss of employment?

Mrs. Bottomley: The right hon. Lady totally fails to address the point that there is growing public confidence in the care that they receive from their health service locally. Nothing that we heard from the right hon. Lady takes the debate forward.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): The right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) was reluctant to quote from cuttings reflecting the state of the health

service in the winter of 1978-79. Does my right hon. Friend remember the years 1974 to 1976, when the then Secretary of State, Mrs. Barbara Castle, was confronted by simultaneous industrial disputes with every staff group in the NHS—a feat never equalled before or since?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend may, like me, have watched last weekend's television programme about Barbara Castle. It provided a reminder that, ironically, the people who always have the greatest problems with health unions are Labour Secretaries of State for Health, because expectations are so high. It is a case of post-dated cheques—"Why are we paying for sponsorship?" As COHSE told the Nolan committee today, why is it giving £5,000 a year to Opposition health team researchers if, at the end of the day, it does not want something for that money?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Rod Richards): It pays £15,000.

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend reminds me that the sum involved is £15,000 a year, not £5,000—and, as far as I know, that is only COHSE's contribution.

Mr. McLoughlin: The right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) referred to several press cuttings, many of which related to London. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there has been a redirection of resources in London, so that facilities in other parts of the country may at long last enjoy a fairer distribution of resources? They include two hospitals in Derby, which have been almost totally rebuilt—the Derby royal infirmary and Derby city hospital, where the right hon. Member for Derby, South opened new facilities just a few weeks ago.

Mrs. Bottomley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. Our health service, like every health service in the world, is undergoing change. That change includes investing in the community and trying to put more into mental health services. That change requires leadership, courage and commitment to health care principles. If on every occasion, on every decision, Labour goes for the short-term headline and populist gesture, it will never again be worthy of the stewardship of the health service. Labour is the party of protest, not of progress or responsibility. It backs every campaign against closure and supports every pay dispute, because it can never face the difficult decisions involved in taking responsibility.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I ask the Secretary of State for an honest and straight answer to this question, because I need her reply for my evidence to the Nolan committee, to which the right hon. Lady referred.

Does the right hon. Lady ever meet lobbying companies on matters relating to health? Does she ever meet manufacturers of health products to discuss procurement issues? If she does—these activities may be perfectly legitimate—is she prepared to reveal when those meetings took place and what issues were discussed at them, if I table parliamentary questions? Is she prepared to be open with the House about these matters?

Mrs. Bottomley: As Health Secretary I am overrun by lobbying groups every day of the week. Last week I spent three hours at a dinner at the Royal College of Nursing.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Answer the question.

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman seeks to draw a distinction between people who produce a product that they wish to sell to the health service and the interests of the people who work in the service. I have also met representatives of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union, of COHSE and of the health unions. Certainly, one aspect of my job is to be involved in promoting some of our most successful industries. I have had lengthy meetings with representatives of the pharmaceutical industry, because I was determined that London should win the Medicines Evaluation Agency. The pharmaceutical industry is one of Europe's, and Britain's, most successful industries. The new agency in London will act as a magnet for further inward investment.

As a member of the Government involved in spending an enormous amount of taxpayers' money, I certainly have an interest in being part of a wealth-creating economy which creates jobs for people and wealth for the taxpayer—and delivers ever-higher standards of health care. I am sad that the hon. Gentleman has so little interest in wealth creation. The Labour party's inability to generate wealth meant that the Labour Government, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) reminded us, had to cut nurses' and doctors' pay and instigate the first ever real terms cut in the health service.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have just had a very long answer to a simple question. Will the right hon. Lady answer my parliamentary questions about meetings?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): First, the hon. Gentleman did not ask a simple question: he asked a long one. Secondly, I am not in the least responsible either for the question or for the answer.

Mrs. Bottomley: I would not dream of giving the hon. Gentleman details of every meeting I have had. I can only say that the holder of my office is continually bombarded by campaigns and initiatives on all fronts. My job is to discriminate between issues and to make sure that patients benefit as a result.

Mr. Alex Carlile: May I throw the right hon. Lady a lifeline? She had reached the point in her speech dealing with mental health, and had just said something about more resources for it. Why, if more resources are being poured into mental health, do psychiatrists in London—virtually to a person—complain that they do not have enough resources or beds, and that they are having to send dozens of patients out of London, away from their families and communities, for treatment?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. and learned Gentleman will know that I am extremely sympathetic to his point. London has had a great duplication and concentration of specialty services. We have 14 cardiac centres and 13 cancer services. Because of the fixed overhead cost of all those centres, I do not think that we have given mental health services the priority that we should have given them.

As the hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware, it is not just a matter of health service contributions. It is also a matter of making sure that local authorities play their full part and collaborate. We have made it clear that we want a greater focus on mental health services in London. The changes involve that greater focus. It is not just a question of resources: it is a question of better organisation and targeting. That is why the Bill that we hope to introduce on supervised discharge is so important,

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to make sure that we target the most severely mentally ill and that supervision registers are set up to maintain contact.

Mr. Carlile: Come on.

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. and learned Gentleman is letting down a good case. If he reads the report on the Clunis inquiry, he will see that hundreds of professional hours were devoted to Christopher Clunis without proper co-ordination or management. We must adopt a more assertive, pro-active approach—an approach that Louis Blom-Cooper has come round to advancing. I have been taking it for some time.

Sir Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): On the general standing of the national health service, for which my right hon. Friend is responsible to the country, is she aware that in a survey of 30,000 homes undertaken in my constituency, asking people who had used the NHS what they thought of it, 87 per cent. said that they were satisfied or very satisfied? Surely that is hard evidence, not just tittle-tattle from bits of newspapers.

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend has rightly identified the real issue. Time and again, when patients are asked what they think of the service they have received, that is precisely the degree of support that they give the NHS. Nobody hearing the disgraceful speech by the right hon. Member for Derby, South would think it a fair reflection of how the health service is experienced by our constituents around the country.

If I may, I should like to tell the House a story. Like many right hon. and hon. Friends, I recently spent a week by the seaside at the excellent Conservative party conference in Bournemouth. During my time there it was a pleasure to visit a smart new hospital with a new A and E department, and with a cancer service that has a recently installed linear accelerator. I also toured its new hospice; and learnt that the hospital had introduced the new arrangements for junior doctors' hours and brought down the maximum waiting time for any care to five months.

At my request, I met privately six of the hospital's junior staff—two doctors, two nurses and two managers. I found them in very good spirits: realistic about the tough job that they have to do, and enthusiastic about the tasks ahead. Indeed, the hospital was a model of what the NHS should be—a model followed by hospitals in many of my hon. Friends' constituencies. It was well run and well equipped. There was a good sense of teamwork. The hospital provides high-quality clinical care in comfortable surroundings.

Just before leaving, I remembered that the hospital also employed a well-known consultant who had in the past been critical of the Government's policies. I tracked him down to his lair and put to him the point that there seemed to be a startling difference between how he portrayed the NHS and what I had found and heard in his hospital. "Oh no," he replied,

"when I speak out I'm talking generally. This is an excellent hospital."

I am sure that the House will want to know that the consultant's name was Jeremy Lee-Potter.

My story illustrates an important point about the health debate. Today we heard a great deal from the right hon. Member for Derby, South about how the service is supposed to be on its last legs. That is simply not borne out by the experience of hospitals such as the one in Poole which I have just described. I am sure that my hon. Friends will readily confirm that it is not borne out in their constituencies either.

What the right hon. Lady said is not borne out by the massive expansion of modern family doctor services, new cottage hospitals, as it were, where patients receive locally more and better services than ever before. It is not reflected in the health of the nation either. Life expectancy is increasing for old and young alike. Infant mortality is falling in every region and every social group. Our capacity to prevent disease through immunisation and screening is also better than ever. Only today, I am pleased to say, we have announced our commitment to bone scans for women at high risk of osteoporosis.

Of course, it is against the Labour party's trade union rules—literally, I suppose—to mention any of that. It denigrates the NHS and denies the achievements of staff. Its big idea is to exploit every mishap, every unfortunate incident, for its own short-term political advantage. Constantly, it plays politics with the lives of the vulnerable and the weak. But the public do not like it and will not wear it. It was not such a laughing matter at the previous general election when the Labour party found itself out on its "Jennifer's ear", and it still has not learnt its lesson. The people want progress in the NHS, not protest from the Labour party.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: My right hon. Friend referred to the family doctor service. The right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) denigrated trusts and fundholders. She wonders why people want them. In my city, by the end of next year, every doctor will be a fundholder. That would not be the case if the patients did not want it and did not flock to the doctors who are fundholders.

Mrs. Bottomley: Once again, my hon. Friend has the point exactly. I believe that in the right hon. Lady's constituency 75 per cent. of patients are covered by GP fundholders. What is the merit in destroying a system that has so much empowered GPs—a system that has enabled them to get more choice, to pay more attention to detail and give greater care to their patients than any previous system? My hon. Friend goes to the heart of the issue.

We welcome the debate. We welcome the opportunity that it provides for our hon. Friends to reveal the contradictions between the real health service and the twisted picture presented by the Labour party. I welcome the chance to spell out the strong future for the NHS under our stewardship. There is more to do.

I welcome the opportunity to describe some of the challenges ahead and our policies for meeting them. We relish the chance to expose the disastrous and destructive policies threatened by the Opposition and the NHS nightmare that they would bring about. Unlike their motion, our amendment congratulates NHS staff. We recognise their achievements: more patients treated than ever before; falling waiting times; and dramatic cuts in the hours worked by junior doctors. There is massive investment in new technology and research.

Advances are taking place in our NHS, at the leading edge of medicine: in cystic fibrosis; the genetics of breast cancer; the ability now to create an artificial heart; and in many other areas. All that is taking place in the NHS today to serve patients for today and tomorrow. Teams of

dedicated doctors, nurses—and managers—are working together to provide the very best that they can. Those achievements command the confidence and the support of those who use the service. The closer people are to the NHS, the more they like it.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): I thank the Secretary of State for giving way.

I do not know whether the Secretary of State has ever been to Northumberland and to Wansbeck general hospital, which is part of Cheviot and Wansbeck NHS trust, but last year, only one month after becoming a trust, it was nearly £2 million in debt. Later, when cuts were made in the hospital, two mothers lost their babies at birth and are now suing the hospital. That is the state of affairs in Northumberland and I would ask the Minister to come up and visit the hospital.

Mrs. Bottomley: It is disgraceful to suggest that those tragic episodes had anything to do with these issues. *[Interruption.]* I listened quietly while the hon. Gentleman asked his question. The least that he can do, having worked so hard to get me to address his question, is to listen to the answer.

The hospital to which the hon. Gentleman referred received five stars in 11 categories in the league tables, such is the quality of care that it now delivers to patients. Its financial control, however, has not been of the standard that we would wish.

Today, the holder of my office can speak with confidence about the NHS, because the financial control is better than ever it was. When the Labour party was in power, this was the time of year of sudden closures, of running out of money, and of shambles in the health service as people were unable to meet their financial commitments through the year. *[Interruption.]* I have already explained that the financial control was not all that we would have wished it to be, but the point is that it is a hospital that is delivering a quality of care for patients that matters.

I noticed that the Labour party sneered when I described that. It is interesting that it sneers at the league tables, because most people think that the length of time that one waits in out-patients and in accident and emergency departments, and the length of time that one waits for an appointment, matters. Time and again, that is the issue about which patients will complain in our NHS if one asks them. That is why the patients charter has been such a dramatic success.

My hon. Friends will remember when we launched the first patients charter three and a half years ago. They will remember that the best that we could do then was to offer a two-year maximum wait, and that 50,000 people were waiting longer than two years for treatment. Within only three and a half years, the wait has decreased, not to two years, but to 18 months.

Mr. Lewis: Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Mrs. Bottomley: It is my intention now to make headway with my speech. I do not intend to give way further, having given way an excessive amount. If I do, I shall be rebuked by my hon. Friends, who feel very strongly about the changes in the health service. *[Interruption.]* I think that I have made myself clear.

The patients charter, which we launched only two and a half weeks ago, shows that not only have we got rid of the two-year waiters, and not only are 18-month guarantees being successfully delivered for hips, knees and cataract operations, but we can now deliver an 18-month guarantee for all care. More than that, we can move into the important area of out-patients. Nine out of 10 are being seen within three months. Nobody is waiting more than six months. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman heard the Secretary of State say that she was not giving way.

Mrs. Bottomley: What is even more disgraceful is the way in which the Labour party, when the health service really has delivered improvements, as it has on the patients charter, says that it does not like the figures and that it is suspicious of the statistics. It must understand that, if one is running one of the largest national services, having authoritative figures is absolutely vital. It will be pleased to know that the Audit Commission helped us to validate the figures on the league tables. We want to measure improvements, to compare and contrast. That is precisely what an internal market is all about. It is interesting that the Labour party sneers and jeers about league tables on the achievements of staff. If Opposition Members visited the hospitals concerned, they would see the sense of achievement among nurses, doctors, managers and others who have delivered a quality of care that matters to their patients.

I am pleased to tell the House that patients are not as cynical as the Labour party. They welcome the charter. They want us to go even further. We listen to them and respond. They want us to do better on the waiting times. I have set that out. They want action on mixed-sex wards. They want more information and more choice. The new charter meets their aspirations and will meet their needs. It will continue our drive to lever up standards in every part of the service.

Once again, the right hon. Member for Derby, South made some rather sneering comments about complaints; certainly the expression that complaints should be "jewels to be treasured" is a phrase used by Brian Edwards, the regional general manager in the west midlands, who has led many of the changes in the patients charter and delivered quite remarkably.

The contrast between the sneering and the public's perception of reality is interesting. Last week, a television programme, "Pulse", made some pretty sharp comments about the health service. It offered a user's guide to the NHS which people could send for. I simply read from the Channel 4 user's guide to the health service—what was said in the book as opposed to the film:

> "There has been a lot of effort to encourage hospitals and GPs to raise their standards. Patients are being offered information—once very hard to obtain—about the standards of service they can expect. More than that, they are actually being encouraged to comment and complain if the service does not meet their needs."

That is the new culture that we have been establishing in the NHS. That is the new culture that our constituents and patients appreciate.

The charter makes the NHS more accountable to those whom it serves. The league tables, interestingly much sneered at by the Opposition, provide information so that people can make comparisons and look for further improvements. The Opposition, as we have seen today,

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attack the charter and the league tables. For them, accountability is something that one talks about at Islington dinner parties, and power is what one gives to the trade unions. We well understand that.

I want to say a little more about primary care, which is, sadly, too often neglected in our debates. Every year, about eight out of 10 people visit their family doctors. General practitioners carry out, on average, nearly three consultations a year for each patient on their list. Even with list sizes nearly 10 per cent. smaller than a decade ago, that means a lot of patients and a lot of GP time.

Our family doctors deserve recognition and support. The Government are giving them that, not only in the form of improved premises, additional staff and an attack on paperwork, but in what is perhaps the most important area of advance, GP fundholding, so rightly mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman).

My hon. Friends and, I suspect, in their hearts, many Opposition Members as well, will know of hundreds of examples of how patients have benefited from GP fundholding. News has even reached the BMA which, in a recent document, stated:

"It could be argued that fundholding, because of the size of the population served, is a good model for achieving consumer accountability in the NHS."

GP fundholding has brought about the most decisive shift in power in favour of family doctors and their patients in the history of the health service. It is at the heart of making the NHS more responsive to patients, more respectful of their choices and better at meeting their needs. That is why we are working to extend the benefits of fundholding to all patients.

Nowhere is the true nature of the so-called new Labour party better revealed than in its spiteful pledge to abolish fundholding. That is socialism in action—the envious grudge against success, the distrust of innovation, the ideological urge to reduce everyone and everything to the level of the slowest and the worst.

Mrs. Beckett: Is the Secretary of State aware of a survey conducted by "Pulse" among general practitioners which showed that more than 75 per cent. of general practitioners would like to see fundholding abolished?

Mrs. Bottomley: Fundholding has been commended not only by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the London School of Economics, but even by the National Audit Office as a way of delivering more flexible and better care to patients. GP fundholders throughout the country are proud of their success. I do not believe for one moment that they would welcome the right hon. Lady's commitment to vandalise one of the most exciting and important innovations in primary care. Throughout the country, fundholders are outraged by her stance and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster said, their patients will be outraged when they discover that she plans to rob them of all those advances.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): If the Secretary of State envisages 100 per cent. fundholding, what will be the purchasing role of her new health authorities?

Mrs. Bottomley: The health authority, much discussed on Second Reading of the Health Authorities Bill and in Committee, will continue to have a strategic role in monitoring, supporting and encouraging. Fundholding is a voluntary initiative. I do not anticipate that we will have 100 per cent. GP fundholders in the foreseeable future. But those GPs who wish to take that step do so in the interests of their patients.

The hon. Gentleman may also not be fully aware of the fact that few fundholders will be purchasing all the services that their patients need. I announced last week a doubling of the number of full fundholder projects and an evaluation scheme to consider carefully how they work. However, doubling the number takes us to only 50, so health authorities will continue to have an important role in the foreseeable future.

One of our great successes in recent years, but rarely debated because there is such agreement about it, is "The Health of the Nation" strategy, the delivery of which is through the local health authority, partly so that it can collaborate with other agencies in order to ensure that they play a direct role in improving the health of the local community.

Throughout the country, change is under way. Change is difficult for the people involved, but it is necessary in order to build a better and more responsive service, to have top-quality centres of excellence and to have accident and emergency departments with 24-hour consultant cover, as at the Royal London hospital, which was the first to have such cover.

The Labour party, by resisting every closure and undermining change, something for which it was attacked only the other day in the much-quoted article in *The Guardian*, would store up trouble for itself. It would be failing to recognise the success of the changes and the importance of what is being achieved.

Above all, we now hear with growing alarm about all the socialist hangers-on, all the different organisations, beating a path to the right hon. Lady's door to protect the interests of the purchaser-provider divide. The Socialist Health Association and Unison, when the right hon. Lady embarked on her vindictive attack on managers and the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) pledged to sack 8,000 health service managers—never have I known such a vindictive attack on a group of health workers—

Mrs. Beckett: I do not know where the right hon. Lady got that from, but there is not a word of truth in it, as I am sure she must know. I know that it was in the *Daily Mail*, but that is no recommendation.

Mrs. Bottomley: The fact that the Socialist Health Association and Unison have already made urgent representations to the right hon. Lady and the right hon. Member for Sedgefield that such an unprecedented attack on managers is not in their interest shows the extent of their power over the words that are uttered by Opposition Members.

We have heard a huge amount about what a villainous lot NHS managers are. I am pleased that there was an improvement in that regard today and I imagine that that is simply because of the representations made by the Socialist Health Association and others.

The Opposition are totally cynical. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield has pledged to turn back the clock on the NHS reforms. That brings back memories to Conservative Members. He has made a cynical deal with the unions. They give him a new clause IV, he gives them

the NHS. It is not as if the trade unions do not already have enough power over the Labour party's health policy. The right hon. Lady is their greatest friend in the shadow Cabinet. All her team are sponsored by the unions. We have already talked about the cosy sweeteners to help them on their way.

The chairman of the home policy committee is a union apparatchik, deciding on Labour party health policy and other policies that it would pursue, such as the minimum wage and the abolition of competitive tendering, which we heard about again today. The unions will be pleased. The end of pay beds is proposed—another tick in the box of what has been asked for. That is all for the unions. It will cost patients £1 billion every year simply to pay the paymasters and to keep them quiet. Given Barbara Castle's experience, I am not sure that even that will keep them quiet.

Even *The Guardian*, much quoted, has told the Labour party that it is talking nonsense and that it would be

"disastrous for the NHS if Labour only looked back".

That is right. The Labour party undermines trusts, described by the right hon. Lady in our previous debate as an abomination, and would rob GPs and their patients of fundholding status. Instead, she promises more power for the unions and less for the patients. The Health Authorities Bill will abolish the regions and sweep away an entire tier of bureaucracy. She proposes an amendment that would place a duty on the Secretary of State

"to establish Strategic Health Planning Authorities".

Oh dear. Strategic health planning authorities? I think we all know what that means. It is clear from his famous memorandum that Leo McKinstry knows what it means. Mr. McKinstry, a former adviser to a Labour health spokesman, wrote:

"That's what Labour is good at: creating bureaucracy. Establishing a new body is one of the few solutions a Labour policy-maker can ever propose when confronted with a problem."

I think that my hon. Friend the Minister for Health remembers that from the Committee stage of the Health Authorities Bill. It is the only thing to emerge from the interminable consultations organised by the right hon. Member for Derby, South.

The right hon. Lady wants to create a new tier of unnecessary interference and a new group of bureaucrats to second-guess the bureaucrats down the line; she wants to give more power to the planners, and take power away from doctors and nurses. Oh dear. But she does not just want to put the bureaucrats back in charge: she and her party want to break up the national health service and hand it over in little pieces to the so-called regional assemblies, described by Mr. McKinstry as

"irrelevant and unwanted talking shops".

I agree with him.

The right hon. Lady wants to take the ability to make decisions away from staff of trusts, who know what patients want, and give it to her friends in local government. Again, the McKinstry memorandum spells out what that means.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Is the right hon. Lady aware that, under the present structure, it is virtually impossible to gain access to information? Trusts are failing to respond to local needs and local advice, or to deal with any of the problems that, as Liverpool people know, are damaging their health service. When will the trusts and the Secretary of State listen to the voice of those who use the health service—the consumers? At present, the trusts are a closed shop from the point of view of the people of Liverpool.

Mrs. Bottomley: I imagine that the people of Liverpool rejoice every day of the week that Sir Donald Wilson rather than Derek Hatton has been leading the health service. If Labour had its way, however, the Derek Hattons of this world would be in the driving seat.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) says that there is a problem with information. I wonder where he has been all these years. What did he ever know about the number of patients treated, about outcomes and about waiting times? The trusts must hold annual meetings and produce annual reports; they must publish their accounts. There is a whole process of scrutiny, evaluation and provision of information. When the Labour party was in power, all that the hon. Gentleman could collect were statistics on deaths and discharges. There was no competitive or comparative information—which was a wonderfully cosy arrangement for those who worked in the health service, because there was no way of keeping them on their toes and ensuring that they all aspired to the level of the best.

I think that we have dealt with Mr. McKinstry and the appalling picture that he paints of Labour's plans. He called Labour councils

"a mean minded cocktail of political correctness, bureaucracy, intervention and abuse of public money . . . massive procedural delays and rumours of corruption."

As I have said, Mr. McKinstry advised one of the most recent Labour health spokesmen; I am very pleased that he is so well informed.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West) *rose—*

Mrs. Bottomley: That is the nightmare that the Labour party is lining up for us.

Mr. Morgan *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman deaf? He should obey the Chair. The Secretary of State is not giving way, and I hope that he can see that she is not. There should be proper decorum in the Chamber, and we will have it.

Mrs. Bottomley: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have given way to Labour Members an excessive number of times—many more times than the right hon. Member for Derby, South, as the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) will doubtless find when he reads the record.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The Secretary of State should get a gold star.

Mrs. Bottomley: I hope that I shall.

The Labour party paints a picture of a fragmented, bureaucratic health service, hobbling from crisis to crisis with neither vision nor direction: a pen-pusher's dream, and a shop steward's idea of Christmas. Labour's policies would result in chaos, upheaval, confusion and waste. They are rejected by the British Medical Association, which describes the "major organisational upheaval" that would result from local authority control of the health service; people do not want that. They are also rejected by the Royal College of Nursing, which believes that the very principle of equity would be lost. They are rejected

[Mrs. Bottomley]

by the doctors and nurses in trusts and fundholding practices, who are not prepared to see their precious freedoms wrenched away and given to the Labour party's friends; and they are, and will be, rejected by the public and by patients.

The right hon. Member for Derby, South used a phrase that Opposition Members always seem to find irresistible. Referring to scientists leaving the country, she spoke of a "brain drain". She should think again, and recognise the enormous brain gain from which the country benefits. Only the other day, I met a team of scientists who had come from America, Australia, New Zealand and other countries all around the world to work in Britain, because of the advantages of working in this country and with our national health service. Moreover, under the director of research and development we have developed a new strategy, providing extra funds so that we can build on our excellent medical research and ensure that its results are properly considered throughout the service.

What the Labour party calls the market mechanism is actually a process whereby purchasing authorities and GP fundholders can measure outcomes and effectiveness. They want to know whether they are getting value for money; they want to scrutinise and to question. At last we have a knowledge-based, evidence-based national health service, fed by our research strategy and feeding into further and profound improvements in patient care throughout the country.

That is possible because of the changes in the health service. It is possible because, by being more effective and efficient, we have secured additional resources to put into the service. What Labour has offered does nothing to encourage researchers, doctors, nurses and managers, and certainly does nothing to encourage patients. Our policies, by contrast, are creating a coherent and stable framework for a strong and modern service.

The national health service has always embodied the finest values and the strongest ethos; there can be no doubt about that. But in its old rigid, centralised form it was decaying; it was falling behind the pace of change that is necessary for evolving medicine, and demanded by the growing needs of patients. Thanks to our reforms, the service has been invigorated with new, local freedoms. We have established the right balance between central direction and local flexibility. Many of the recommendations of today's Select Committee report can be implemented more effectively because of the new structure that we have put in place.

We have a national health strategy; we have national as well as local accountability; we have ensured that national policies can be, and are, delivered more effectively through local action. What Labour derides as "the market" is, in fact, the power of health authorities and fundholders to challenge the system, to question and scrutinise, and to insist on benefits for patients. That is their aim and aspiration: to demand the answers to questions that would not even have been asked when Labour was in power.

Of course there is more to do. There is more to do for mental health, for junior hospital doctors and for a whole range of services. But by acting as good stewards for the health service, and improving efficiency and the number of patients treated, we have put ourselves in a better position to go even further forward. Let me make it clear that we are proud of the changes that we have set in hand. We are proud of the extra money that we have put into the national health service, and we are proud of the achievements of staff. It is simply not good enough to utter populist gibes from the sidelines: the NHS deserves better.

Conservative Members want to protect trusts and fundholders. We want further progress in primary care, and even more improvements in the health of the nation. We will not stand by while Labour seeks to destroy all that has been achieved to meet the outdated, grasping demands of the unions. We will not let the clock turn back to nods and winks, and post-dated blank cheques. If anyone can speak as the guardian of the national health service, it is the Conservative party, which has run it for twice as long as the Labour party.

The Government need no lessons from the Labour party on our commitment to a comprehensive and coherent health service. We have taken the action necessary to equip it for the future. We have acted while the Labour party has ducked, dithered, plotted and fudged. I suspect that it will be a long time yet before the Labour party has the nerve to come to this place, without a policy to its name, simply to threaten upheaval and turmoil. It is under a Conservative Government, and only under a Conservative Government, that the NHS can look forward to a strong, secure and exciting future.

5.29 pm

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): Listening to the Secretary of State for Health and to her exposé on the health service, I had a certain feeling of déjà vu. Once again, she made what a number of hon. Members have come to regard as slightly distasteful comments in claiming responsibility for almost every medical development in the health service. She spoke again of the development of artificial hearts. Such hearts have been developed elsewhere for many years, and it is no thanks to the Government that such developments have taken place.

I recall that when a former Under-Secretary of State for Health wanted to attract lots of publicity she used to make various claims for key-hole surgery, organ transplantation and other treatments, as though she had pioneered them herself. The fact that more patients are treated is due not to the Government but to the nurses and doctors who work in the service. The sooner the Government stop making false claims, the better.

Mr. Couchman: The hon. Gentleman rightly praises the excellence of national health service staff. Does he agree, however, that when things go wrong in the NHS, it is often down to a member of staff?

Mr. Galbraith: That truism has no particular relevance to what we are discussing. I did not understand the point of that intervention.

There is no 10-minute limit on speeches, although I shall definitely try to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is no 10-minute limit, but hon. Members should not feel that they have to fill the whole time.

Mr. Galbraith: You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, can be assured of that. I just wondered how many interventions I should take on this matter.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Four.

Mr. Galbraith: That is more than I usually take, so there should be no problem.

I want to concentrate on rationing in the national health service. Debate on the subject is increasing in health service journals, including in the *British Medical Journal*. I consider it to be a serious and sinister matter, which we should knock on the head at this stage. The reasons for that debate are secondary to what has been done to the health service under the Government. Their policies have led to the starvation of resources and to a market mechanism in the health service. To camouflage that and to enhance the changes, we get discussions about rationing health care.

It is said that rationing is necessary. We should not accept that argument and that, somehow, we cannot fund the service properly, and that some needs cannot be met. We should object to and resist that argument. We should not agree that the health service must accept rationing.

A definition of the rationing of health care is important. Rationing of health care is the denial of treatment that would benefit the patient, that the patient wishes to have and that the service wishes to give him. That is the correct definition. Within that definition, I do not include unnecessary treatment of patients. Many antibiotics exist for upper respiratory and viral infections. Stopping such problems is good medical care and a proper use of resources, but it is not rationing. We must remember that rationing is the denial of treatment that would benefit patients.

An important criterion of rationing is that no exit from the system is possible. There is only one true form of rationing in this country: transplantation. There is no equilibrium between the need for and provision of transplantation services; need exceeds provision because of limits on the service. The important thing, which is true rationing, is that there is no exit from that system: one cannot have a transplant in the private sector. The problem is that we are talking about rationing not of other provision but of NHS provision.

People who have money immediately exit and are treated in the private sector. The private sector is growing under the creeping, growing, sinister, behind-the-scenes privatisation of the NHS, which has been going on for many years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *rose—*

Mr. Galbraith: I give way to the hon. Gentleman because I know that there is no 10-minute limit.

Mr. Bottomley: This is almost the same point that the hon. Gentleman is making, and I put it in a non-partisan way. If the number of cataract, hip and heart operations has significantly increased, is that because doctors are more able to carry out such operations, because people could not receive them before or because of some form of rationing? Is there another explanation? It is certainly true that more major treatments, which are of great advantage to elderly people in particular, are being offered. Is that an end to rationing or an increase in it?

Mr. Galbraith: If the hon. Gentleman will let me continue, I shall develop my argument and raise a number of other related issues, and I hope that, in doing so, I shall answer the questions.

One of the other justifications for rationing that we must dispense with is that, somehow, health care is a bottomless pit and that, therefore, need will never be met. That is not so. It may be true of a demand-led service, with unnecessary treatments and demand generated by the private sector and popular consent, but not of a needs-based service, which the NHS should be.

We know how many people require hip replacements—not everyone does, so demand is not bottomless. We know how many people require hernia operations, and demand is not bottomless. All we have to do is establish the extent of such need, after which it is a question of having the political will to meet it. Let us hear no more justification for rationing on the basis that need is a bottomless pit. That argument is fallacious and we should dispense with it.

Another argument for rationing that is often advanced is that everyone is doing it so we are no different from them. Again, that is not quite true. Many health care systems are concerned about cutting resources, but that is not necessarily the same as rationing care. The United States of America is not rationing health care; it is trying to stop unnecessary investigation and treatment, which is a different matter. In this country, the culture of medicine and all its ramifications are based on clinical judgment rather than on clinical independence, which is different. We should try to enhance that culture, which is threatened under the market system.

It is said that we already have some rationing in the NHS and that it is achieved through waiting lists. That is not true. Waiting lists are a system not of rationing health care but of delaying it, which is different. It is an unfair, arbitrary system that, again, allows people to exit from it to receive their treatment. It does not ration treatment but delays it.

The other system involves the general practitioner as the gatekeeper: the GP sees bigger waiting lists and, therefore, does not add to them. Again, that is not true. If a GP thinks that a patient needs health care, he sends him for it. The system allows the GP to use his or her clinical judgment and it reinforces the need not to get involved in unnecessary investigation and treatment. That is the system here, unlike in the United States. Someone who goes to see his GP with a headache does not need a CT scan or elaborate investigations. Instead, the GP uses his clinical judgment, which is what happens under the gatekeeper system. It is not a rationing system if it is based on clinical judgment.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I support much of what the hon. Gentleman is saying. His point shows why GP fundholding is so successful and effective.

Mr. Galbraith: The Secretary of State is completely wrong. That system works only if the patient has a trust relationship with his or her doctor. [AN HON. MEMBER: "What does that mean?"] That question reveals the ignorance of the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler), who listened to my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) while

[Mr. Galbraith]

laughing and giggling about the health service. The trust relationship between patient and doctor means that they trust one another, which is in the best interests of the patients. The way to destroy that system is to introduce a GP fundholding practice, which will introduce a financial element into the decision-making process, as happens in the United States, where the doctor and his patient wonder whether the financial element will come between them. The Secretary of State is completely wrong and will ruin the trust mechanism. The loss of that trust mechanism leads to secondary defensive mechanisms and increased costs.

The hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) mentioned rationing. There has been, and there still is, a form of rationing in the sense that some sections of the population have low expectations. The rates for operations such as cataract removal, prostatectomy and others vary across the country and across the social classes—there are higher rates in the higher social classes and lower rates in the lower social classes. It might mean that the higher social classes have a few unnecessary operations, but I doubt that. However, it does mean that the lower classes have lower expectations. I hope that that deals with the hon. Gentleman's point. That form of rationing has persisted for some time but we should be seeking to eliminate it.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The hon. and caring Gentleman speaks from experience. Most of us would accept that people need to have higher expectations and the royal colleges can help by carrying out studies in their various fields of expertise into what would happen if there were equitable treatment for all. However, does the hon. Gentleman accept that a significant increase in the number of heart, cataract or hip operations must be a reflection of extra resources or better organisation, but certainly of meeting higher ambitions, which is something for which we should all be aiming?

Mr. Galbraith: The hon. Gentleman has identified rationing as it used to exist. Renal dialysis is a case in point. That treatment was introduced when I was but a lad in medical school. It was limited for quasi-medical reasons but there was a form of rationing. However, there is a difference between that form of rationing and that proposed today. Under the previous systems, rationing of new developments was recognised but the aim was to eliminate it and expand the service. We are now going the other way by reducing and denying treatment.

I conclude by cautioning against two systems that have been suggested for use in this country. The first is the Oregon system, which the Secretary of State said was flawed. For those who may not be aware of it, it is a system used in Oregon to try to ration health care. It involves condition treatment for pairs of patients in a ranking system based on utility and disability. It is not an effective system for rationing care and should not be introduced here. I trust that health managers will not attempt to use it. It is not a true rationing system because it is concerned only with rationing Medicaid, which is only one part of the care available for the indigenous population. There was public consultation but it was a sham because it involved only middle-class people and not those affected. The major flaw is that it does not deal with an individual patient's needs.

The second system that is occasionally advocated is "qualys", or the quality adjusted life years system. It is quasi-scientific involving given numbers but its reputation has no basis. I have tried to use qualys from time to time along with other systems of practically no value in dealing with individual patients. Such a system is nothing more than a useful research tool. The main reason why qualys and similar systems are useless is that they do not deal with the individual patient on whom we should be concentrating. The problem is that we often end up talking about categories, as the Government tend to do.

We must deal with the different factors affecting individual patients. Rationing systems have no part to play. Practices may have to be varied because someone wants extra time to see his grandchild, son or daughter graduate but, at the end of the day, someone has to sit on the bed, look the patient straight in the eye and say, "Yes, the treatment would be of benefit to you but because the Government have told me to ration it, I'm afraid you can't have it."

I am in favour of the elegant muddle through, whereby pressures are adjusted according to individuals and patients are consulted under the trust relationship that exists between them and their doctor. That relationship is being threatened by the Government's underfunding and the introduction of market mechanisms into the system.

5.46 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith). He is a classic example of how much the House gains by having among its number those who have had an expert career outside—an issue that I hope the Nolan committee is considering.

I express appreciation, too, for the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who, if imitation is flattery, paid me the great compliment of imitating an anecdotal technique that I developed in national health service debates as a novice Back Bencher between 1977 and 1979 when she was a Minister elsewhere. My one salient regret about her speech was that she left her mission statement so late that she did not allow herself adequate opportunity to develop the strategies that would have given that mission statement meaning.

It was a little more than three months ago that a debate on the national health service in London afforded me a maiden recent opportunity to speak about Bart's and its merger with the Royal London and the London chest hospitals. I am grateful to the Opposition for affording me a further opportunity today. I said at the time that Bart's had entered into the merger negotiations with good will and in good faith but that I was disturbed by the spirit in which progress was being made, given the fact that for the merger to bear fruit it was essential that the parts of Bart's that might transfer to the Royal London should feel that what was emerging was an institution greater than the sum of the parts. I choose my words carefully about the shape of the merger because of the current consultation about the trust's proposals.

I should like to be able to tell the House that my anxieties have been allayed by the developments since our previous debate. Since then, the consultation has been initiated, which is as it should be. I am confident that on such a serious issue responses to the consultation document will be comprehensive and well informed. Of course, the consultation period still has some time to go.

I am more uneasy, however, with the spirit underlying the merger, which is critical to the process. Since conspiracy theory was already rife at St. Bartholomew's, to which I shall return, it is unfortunate that conspiracy theory should have emerged at the Royal London hospital as well. I refer to the recent press conference on the shape of the future hospital, at which allegations about Bart's and its behaviour leached into the national press. It seems to a bystander careless, on so sensitive a subject, that it was not arranged for anyone to be present to represent Bart's at that press conference, when the participation of Bart's representatives is critical to the future and the future merger.

That is what I mean by saying that the spirit of the merger process seems to have gone unnecessarily sour, when the trust is asking Bart's to make the principal emotional sacrifices. The unfortunate consequence has been an overwhelming vote of no confidence in the trust's management and leadership by the medical council at Bart's, at precisely the moment when maximum confidence would be desirable for the future success of the enterprise.

I implied earlier that conspiracy theory had been present at Bart's. That followed the health authority's decision to recommend the closure of Bart's accident and emergency department, barely days after the consultation period had ended and when there had been a massive numerical majority of representations in favour of its retention. That was followed a year later by the trust adopting a one-site solution with what seemed unexpected speed against the grain of the earlier debate.

One of the consequences—it is a bad consequence—is an imbued conviction among some at Bart's that the current consultation is all over bar the shouting. I have total confidence that the authority and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will measure most judiciously the evidence laid before them. If they were in any doubt previously, I hope that recent events have brought home to them how essential it is that the decisions reached on the consultation's evidence are seen to have been evaluated with exceptional—indeed, preternatural—fairness. They have a delicate and highly frangible vessel in their hands.

I am not seeking to revive the controversy over Bart's A and E unit. I pay tribute to the way in which the national health service elements are working with the City of London corporation to examine plans for an expansion of the minor injuries unit at Bart's, to ensure that residents of the City, south Islington and south Hackney—a cohort of about 30,000 people in all—are not disadvantaged by developments at Smithfield, whatever in future they may precisely be.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have not, however, laid to rest the fears of the wider City about how well prepared they are for an emergency in the City on the scale of the five in recent years involving the railways and terrorism. It is understood that the paramedic provision is a response to individual heart attacks. That is accepted, but very serious evidence was given to the consultation on the Bart's A and E unit by the City of London police about traffic patterns in the area—notably after the anti-terrorist traffic restraints were imposed on the perimeter of the City. That evidence has never been properly countered or those fears assuaged in the context of a major emergency.

I hope that in his winding-up speech my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on the scale of paramedic provision available against the known statistics of past emergencies. I mean no unkindness to my hon. Friend or others on the Front Bench when I say that it is not enough for them to believe that all will be right on the night. The public and the police have to believe that it will all be right on the night, too.

All that said, there is no reason why good cannot come of change—a proposition that, paradoxically, is more widely recognised by Conservative Members than by Opposition Members. The South Westminster health clinic, which was promised for the aftermath of Westminster hospital, has trodden cautiously, but, in so doing, has secured and enjoys the increasing confidence of consultants and local residents alike. It is a friendly, welcoming and effective facility. With some tactical differences, the similar new clinic in Soho promises well, after years of my Soho constituents raising their voices to heaven to say, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

There is no reason why the national health service cannot meet rising expectations, even in inner-city communities, with élan and efficiency. What is so depressing about the stance of Her Majesty's Opposition is the sterility of their thinking and their motion today in the face of problems that the NHS will face in the next century, and which the Government's reforms were admirably and timeously designed to address. It is no good the Opposition thinking that the problems presented by demography on one hand and the advance of medical science on the other will go away, yet there is no evidence of what their solutions would be.

When the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was health spokesman for the Opposition in the previous Parliament, there were glimmerings of recognition that the national health service's future problems were stark and that neither the status quo nor a suspiciously flexible amount of extra public expenditure in billions of pounds would solve them.

The fatwa of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) against public expenditure commitments has inevitably exposed the bareness, not to say the barrenness, of the intellectual policy cupboard of the right hon. Member for Derby, South. Of course, we understand the defensive mantra that states in response to any problem that it would be inappropriate and imprudent of any Opposition spokesman to say anything at all about their future policies until they take office. There are still some highly specific decisions that I acknowledge could not be taken until one knew the price of eggs on the night, but that does not apply to strategic thinking about the national health service. A repeal of the reforms of this Government would take one back to the status quo ante and, even among the most atavistic on the Opposition Benches, there cannot be many who think that that would do as an adequate posture.

So we are confronted by a wall of moth-balled, first world war E-boats, with their weaponry masked; a generation of naval architecture on a chronological par with clause IV. Whoever replies for the Opposition will have to do better than the right hon. Member for Derby, South if the Opposition want to claim that what they have initiated today can properly be called a debate.

5.57 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): It is always a pleasure to follow such an exemplary parliamentarian as the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke). He treated us to a piece of English at least, which will be well worth re-reading tomorrow. I also agree with much of what he said about Bart's. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) would have wished to be here this afternoon to comment on that issue.

During the first hour and three quarters of this debate—it seemed at times a good deal longer—reference was made to a number of surveys. Of course, most of them had been carried out after treatment had been completed and on questions asked of patients. The tribute which those surveys pay is not to the organisation of our national health service but to the doctors, nurses and other staff who serve in that service. The issue in this debate is the conditions in which those servants of the public give their service.

I suspect that many Conservative Members read *The Daily Telegraph*, so they will know what I am talking about when I refer to the "Bottomley ward". The "Bottomley ward" was described in an article by Martyn Harris in *The Daily Telegraph* on Monday. It is that overflow ward, now common, made up of trolleys in the hospital corridor—the place where, literally, patients are allowed to fall off their trolley and are sometimes not noticed until it is too late. That is one of the adversities that staff face, and it makes calls on all their resources of humour and determination; but I suspect that those staff would take a very different view from the complacency offered by the Secretary of State.

Mine is a rather different approach from that of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). She believes that the Government want to wrap up and privatise the national health service. I do not think that that is right at all. In a sense, it is worse than that. The Government do not want to wrap up the national health service, but they are doing so without trying. It is not privatisation by stealth; it is failure by bungling.

The Government's reforms of the NHS have reached crisis point—at least that is what we are told day after day by the people working in it. It is a crisis in which the reality of trolleys in the corridor is but one small, overt sign. The concern of patients and staff has turned to dismay and despair as they feel the brunt of the Government's market-driven policy stick. Indeed, political obsession with the market is coming before health issues, and it is time that the Government realised that that is happening.

Now a new sophistication has been added—one might call it the Bottomley lobotomy. It is a very simple, non-invasive procedure. It involves taking the truth, debriding it, dressing it in healthy-sounding platitudes, and then plastering it with statistics. For example, I refer to waiting list statistics. Some people are waiting to wait to go on the waiting list. Waiting list statistics that allege that nobody has to wait more than two years are simply not true. It is time that the Government recognised, accepted and confessed that what they say about waiting times, if not waiting lists, is simply untrue.

In an attempt to back the Department's campaign of what must be called deceit about what is happening in the NHS, the NHS trusts have tried to gag those who know best—the staff. I have witnessed that in my constituency. Many right hon. and hon. Members have had NHS staff from senior to junior level sidle up to them and say, "I really shouldn't tell you this because we are told not to talk to our MPs about it, but things are going sadly wrong."

Whereas the Tory party vice-chairman, Mr. Maples, proposed that the best tactic might be merely zero media coverage, the Secretary of State and the health quangos have introduced a new element, the contractual silencing of staff. Surely there could be a need to gag staff only if there were something to hide.

The one reassurance that we can gain from that concealment is that the Government are failing in any event to stop the failed reforms in the NHS from becoming a focal and vocal issue. A 300 per cent. increase in complaints from patients to hospitals tells us all that we need to know.

The mother of my constituent, five-year-old Rhiannon Louise Evans, telephoned me yesterday and gave an example. Rhiannon needs to have her tonsils and adenoids removed—the sort of thing that used to be done routinely, followed by a diet of jelly and ice cream, but these days it is not so common. Three times the mother has prepared that five-year-old child on the basis that the child was to go into hospital shortly, and three times the arrangement has been changed. That cannot be acceptable.

Indeed, hostility to the Government's reforms has even reached Dr. Jeremy Lee-Potter. We have heard the Secretary of State turn from praising Dr. Lee-Potter, which used to be the order of the day, to attacking him today. What did the Prime Minister's office do when Dr. Lee-Potter turned native on the Government and decided to give his real opinion? It telephoned the chief executive of Dr. Lee-Potter's trust to find out what it was going to do about him. The Prime Minister's office was prepared to interfere in the contractual arrangements that Dr. Lee-Potter enjoyed. Of course, there was not much that it could do, as Dr. Lee-Potter was in an advantageous position to leave the trust in any event, and he has announced that he will do so.

I see the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) frowning in surprise, but I challenge the Minister to deny that someone in the Prime Minister's office telephoned the chief executive of that trust to ask what it was going to do about Dr. Lee-Potter.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The reason I looked quizzical is that the hon. and learned Gentleman said that someone telephoned, as though one could do something about someone who has announced his retirement. What is the allegation to which the hon. and learned Gentleman refers? What was the Prime Minister's office supposed to have asked the trust to do? Will the hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that three quarters of the newspapers that referred to Dr. Jeremy Lee-Potter put his age at 59, whereas he had passed normal retirement age some time before?

Mr. Carlile: I said clearly that the Prime Minister's office was seeking to interfere with Dr. Lee-Potter's contractual arrangements. The Prime Minister, through his staff, has no business to telephone the chief executive of an NHS trust and ask, as though of Thomas a'Becket, "What are you going to do with this unruly priest?" That is what happened.

I was about to refer to the development of a two-tier system. That has become irrefutable, as fundholding GPs have access to speedier provision than non-fundholders. It is a fact. In my constituency, treatment to be obtained in neighbouring districts on reference from non-fundholding GPs is being postponed until the next financial year, whereas fundholders' patients obtain treatment this financial year. What clearer evidence could there be of a two-tier system than that?

The growing number of consultants who, out of utter frustration, are taking early retirement shows the extent of discontent in the service. Dr. Lee-Potter is not the only example by any means. Dr. Sandy Macara, chairman of the council of the British Medical Association, was mentioned. *[Interruption.]* I hear a few guffaws from Conservative Members at the mention of his name. If the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) knew Dr. Macara well, he would know that Dr. Macara is no radical. He is a man of moderate opinions and great medical distinction. It is with a heavy heart that Dr. Sandy Macara criticises the Government, but he does so on the basis of fact.

The confusion of priorities in the NHS today arises inextricably from the operation of the internal market in a way in which patients are following money rather than resources following patients.

I have referred specifically to problems in psychiatric care. In summary, the situation in London and in some other big towns and cities, but particularly in London, is that patients with psychiatric illnesses are placed in overcrowded wards. In some cases, they are moved out of overcrowded wards as far as 200 miles from London. They are forced to be treated away from their relatives, friends and communities. The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South is right; demographic changes must be taken into account. In that context, the provision of psychiatric care must be a major consideration.

The decline in psychiatric provision has happened since the Secretary of State took over at the Department of Health. The problem has become worse. The right hon. Member for Derby, South is not solving the problem; she is exacerbating it. Why are psychiatric patients in London suffering at the hands of the Government? If psychiatric care is to have its proper priority, it will not be dealt with simply by providing supervised release; that is but a footnote on the page. A proper, adequately funded service for psychiatric treatment is needed. It is astonishing that the present Secretary of State, whose professional background is as a psychiatric social worker—a respected one—has not been able to provide the level of funding, beds and community care which her very own profession needs.

I welcome the Labour party's choice of subject for the debate. It provides the House with a much-needed opportunity to challenge the Government's failing policy which threatens the very essence of the health service which provides health care free on the grounds of need, not on income. The debate is also an opportunity to discuss the new Labour party's view of the future of the NHS.

It is easy for Opposition parties to score political points on this issue and, with the record of the Government, it would be harder not to score. A bigger challenge in many ways is to address seriously the reform of our service which is required to ensure quality care for everyone. There are specific problems to be solved, but there is a much bigger issue—the strategy needed for the future, once those problems are resolved.

One of my concerns which is shared by many interested Labour-watchers is that the Labour party might attempt to return the NHS to a centralised, totally provider-driven institution. That the internal market in its present form is failing is not in question; what is in question is how best to provide health care that is sensitive to the needs of patients and their communities, and can balance costs and benefits in terms of value and quality. Labour in opposition may wish to sustain the myth that the NHS can be a fund without end, but that could not be the reality under a Labour Government.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: I know that the hon. Gentleman is getting sensitive, but he must hear some more before I give way.

From the speeches we have heard from Labour Members, it seems hard to believe that there would be waiting lists under Labour, as there are with any Government. No amount of Beckett and Brown soundbites—we may be about to receive a dose of the latter—will avoid the reality that decisions must be made which involve choices, and that priorities must be chosen in modern health care.

The Government have failed by putting costs before provision. Inversely, Labour—while speaking in the language of fiscal prudence—has to tell us how it would deal with the problems which arise. I shall now give way.

Mr. Brown: No, I have lost interest.

Mr. Carlile: I shall say a bit more, and perhaps I shall tempt the hon. Gentleman to intervene.

Would Labour destabilise a significant part of our health provision by abolishing all trusts? If so, how much would it cost? Does the party recognise that, although the system is not one with which it would have chosen to start, it does not start with a clean sheet of paper? Would Labour abolish all fundholders, despite the fact that a large number of GPs like the fundholding principle? Would Labour abolish all competition in health care, despite evidence that competition can, in some circumstances, be healthy for the service? If so, what would Labour put in place of those things? What would the structural changes envisaged by the Labour party cost?

I share the Labour party's belief—I hope that it is also the Conservative party's belief—in the NHS. It is a straightforward principle. Those of us who believe in the NHS believe in a service in which health care is available to all, based on need and not on ability to pay. We need to have a rational and factual debate which is not based on soundbites, and which takes place across, as well as along, party lines. Ideological brick walls should not be built to block the development of a better health service.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): The hon. and learned Gentleman says that he wants facts. Does he still agree with the drift of a consultation paper which the Liberal Democrats issued in the summer of last year which proposed the retention of the division between the commissioner of services and the provider of services? Does he still believe in the retention of trusts and modified GP fundholders? Some of us are concerned at the accuracy—again, the hon. and learned Gentleman asks for

[Mr. Matthew Banks]

facts—of an editorial in the *Health Service Journal* in September last year which, commenting on the Liberal Democrats' health policy, said that, with luck, someone might be kind enough "to offer some direction". Could we have that from the hon. and learned Gentleman?

Mr. Carlile: The consultation paper was a part of the policy-making process, and I agree with what it says. I became the Liberal Democrat health spokesman in September, and I am seeking to provide the direction which the hon. Gentleman seeks. I hope that he will be more knowledgable about my drift by the time I sit down.

The Labour party should address these questions. If a private provider can provide scanners—as is happening in some parts of the country—on a 24-hour basis more economically to the NHS than could be provided by a district general hospital, does the Labour party exclude that provision from the private sector? If it does, it would seem to be asking for serious trouble, as it would be going back to an old-fashioned view of the service. Would Labour drive the private sector out of the market? Would it renationalise cooking and cleaning services, scanners and all elective surgery?

My party and I share many of the aspirations of the right hon. Member for Derby, South for the NHS, but, just as the Liberal Democrats are asking how and why a changing NHS can be sustained, so, too, must the right hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown). The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has led the Labour party for only a few months, but it is now becoming time for those of us who watch the Labour party with considerable interest to see whether we will continue to have from it only the sound and fury born of 15 years of opposition, or whether that sound and fury will signify something for the health service, which certainly needs something new.

The service needs a fresh sense of direction and a commitment that will convince staff that it will survive and that it will enable them to continue what they do very well—serving the public whom they have to treat. The Government have failed the national health service, but the Labour party has still to give us a sign that it has something viable to offer. The NHS will remain positive only if the policies for it and the structure envisaged for it are also positive.

6.18 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): There is no doubt in my mind that the Government's record regarding their health reforms shows clearly that there has been an increase in the quantity and quality of patient care, and also better value for money. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already given the details, and even independent surveys have demonstrated patients' growing satisfaction with the NHS. I am referring to the "British Social Attitude Survey" last November and a survey that the National Association of Health Authority Trusts carried out in June 1994.

The "British Social Attitude Survey" shows that the trend in falling public satisfaction with the national health service during the late 1980s has been reversed—1993 was the first year since 1986 when more people were satisfied than dissatisfied with the way in which the NHS is run. As we have had plenty of quotes from newspapers, I shall quote *The Guardian*, which reported that the survey suggested that the NHS reforms have achieved "considerable success" in helping to restore confidence in the NHS.

The other survey by NAHAT showed that nine out of 10 patients who had attended hospital in the previous year found the service very good, good or average, and three out of four found it very good or good.

We have a more accountable NHS because the Government have considerably strengthened the mechanisms of the service's independent audit, especially by extending the remit of the Audit Commission, and have also set out standards and rights in the patients charter. More information and more patient involvement in the decision-making process, especially through GP fundholders, are required. All those factors add up to putting the patient first—a sound philosophy.

To that end, the all-party Select Committee on Health, of which I am the Chairman, has also been playing its part in monitoring and scrutinising the performance of the NHS, as our contribution to identifying the challenges and improving the service.

A common theme in several of the Committee's inquiries during the present Parliament has been priority setting in the national health service. Last July, we published a report that concentrated on the implications of a continued increase in the cost of drugs to the NHS for priority setting. The report presented a package of radical recommendations on the drugs budget.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to draw the attention of the House and of the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) to the fact that we published a report today on the wider issue of priority setting in relation to the purchase of health care within the NHS. I am pleased to be able to say that that report was agreed unanimously. In addition to thanking all my colleagues on the Committee for their help in producing that report—I see one, the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) in her place—I thank our five specialist advisers and our secretariat.

The report deals with issues of major importance to the future of health care. In our opening paragraph we state:

"As medical developments open up new opportunities for treatment, it is widely believed that pressure upon resources will continue to increase. Coupled with an aging population and changing patient expectations, these issues are likely to become ever more important. The way in which priorities are set within the NHS affects everyone. This report reviews how NHS purchasers have decided priorities in the midst of competing demands upon resources."

The principal conclusions and recommendations of the report are, as usual, set out in an annex. I will not attempt to recite all of them, but will concentrate on a brief summary of the report. It begins by considering how other countries are grappling with setting explicit priorities. We discussed the radical experiment in health rationing that is under way in the American state of Oregon, which the Committee visited as part of its inquiry. We also explain the systematic approach to priority setting that is being attempted in two other countries—New Zealand and the Netherlands.

Next, we studied some of the factors that might influence future demand for health services in the United Kingdom. For reasons that we explain, we do not make

judgments on future demand, nor do we enter the debate about current or future funding levels—they reached an all-time high of £37 billion in 1993-94.

As part of our inquiry, we commissioned a research paper from the Office of Science and Technology on "Factors Affecting Pressure on Health Care Resources". That forms the basis for our discussion and the paper is printed within the report as annex A, which we hope will help hon. Members and those outside.

We considered the potential impact on health costs of demographic changes, changing patterns of disease, advances in medical technology and changing patient expectations. Of those factors, demographic change is the most certain source of upward pressure on costs—in particular, the aging population, although the short-term impact of that change during the next 10 years is projected to be relatively limited. The Office of Science and Technology report makes clear the extent to which all such projects are subject to considerable uncertainty.

Of course, not all choices regarding the provision of services involve balancing competing demands in the light of increasing demand and restricted resources. Choices can often involve using resources more effectively. Against that background, we examined the process of making choices in the NHS—at national level, by individual purchasers and finally by individual doctors, nurses and other professionals.

At national level, we began by asking the basic question, "What is the NHS for?" We set out previous attempts to answer that question and formulated our own set of fundamental principles for the NHS, based on the principles of equity, public choice and the effective use of resources. We expressed our view that an honest and realistic set of explicit and well-understood ethical principles is needed at national level to guide the NHS into the next century.

We considered the way that Ministers and the Department of Health communicate their priorities to the service and we shared the concerns of witnesses who complained about "priority overload". The Committee urged greater clarity when deciding which items are of crucial importance—those that should be regarded as priorities, while others, however urgent or desirable, should be regarded simply as initiatives. We called for a reduction in the total number of national priorities and initiatives.

In a helpful spirit, we recommended how the Government could improve the communication of priorities. We called on the Government to issue an explicit statement every year of how they expected the service to develop during, for example, a three to five-year period.

At the local level, we contrasted the decentralised approach adopted in the United Kingdom with methods used in other countries. Here, districts have had to develop their role almost from scratch. While that approach has encouraged innovation among the most able purchasing teams, we were struck by the seemingly enormous variation throughout the country. Some purchasers know exactly where they are going—others have yet to find the map and are drifting. Our conclusions on local decision making are based on detailed research. We received submissions in response to a questionnaire from all regions and from nearly half of all districts.

We set out the criteria that the districts should adopt when decision taking and reviewed the development of local health strategies. We recommended that the NHS executive should take steps to ensure that, at minimum, epidemiological profiles, including variances from national averages, analyses of need and details of current provision, were open and accessible to public scrutiny and that the statutory requirements governing consultation over community care plans should be extended to cover consultation over health plans.

The Committee also stressed the importance of input from providers to good purchasing and called for GP fundholders to be required to sign up to an agreed set of local priorities each year prior to gaining access to their budgets. We examined the extent to which shifts in purchasing have occurred since the introduction of the internal market in 1992 and concluded that, to date, no major shifts have occurred. Districts have concentrated on setting priorities only at the margins. We believe that health authorities must develop the analytic tools to enable them to review existing services in depth and to redeploy resources from services of uneconomic or low health gain to services of real benefit.

We also reviewed how the NHS at district level has traditionally restricted access to non-emergency services through waiting lists and cost shifting and by giving particular services a low priority. We discussed the extent to which services have been excluded and concluded that, in terms of the impact on overall NHS resources, the absolute exclusion of services to date has been of marginal significance and is not appropriate.

We therefore recommend that the Department refines the operation of waiting time targets to increase flexibility and sets out clearly the framework within which purchasers will be expected to define the local package of services. We recommend that it sets out criteria by which decisions may be scrutinised, debated and, if necessary, challenged by individuals. We state that there should be no absolute exclusion of services from NHS provision. Whether a specific service should remain available must depend solely on whether there is a clinical need for that service and whether the service will demonstrably improve the health status of an individual.

Some of our witnesses argued that, instead of exclusions, greater emphasis should be placed on better value for money by making more efficient and appropriate use of existing resources. We draw attention to the large variations in the use of routine services across the country. There is a pressing need for greater information on those to be made available to purchasers and the public. The variations suggest that some routine treatments may be largely ineffective and a waste of resources, and even the most conservative estimates suggest that, by tackling that problem, there is greater potential to release resources for other services.

We warmly welcome the recent attempts to take effectiveness more seriously through research at Oxford and York, and by means of effectiveness bulletins. Feedback from our witnesses suggests a long untapped demand for greater information on effectiveness, and we make specific recommendations on how that information could be better disseminated. However much information is available, it is of no use if clinical behaviour does not change appropriately. We are convinced that persuasion rather than coercion must be used. We therefore make urgent recommendations on how that might be done.

[Mrs. Marion Roe]

Our evidence suggests that previously implicit criteria are now becoming more explicit. Clinical guidelines and protocols are bringing those criteria out into the open. We see a need for greater explicitness also in the scrutiny of those criteria. Patients must be involved more fully in the choices regarding their own treatment. It is clear from our evidence that health authorities are making greater efforts than hitherto to involve the public in priority setting, but performance remains patchy. While some consultation exercises have led to welcome changes in local services, others are perceived to have had little impact on services. That has led to disappointment and alienation. Variation between districts is worrying. There are difficulties in gaining genuinely representative public views on priorities but we recommend that the Department sets minimum standards for involving the public in the development of services.

I have now covered the report's main points but urge hon. Members to read the whole document. It is fair to say that, unlike last year's report on the drugs budget, this report does not contain a package of radical proposals because the issues involved are complex. They are taxing every Government in the developed world and, in many cases, as hon. Members will have gathered from my remarks, there are no easy nostrums or straightforward solutions; it would be dishonest for us to pretend that there were.

We hope that our report will be taken as a systematic attempt to review those difficult matters, take a snapshot of the current state of decision making in the health service, and contribute to a debate that will undoubtedly continue for years to come. We await with interest the Government's response to our report and recommendations in due course.

6.36 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): When I went to St. Bartholomew's hospital this morning, an official sign in big red letters outside said:

"There is no accident and emergency unit at this hospital".

The notice signalled, and was intended to signal, that everything about St. Bartholomew's hospital is to be destroyed. There were flowers and wreaths under the notice. A card on one of the bunches of flowers said:

"Sadly missed, from Whitecross street traders".

A card on a large wreath said:

"For all those who may become the victims of Bottomley's stupidity".

It was signed, "Local Residents".

Last week, a moving, beautiful, poetic candlelight procession moved off from St. Bartholomew's hospital to St. Paul's cathedral to pray that some good might come of the evil that was being done. The bells pealed out across the City. Heads were bowed, but people's faces shone with a sombre pride. Some cried openly and unashamedly in the street. We were witnessing a tragedy that should never have happened.

What a sad epitaph for the Secretary of State that she should go down in history as the person who hired a pathetic, second-rate, professional mafia—Sir Timothy Chessells; Admiral Staveley; Sir Derek Boorman; Gerry Green; and Francis Heidesohn—to destroy the world's oldest and possibly greatest hospital. If ever a Secretary of State failed to understand the true principle of conservatism—that of conserving excellence—it is this Secretary of State.

Today, the Royal London hospitals trust, which was born of the merger between the Royal London hospital, St. Bartholomew's and the London chest hospital, is an institution at war with itself—torn and driven by strife, caused, ironically, by the chairman and chief executive of the trust. That war and strife exemplify what is wrong with the NHS today.

On 11 January this year, Mr. David Maclean, chairman of the Royal London hospital medical council, told the St. Bartholomew's hospital medical council that a recent press conference, at which a gang of five consultants from the Royal London hospital had slagged off consultants from St. Bartholomew's to the *Daily Express* newspaper, had been orchestrated and initiated by the trust's chief executive, Mr. Gerry Green.

If anyone doubts the truth of that, I have the minutes of the meeting with me. Can anyone imagine the chief executive of a trust organising a press conference to destroy his own institution and to encourage one group of consultants to destroy the reputation of another group of consultants?

At the press conference, the gang of five—Wilson, Cunningham, Wright, Swash and David Maclean himself—lied, lied and lied again about their colleagues at Bart's, and did so at the behest of the trust's chief executive. They defamed Mr. Steven Miles, who ran the Bart's accident and emergency unit. In an even more bizarre twist, they defamed Professor Mike Besser, one of the world's top doctors, the former acting chief executive of St. Bartholomew's hospital and currently the deputy president of the Royal College of Physicians. If that is not bizarre, what is?

On 25 January, 86 consultants from the medical council of St. Bartholomew's hospital passed the following motion:

"That the actions of Mr. G. N. V. Green"—

the chief executive—

"and Sir Derek Boorman"—

the chairman of the trust—

"in respect of recent press allegations impugning the integrity of senior members of this Institution and their subsequent responses to them are unsatisfactory, have led to unnecessary divisions between consultants on the three Trust sites and are not seen as providing an even-handed approach to management of the Trust. Medical Council sees this as part of a wider inability to pursue, as initially promised, such an even-handed approach. Medical Council therefore resolves that it has no confidence in the Chief Executive and Trust Board Chairman and that each should resign forthwith."

That motion was carried nem. con., which means that 80 consultants voted for it and a few abstained.

The minutes of that meeting stated:

"It was further resolved that the Acting Chairman should write to each of the five consultants involved, expressing:

(1) Dissatisfaction with their actions and failure either to justify their allegations or to withdraw and adequately to apologise for them.

(2) To request those of them holding positions of authority such as Clinical Director and Ethical Committee Chairman, to consider whether they can continue to enjoy the confidence of their colleagues on this site in these positions."

It is extraordinary that the clinical director and ethical committee chairman should act without ethics and morality, and five consultants may be suspended pending a full inquiry into their actions. What is going on at the Royal London hospitals trust?

The Daily Telegraph subsequently carried an article in which it was alleged that the consultants at Bart's had misused funds from the Imperial Cancer Research Fund. That allegation was equally untrue. The Imperial Cancer Research Fund is about to write to *The Daily Telegraph* to say that it was untrue. We are witnessing a dirty tricks campaign—political and military games carried out on behalf of the Secretary of State by the chairman of the trust, who happens to have been a former joint chief of the intelligence staff. It is extraordinary.

The turmoil at the trust has continued with the appointment of the warden to the merged medical colleges. Sir Colin Berry, a pathologist, was appointed, even though he is subject to investigations on two serious cases of medical negligence involving two women who have had their breasts cut off as a result of his misdiagnosis. The general view is that Sir Colin should not have allowed his name to go forward while those allegations are being investigated. We need a full statement from Sir Derek Boorman, the chairman of the trust, to explain.

Mr. Couchman: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and I seek your guidance. Are the hon. Gentleman's accusations against a distinguished doctor's clinical judgment in order, in view of the fact that the matters are currently being investigated?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): The sub judice rule applies only to court action. I am assuming that there is no question of court action in this case. I have no doubt that the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) can elucidate on that.

Mr. Sedgemore: I am not aware of any court action, but I am aware of investigations currently taking place. I believe that it is appropriate, in the House, for me to say that it is my contention that Sir Colin Berry should not have put himself forward to be the warden of the joint medical colleges, given the nature of the allegations. One must be seen to be cleaner than clean and show qualities of leadership. I do not see how that can be done in such circumstances.

It is also unfortunate that Sir Colin was appointed when there was an infinitely superior candidate called Professor Lesley Rees, who is generally regarded in medical spheres as perhaps the best dean that this country has ever seen. I am convinced that she was not appointed partly because she is a woman—the male chauvinism of the Royal London college is legendary—and partly because, although she fought to make the merger of the Royal London and the St. Bartholomew's medical schools work, she also fought to preserve activity at Charterhouse square for the medical college and at the Smithfield site for the hospital.

Sir Derek Boorman has meanwhile shown himself to be paranoid and has set up an extremely expensive inquiry into the leaking of a document at the time the warden was being appointed. That seems bizarre. During the course of that inquiry, there was an extraordinary homophobic outburst, in which Sir Derek made it clear that he regards being gay as a human weakness. That seems to be beyond the pale for someone who is chairman of a hospital trust.

Recently, there have been more general allegations about Sir Colin Berry, and an investigation is taking place. We should be told the nature of those allegations, the evidence that was given and the results of the investigation. The right course would be for Sir Colin to stand down and for the post to be readvertised.

I was talking about war and contrition at the hospitals trust. No fewer than four consultants independently told me—wrongly, I am sure—that they believed that their telephones were tapped. Many people have a paranoia about the tapping of telephones, but is it not odd and understandable that four senior clinicians should separately report to their local Member of Parliament that they think that that has happened? It seems to suggest that there is something radically wrong at the Royal London hospitals trust.

The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) mentioned the role of the East London and Hackney health authority. It is clear that the purchaser, in the form of Frances Heidesohn, has for the past year been working behind closed doors with the provider, Sir Derek Boorman, to close St. Bartholomew's hospital.

I went to see her for an hour and a half recently. The *Evening Standard* stated simply that such treachery would never be forgiven. I do not want to use such emotive language, but it seems that claims that there is competition—and that the purchaser-provider split has brought about that competition—cannot be upheld when the consultative document produced by the purchaser is identical to documents that were leaked to me earlier this year and were prepared by the provider. That is not competition, but collusion. Not only were the figures and the language the same, but so was every comma and colon.

The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South said—I am sure that he meant it—that he hoped that the Secretary of State would give serious consideration to the consultation process, where the purchaser and the provider jointly propose that the site of St. Bartholomew's hospital at Smithfield should be completely closed down.

No such examination of the proposals will be prepared. Within the past 24 hours, the acting chairman of the medical council at St Bartholomew's hospital, Larry Baker, has been to see the trust chairman Sir Derek Boorman, the chief executive Gerry Green and Dr. Duncan Empey. When Larry Baker said that the Bart's people were insisting that serious medical activity should continue at the Smithfield site, Sir Derek told him that the Government had made enough U-turns on medical affairs, and they were not going to make another one.

The chairman of the medical trust has said that he knows what the Secretary of State will do. Clearly, he is acting on the orders of the Secretary of State. I am confident about that because, before he took up his post—before he had viewed any evidence or even entered his office—Sir Derek Boorman told me that he intended to close the St Bartholomew's site. They were his political instructions, and that was what he intended to do.

I trust implicitly the sincerity, honesty and integrity of the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South, but he has to start asking a few hard

[Mr. Sedgemore]

questions about some of the people around him. I believe that the plight of St Bartholomew's hospital could end in tragedy, and I will fight against that.

At the meeting between the acting chairman and the chairman of the trust, the question was raised as to what would happen if a Labour Government were elected in two years. The acting chairman was told that those who board the train now will prosper, and those who do not will not prosper. That has nothing to do with medicine; it is dreadful politics, and it is an insult to this country.

The motion moved by my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) clearly states that there should be a moratorium on hospital closures in London while the decisions are viewed rationally. There is no reason for the actions of the Royal London hospitals trust; it is gut and nasty politics, from which the House should disassociate itself completely.

6.52 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I do not wish to follow the line taken by the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) or that of my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) with regard to St Bartholomew's hospital. I do not know the arguments between St Bartholomew's hospital and the Royal London hospital, and I do not understand the circumstances. However, I do know that hon. Members as far afield as myself in my mid-Kent constituency have been lobbied by both sides of the argument.

As long ago as 1908, it was realised that there were too many large hospitals in a three-mile ring based around the central point of Harley street. Ever since that time, the rationalisation of the facilities in London has been a troublesome and contentious issue.

A dozen years ago, I was the chairman of an outer London health district which was deprived of resources because so many resources were allocated to the inner-London ring. My constituency in mid-Kent and the Medway towns have been a most deprived district, vis-à-vis population size, for a long time. We are very pleased that we are to see a £45 million extension to our district general hospital in Gillingham. That will provide services to a population of 300,000 people which we expected a long time ago but which we were deprived of because of the over-resourcing of inner London.

I shall devote most of my speech to examining the pursuit of value for money in the health service, particularly with regard to primary health care. The debate has been very interesting so far. The spokesman for the Liberal party, the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), rubbished the Government's policy on the health service. He then asked the Opposition spokesman whether a Labour Government would abolish trusts and fundholding, as well as a number of other questions which I thought would be asked by those on my own Front Bench.

However, the hon. and learned Gentleman did not tell us what the Liberal party would do for the health service—although it is unlikely ever to have responsibility for the national health service. As I said by way of intervention during the Secretary of State's speech, running the health service is somewhat different from sniping from the Opposition Benches. The Opposition do not have to seek best value for money from this year's £33 billion budget for England and Wales, and they do not understand the responsibility involved.

Ten years ago, the pursuit of value for money from any part of the national health service was somewhat less than fashionable. The suggestion to doctors at that time that it was a laudable aim to derive best value for every pound that was spent on health care was likely to bring forth the lofty response, "You worry about the cost while I get on with the healing."

The resources debate then was about the absolute level of the money voted to the national health service rather than the deployment of that budget, whether at a national or a local level. Much has changed since that time and, politics notwithstanding, the change has been in the interest of the patient. While my speech is mainly about value for money in primary care, many improvements in the deployment of resources have occurred throughout the hospital and community services sector as well.

Awareness of the need for the NHS to provide value for money is growing, and will continue to develop. In 1992-93, the national health service budget for England and Wales was more than £30 billion, of which approximately one quarter—£7.3 billion, which was the entire health service budget in 1978-79 when the Labour party was last responsible for the national health service—was spent on primary health services. The four main service areas were ophthalmic, pharmaceutical, dental and general medical services.

The cost of pharmaceutical services, at more than half £7.3 billion, dwarfs even the cost of 27,000 registered general practitioners' salaries and their practice allowances. About 10 per cent. of national health service expenditure is spent on drugs prescribed by GPs, who typically write 1.5 million prescriptions daily. It is little wonder that such emphasis has been put on rational prescribing in the search for value for money in primary care. I must declare an interest in the subject, which is on the Register of Members' Interests, as I advise a pharmaceutical company, Pfizer Ltd., in Kent.

Three major initiatives have motivated improvements in the services provided by GPs: the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, the general practice contract and the patients charter. The recent reforms have flowed from the NHS and Community Care Act, including GP fundholding, which is now in its fourth year and will undergo major extensions from April.

As my right hon. Friend reminded us, in November 1994, the National Audit Office published a report on the first two years of fundholding. The report concluded that fundholders reported that they had achieved a wide range of benefits for their patients, including reduced waiting times for non-urgent hospital admissions and first out-patient appointments, a more responsive service in diagnostic test results and discharges from hospitals, and the provision of additional services in their practice premises such as advanced equipment and consultant out-patient clinics.

Fundholders have become more aware of the need for rational prescribing, and they have curbed the growth of their drugs expenditure compared with non-fundholders. Although initial budget setting was hampered by lack of good historic data, from 1993-94 the NHS executive has required regions to develop benchmarks based on average

treatment and prescribing levels, to help set budgets. That should prevent the sizeable underspends and overspends of the first two years.

Early experience showed that GP fundholders were three times more likely to underspend than to overspend their budgets. Although some large windfall underspends were repaid to regions for distribution, in 1992-93, underspend of £28.3 million was retained to be spent by fundholders, to the benefit of their patients. Fundholders have drawn up objectives, and some consulted not only health authority purchasers but their patients on how their practices might be improved. I wonder whether anyone can remember that happening before the 1990 Act was implemented.

All general practitioners are independent contractors to the NHS. Fundholders are accountable to regional health authorities for how they use their funds. It follows that regions and family health service authorities must monitor fundholder performance, not just for financial competence and probity—I will say more about that later—but for the quality of service offered.

The National Audit Office report made a number of recommendations, which I will summarise. The NHS management executive should extend the benefits of GP purchasing involvement to all patients. It should use benchmarks rather than historic figures to set budgets and consider introducing fund management plans for all fundholders, to provide a basis for agreeing objectives and monitoring performance. Regional health authorities are urged to manage underspend by fundholders more effectively, and, where windfall underspends occur, to negotiate voluntary return.

District health authorities are urged to set indicative budgets for non-fundholders on a comparable basis to budgets set for fundholders, and fundholders must be able to demonstrate the likely cost and benefit for patients of their plans to utilise fund savings.

It is clear that the NAO report is broadly favourable to the fundholding concept, and applauds the value for money achieved during the scheme's first two years. That is just as well, for the Government propose dramatically to extend the scheme from April this year, when there will be a three-layer fundholding scheme.

Small practices will have community fundholding that will not involve the purchase of acute hospital treatment. Standard fundholding will be extended and available to practices with just 5,000 patients, compared with 7,000 now. A total purchasing pilot scheme will allow GPs in a locality to purchase all hospital and community health services for their patients, including accident and emergency services.

The NAO report called for the extension of the benefits of GP purchasing involvement to all patients. The 1995 extension should enable progress to be made towards that goal. It will be even more important that fundholders keep and submit proper accounts of their activities and that the new health authorities will need to monitor those accounts carefully on a value-for-money basis as well as for strictly accounting purposes. Expertise in auditing that sizeable operation must be developed speedily, and any malpractices rooted out. I will return to that point.

The patients charter, in conjunction with the new GP contract, has given patients the right to expect a number of services not previously available. They include check-ups when a patient is first registered, a regular check-up for the elderly every year at the surgery or at home, and check-ups every three years for other patients.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, in parts of Strathclyde, a printed sticky label is used to say, "Sorry—we can't meet the nine-week target in the patients charter"? Some folks wait 19, 20 or 25 weeks to meet consultants and surgeons. The patients charter is certainly not working in Scotland.

Mr. Couchman: With respect, I was talking about the expectations from the patients charter in respect of GP services rather than hospital services. I must allow my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health to answer the hon. Gentleman's question when he winds up.

Mr. Graham: I was trying to make the point that GPs are having to apologise to their patients because they cannot arrange appointments with consultants and others for long periods.

Mr. Couchman: I am sorry that I gave way again, because I do not think that added to the hon. Gentleman's first intervention. My hon. Friend the Minister will answer for the patients charter in the round, in Scotland as well.

As a result of the GP contract and patients' expectations, many practices have extended their provision for immunisation, well person clinics, specialist clinics for chronic diseases such as diabetes and asthma, and minor surgery—as well as for alcohol and drug misuse. The best practices now offer substantially better value for money than before the new contract, and are being rewarded appropriately.

I mentioned that the pharmaceutical bill accounts for half the primary care bill of £7.3 billion, and it would be impossible to refer to value for money in primary care without expanding on that aspect. There has been a tendency to rely on driving down the cost of each prescription to contain the burgeoning NHS drugs bill. It is a cliché to say that cheap is not always best, but to emphasise that maxim, I will quote the words of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in Committee on the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, speaking then as Minister of State:

"Sometimes the best prescribing is restrained prescribing of high-cost items. Low-cost prescribing is not necessarily the right way. There are some new drugs which, if applied at the right time, can achieve the best results. It is simplistic to think that prescribing is anything other than a subtle, complex and frequently changing subject."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 1 February 1990; c. 641.]

Those wise words prompt a number of questions, but I do not want to overstay my welcome. The Audit Commission report "Prescription for Improvement", published last year, offers a comprehensive analysis of factors that make the case for rational prescribing, and thereby counters the pressures that my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) mentioned, of demographic change, treatment in the community, continuing pharmaceutical development and the impact of GP contracts in spurring screening—which identifies more disease in more patients, who obviously then demand treatment.

The speech of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) was one of her least impressive offerings at the Dispatch Box. It was a litany of newspaper cuttings, and I was at pains to discern much of Labour's policy.

[Mr. Couchman]

The right hon. Lady mentioned waiting lists, and I declare an interest. I and my family are national health service patients and always have been. We do not pay private health insurance. The only treatment for which we pay is dentistry, because NHS dentists are difficult to come by in my part of the world. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I have written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on many occasions about the provision of NHS dental treatment, because I am as unhappy as hon. Members in other parts of the House about that matter.

I would defend to the limit people who have private health insurance. Having paid their taxes and national insurance, they have a right to contribute to such insurance. They do so in the expectation that, if they need a non-urgent procedure performed, they will be able to have that done more quickly than if they were to rely on the NHS.

Mr. Graham: That is terrible.

Mr. Couchman: The hon. Gentleman says that that is terrible, but I am quite prepared to defend the right to do that, even though I do not choose that option. People who do save the NHS a great deal of money. What I am less happy about is the apparent manipulation of waiting lists by some consultants, to their own advantage.

I went home from here last Thursday evening and watched the video of a Channel 4 programme in the "Dispatches" series, called "Serving Two Masters". It related the findings of Dr. John Yates, a senior manager in the health service until two or three years ago, when he became a full-time academic researcher. His project on health service waiting lists left me profoundly disturbed. He says that 96 per cent. of private patients see a consultant within a month, but only 9 per cent. of NHS patients do. That is worrying. He also asked a number of pertinent questions: was it just coincidence that consultants working in specialties with the longest waiting lists have the highest private sector earnings? He asked whether private sector operating concentrates on conditions which, in the NHS, have the longest waiting times for treatment.

Dr. Yates gave some disturbing facts about cardiac surgery in London, and about orthopaedic and ophthalmic consultants throughout the country, particularly in Birmingham, where he was doing most of his work.

I think that Ministers need to pay some attention to Dr. Yates's findings. The time has come to take the Duncan Nicol line of one private practice session a week being the right amount for any consultant who is full time, or the part-time equivalent of ten elevenths. I know that that will not be popular with some consultants, but it is right to keep them to their contracts with the NHS.

Mr. Hayes: Does my hon. Friend therefore agree with the Minister of State, who has suggested that the way round some of these undoubted abuses is to begin more local pay bargaining?

Mr. Couchman: I am not sure that that is as effective a mechanism as where the contract is placed. Most consultants' contracts are still with the regional health authorities. That has been a problem since I was chairman of a district health authority; for it is very difficult for a DHA, now a trust, to call to order consultants who appear to be kicking over the traces. There have always been consultants with split responsibilities—three sessions here, four there, two in another district. They were always in the other place.

The time has come for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to grasp the nettle and to place contracts at the point where consultants are employed—with the trusts, if they serve trust hospitals.

My right hon. Friend must deal with the problem of waiting lists, because she must give confidence to national health service patients that they are not losing out to abuses by consultants whose probity and integrity, I fear, are falling short of the highest standards expected under their contracts with the NHS.

7.13 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I am pleased to have been called to speak. It is worth repeating what the debate is about: the threat to the existence of the national health service resulting from Government policies.

I thought that my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) made a brilliant speech in which she analysed the Government's intentions with devastating accuracy. The sedentary insults that were hurled at her—there have been more since—only went to prove that her speech hit home.

I shall use my time to allow the patients who have written to me to speak to the House through me about their recent complaints. Under this Government and Secretary of State for Health there is always a yawning gap between the slick image of an improved modern health service and the real world.

The reality for patients can be very different from the Secretary of State's version. The description of a Bottomley ward in *The Daily Telegraph*—trolleys in the corridors with patients lying on them—says a lot more about the NHS than anything the Secretary of State said today.

In my constituency trust's area, as with every other trust in the country, we are inundated with glossy brochures full of propaganda, but I tend to read more closely the letters that I receive from patients and former patients. In October, for instance, I had a letter from a patient who was attending the oncology clinic at the Royal Halifax infirmary. Hers is a very different story from the one in the glossy brochures. I will not give the House her name, but it has gone to the Secretary of State. She writes:

"Words are inadequate to try and attempt to praise the care and commitment of Dr. Howard Close",

the consultant in charge of the cancer unit.

"My own experience has shown that on Thursdays in Halifax he attends to in-patients, new patients and out-patients from late morning until who knows what time in the early evening . . . He is a man of tremendous warmth and gives each patient the time and individual attention each one so badly needs. As a cancer patient one feels at one with Dr. Close in a trusting relationship . . . The nurses too are equally committed, working in archaic conditions, supporting Dr. Close in this busy, demanding clinic."

Whenever we bring patients' complaints to the attention of the Secretary of State, she sounds off about how we criticise staff and doctors. But I share this patient's admiration for the team working in that clinic.

The patient goes on to describe her concerns about the clinic:

"The clinic and its surroundings are small, cramped and cheerless. It is far too small to cater for the number attending at any one time. At a rough count there may be seating for 25 to 30 people. The seats

are the plastic bucket type, very uncomfortable especially for sick people . . . The seats are placed close together so that it is impossible to read because of sheer space. We just sit. It is a silent clinic, broken only by the nurses calling out the names of people to be weighed; whilst we just sit and listen. At times very sick people are brought into the clinic in wheel chairs to wait. It is a very pathetic sight for ill people to wait at this clinic with little or no privacy for anyone. There is nowhere for a patient to have a drink and the waiting time can be anything from two and a half to four hours . . . I have been an in-patient at the Cookridge hospital when undergoing chemotherapy for 10 months last year and have never experienced the sadness and desolation in the atmosphere one feels in the Halifax out-patient clinic."

I took up this emotional complaint with the chief executive of the trust. I will not bore the House with the reply, except to say that she agreed that Dr. Close and his staff were excellent, caring employees, and agreed about the condition of the clinic, but went on to say:

"Unfortunately, I am not able at this point to guarantee that we will be able to make this funding available."

She was of course referring to funding for improvements to the clinic. This same hospital has £500,000 in trust in the form of donations and bequests from grateful patients' relatives and fund raisers—yet nothing has been done about the clinic. It really is a desolate and desperate place. Calderdale health trust is behaving in exactly the same hard-hearted way as many other trusts all over the country. It especially behaves in that way on early discharge. Primary care and community care in Calderdale is the same as in many other places; it simply means passing the buck, and Calderdale health trust is doing that as well.

I attended recently a forum for Halifax and Calder Valley pensioners, to discuss with the trust one of the so-called "consultation exercises" that it carries out from time to time to put into yet another glossy brochure—some more propaganda. Elderly people gave their testaments and the trust gave a written report afterwards of the answers. I shall read out a couple of questions on early discharge, because it is symptomatic of what is happening in the country.

One relative of an 84-year-old widower spoke of the widower being discharged from hospital, only to be readmitted shortly afterwards owing to a lack of nutrition. When discharged again, he was provided—to make it easier for him—with a chemical toilet, but no chemicals to enable him to use it. Although he was readmitted with nutrition problems—malnutrition, no doubt—he was told that he was not eligible for "meals on wheels". There was no answer to that complaint for the Halifax pensioners who raised the matter on his behalf.

When patients brought up the issue of what will happen when the purpose-built Northowram hospital, for elderly and psychiatric patients, closes, which it will—it is a new hospital, not an outdated Victorian unit—they were told, "If we have all the services on one site, it will save on running costs." I could go on about some of the thoughtless responses—heart-breaking in some cases—when the pensioners asked genuine questions about what would happen to them in the future.

In Halifax, hospital wards are closed almost monthly. Yet patients are crammed like battery hens in old, outdated wards, and men and women are nursed side by side in some of those wards. No matter what the objection to mixed wards, the trust—the people who are giving us all the choice—simply tells us that mixed wards will continue to be the norm in Calderdale. On a recent visit to see a patient, I witnessed a severely brain-damaged lady expose herself to a very embarrassed male patient, and some loving and caring patients walked in and caught her doing that. That simply is not good enough today.

Other women, who had suffered strokes or heart attacks, were mixed in with all kinds of patients, cramped together like battery hens. Some of those people were waiting to go into the hospital for rehabilitation. The hospital is about to be closed. It is a disgrace. We are told that we can lose 300 beds without it harming patient care. It is already harming patient care, very badly.

Mrs. Wise: It occurs to me that my hon Friend's points have some relevance to the statement that was made by the Secretary of State—that more patients are being cared for. I am thinking particularly of a friend of mine in the north-east whose mother was discharged, in the circumstances that my hon. Friend described, although clearly extremely ill. She had to be readmitted within a day and died two days later. That, of course, would count in the statistics as two hospital episodes. It would show up as patients. No wonder more people appear to be treated. It is directly linked with premature discharge.

Mrs. Mahon: My hon. Friend makes a very clear and telling point, and what she says is the truth.

Mixed wards are not generally liked. I received a letter only yesterday from the Townswomen's Guilds, which has been complaining against mixed wards for more than 10 years. It told me:

"Our members are very concerned about many health issues and have recently expressed their dismay and dislike of mixed sex wards in British hospitals . . .

Townswomen have personal experience of staying in mixed wards and have written to me with their stories detailing their discomfort and upset when they found themselves in this situation. Many of those writing to me expressed concern that the extra stress of mixed wards could hinder rather than help the healing process."

It goes on to talk about the lack of dignity and the embarrassment experienced by many in such wards. That is the experience that I get as a Member of Parliament, but my trust does not listen to me. I simply get brushed off with, "Oh, well, we only seem to get complaints from you." That is simply not true.

I know that the Secretary of State said that, in future, she will ensure that people are told whether they are to go on to a mixed ward, before they are admitted to hospital. But will they have to wait longer if they object? It is serious, indeed.

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Lady makes an important point about mixed wards. It is something that we take seriously and I hope, therefore, that she will welcome what has been incorporated in the new and updated patients charter. It puts the pressure on—not just her pressure but that of the NHS as a whole—calling for people to be given that option where available and to be given information so that if no place is available on a single-sex ward, there may be an option to wait a week or two until one is available. We are with her on that.

Mrs. Mahon: Or six months, perhaps. The Calderdale trust is taking no notice of that advice. It is advice and the very nature of the advice means that trusts can ignore it if they want. I shall wait to see whether any more teeth is given to the suggestion that the Minister makes.

[Mrs. Mahon]

I deal now with the excellent document "Serving Two Masters" by Dr. John Yates, an eminent health service manager, as has been said. He exposes not only what is happening with some of the consultants but the Government's claims on waiting lists. He says:

"There is now a queue of over one million people waiting for an operation. For years, the length of this queue has been used as a measure of waiting time. Although the length of the waiting list does not necessarily predict the length of wait, most people see a relationship between the two. The NHS, politicians and the press watch the statistics of waiting lists quite carefully, but rarely admit that they have only examined half of the problem: there is another, sometimes longer, wait just to get on the waiting list. The waiting time for an out-patient appointment to see the surgeon is not information that the NHS gathers systematically, nor does it publish national statistics about it."

As we heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) and for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), who is not in the Chamber at the moment, there are not three waiting lists but four. We should investigate that further. Also on waiting lists, my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) made the point very well about counting twice, and the radical statistics group makes the same point. That is relevant, because at the moment, it is meaningless jargon at best and at its worst it is simply lies. It bears no relationship to the reality and to people's everyday experiences. There really is an image-reality gap.

The reality is that of Lewis Braun, an 18-year-old teenager from Wilmslow, about whom we all read a couple of weeks ago, who suffered horrific burns but was driven 60 miles, in agony, after being turned away from the Christie hospital—his nearest hospital—because there was no intensive care bed. Then there is the reality of Roberta Gierardo, who died of a brain haemorrhage on new year's eve after an eight-hour wait in casualty at the North Middlesex hospital while staff spent the night scouring London and the home counties for an intensive care bed. I wrote to the Secretary of State shortly after that incident was reported because someone in London had contacted me, but she has still not replied to my letter.

I want to talk about the reality of the NHS today where the elderly, sick and psychiatrically ill are denied a bed simply because they have grown too old or because it has been decided that they can be cared for in the community when, in reality, there is often no community to care. The new draft guidance on long-term care, which clearly departs from the founding principles of the NHS of care from the cradle to the grave, will not solve any of the problems put to me by my constituents or provide an answer when they ask me whether they will have a bed when they become sick and old.

As I shall continue to say in the House at every opportunity, the elderly and the long-term sick are being betrayed daily by the Government. Elderly people are not animals to be dumped by a system that they brought into being and for which they paid. The members of the Halifax Pensioners Association, which has complained to me of that betrayal, are the best in the world and most of them are the product of two world wars in the span of a single lifetime. They deserve better. Too often, their reality is that of an 84-year-old constituent of mine whose case is detailed in a letter written to me by his son, which I received just this week, and which I intend to read again. It says:

"Last Wednesday my 84 year old father"—

the letter gives his name, but I shall not repeat it—

"entered the 'Calderdale Health Care', I still prefer the Royal Halifax Infirmary, for an operation on Thursday. He was told that he would be in until Monday"—

23 January—

"yesterday"—

three days earlier than the date on which he had been told he would be discharged—

"when I rang to find out his condition I was told he was being discharged. I rang my parents to find out how he felt, my father is one of the countless millions who never complains and feels grateful for any help he receives, said he felt 'wobbly' and that while he had been waiting for my severely arthritic mother to find someone to give her a lift to the hospital to pick my father up, he had urinated into three pairs of pyjamas . . . Is this another example of Virginia Bottomley's brave new world? If so, I am thoroughly disgusted. All his working life my father has worked and paid his tax for treatment like this. I cannot let the British public know of this disgusting example of the new NHS but you can and I hope this will help you to do so."

I have also forwarded that sad letter to the Secretary of State. We hear all the statistics being churned out, but we should look at the reality for elderly people. I wonder if the Secretary of State would describe that letter as a "jewel to be treasured". It is a sad indictment of the Government and how they have let down the NHS.

As I said earlier, people are not animals who must be corralled into the private sector where they are means-tested down to the last pound by smart accountants acting as zoo keepers. They are the people who gave us the NHS and they should not be left to the mercy of community care that scarcely exists because councils have been squeezed and squeezed since 1979. When the Government talk about community care, they mean secondary care where people are dumped out of the NHS.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Rubbish.

Mrs. Mahon: Elderly people are increasingly dumped out of the NHS. It is the Government who are rubbish, not the elderly people who complain to me.

The Secretary of State refused to give way to me and my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) about psychiatric beds in London because she has been grilled by the Select Committee and knows well that she has no answers for every expert and professional who told her that there were not enough acute beds for psychiatric patients in London. Yet she refused to stop closing them.

The fight is on to save the NHS and to end the market fascism that seeks to destroy it. That is a well-chosen description of what is happening. I want the Government to go and go quickly, but for the sake of the NHS I should like the Secretary of State to go a lot faster.

7.34 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): I am proud of our NHS. It has developed and flourished under successive Conservative Governments who have invested additional funds in real terms in the service each and every year since 1979. That commitment has resulted in an even greater proportion of gross national product being directed towards health—from 4.7 per cent. in 1979, the legacy left us by the Labour party, to 6.1 per cent. currently.

The Secretary of State has already announced a further large injection of funds for the forthcoming year. For the year 1993-94, a massive £37,000 million was invested to provide a comprehensive and efficient health service which is still the envy of the world and which is available to every man, woman and child in Britain irrespective of age, race, colour or creed.

Why is the NHS the envy of the world? Why do health professionals visit from Europe and America to find out how we provide such good value for money in health care? The answer is simple. It is because of the health service reforms introduced by the Government in 1991. As a result of those reforms, the country now benefits from more health facilities and ever-increasing quality. But that cannot be taken for granted, nor would it continue under a Labour Government.

I am sorry to say that I have heard a load of rubbish being spoken about the NHS this afternoon by the lot opposite—scare stories, slurs, misrepresentations and stretching the truth to the limit. That has been a deliberate ploy, instigated by that lot over there in a feeble attempt to obscure what most people see as a clear-cut issue.

The health service is a perfect reflection of the state of the two main political parties in Britain. On the Conservative Benches, we have a party which sees the need to alter and adapt policies and institutions to the needs of a changing environment. The Conservative party is the true party of change and has been rewarded for its progressive approach with four successive election victories.

The Labour party, however, is politically and financially handcuffed to the policies of the past and, as a result, has stagnated. The Labour party fears change and thus, following the principle of Darwin's theory recorded in "On the Origin of Species", is doomed to extinction.

It might be useful if I put a couple of things into perspective. The NHS became operational on 5 July 1948. At that time, electricity generation was the task of the British electricity authority, the forerunner of the now defunct central electricity generating board. British Rail, established only a year earlier, was investigating technologies to replace the steam locomotive.

In the 1990s, 50 years later, the electricity industry has been privatised and British Rail is in the process of restructuring and reorganising. In 1991, the Government introduced their NHS reforms. Demographic changes, new social aspirations and advances in medical science all contributed to the need for a new service culture.

Conservative reforms centred on a set of simple and sensible principles. First, we believe that the national health service should put patients first. Our reforms transformed the NHS, ending the boom-bust mentality of the old provider-led system. In those days, hospitals worked flat out; all their beds were available for the first two thirds of each year, but they then had to cope with bed closures because the money had run out. That resulted in the indiscriminate cancellation of urgent as well as routine operations.

We have now created a purchaser-led system, in which the purchaser identifies needs and responds to the requirements of the local population. Purchasers arrange contracts to ensure that hospitals and community units know what services, and how many services, will be required of them, so that they can plan the delivery of those services with optimum staff and bed numbers. The process encompasses the principles of local decision making, partnership and efficiency. Efficient hospitals will receive more funds to cope with the increased number of patients whom they serve: the funds follow the patient.

The success of those reforms speaks for itself. First, the number of patients treated in hospital has increased from 7 million in 1991-92 to 8 million in 1993-94. Secondly, more than 800 hospital building schemes, each worth more than £1 million, have been completed since 1980, and nearly 300 are in the pipeline. Thirdly, waiting times have decreased dramatically: 50 per cent. of patients are seen immediately, 30 per cent. of the rest are seen within two weeks, 75 per cent. of patients are seen within three months and 98 per cent. are seen within a year.

Fourthly, spending on the NHS has increased by 66 per cent. in real terms since 1979. Over 1995-96, the Government will again increase their NHS spending—to £37,000 million, an increase of £1,300 million on the year before. Fifthly, between 1979 and 1992 the number of nurses and midwives increased by 25,000, and the number of medical and dental staff by nearly 10,000. Sixthly, since 1979 nurses' average earnings have increased by 65 per cent. in real terms, and doctors' pay by 35 per cent.

Seventhly, for the first time we have published hospital performance targets. Eighthly, we have established the patients charter, which has had an enormous impact in raising standards and improving efficiency. Ninthly, the proof of the pudding is in the eating: following the Government's 1991 reforms, 419 NHS trusts are now in operation. There are also 8,000 fundholding GPs, accounting for more than 50 per cent. of all eligible practices and more than 35 per cent. of the population.

The success of the Government's reforms is reflected in the excellent Queen Elizabeth II hospital in my constituency. Since the hospital was given trust status in 1991, the number of in-patient and day-case operations has increased by 28 per cent. The average waiting time has dropped to just three months, which is well below the national average, and the trust has introduced a number of new developments and schemes amounting to £13 million in total capital expenditure.

That lot over there are a cynical mob. I have watched them shake their heads while I have merely presented the facts. If they cannot accept the truth from me, perhaps they will listen to the people. In a survey conducted in June 1994, nine out of 10 patients who had attended hospital during the previous year found the service very good, good or average. That hardly tallies with the tales of gloom and disaster that we hear from Opposition Members.

Perhaps it would be a good idea to take a trip down memory lane and remind ourselves exactly what happened under the last Labour Government—as opposed to what has been said in more recent statements. Labour's political interference in the Government's health reforms can be traced back to 1990, when the poisoned dwarf, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who was then Labour's health spokesman—

Mr. Nicholas Brown: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to describe an hon. Member as a poisoned dwarf?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I did not catch what the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield

[Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse]

(Mr. Evans) actually said, but if he used the phrase "poisoned dwarf" I invite him to think again, and withdraw it.

Mr. Evans: I withdraw it unreservedly.

The hon. Member for Livingston, who at that time was Labour's health spokesman, threatened NHS managers who were working on the implementation of the Government's health reforms. Issuing a blatant threat, the hon. Member for Livingston told them to "go slow", because all the reforms would be reversed by the next Labour Government. The *Health Service Journal* condemned the outrageous interference of the hon. Member for Livingston, saying:

"The threat was barely veiled: everyone judged to have appeared to be enthusiastic about the White Paper need not expect to have their contract renewed by a Labour Health Secretary."

The journal went on to describe the hon. Gentleman's actions as

"outrageous interference in NHS management and flagrant intimidation of NHS managers."

So much for democracy.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)—balding Bambi—

Mr. Nicholas Brown *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Again, I appeal to the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield, who has been in the House for a long time and is an experienced campaigner. I invite him to withdraw his remark.

Mr. Evans: I withdraw it.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield, with his £60 haircuts and his £500 suits—sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union—has indicated that, under a Labour Government, he will be prepared to see the clock turned back on the NHS reforms. That means that the management of the health service will be taken away from the health professionals, and returned to the claws of the unions. It is hardly surprising, given that 156 Labour Members are sponsored by unions—including all Opposition Front Benchers.

The 1978-79 winter of discontent is indelibly printed on the minds of the public—so much so that that lot over there received four red cards in the last four elections. They lost in 1979; they lost in 1983; they lost in 1987; they lost in 1992; and they will lose again in 1997. How could the British public put the health service into the hands of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)? He cannot even remember where he parked his car, let alone cast his memory back to the appalling way in which the Labour Government bungled the health service in the 1970s.

In 1974 the Labour party manifesto promised:

"A Labour Government will . . . expand the National Health Service".

Three years later Mr. David Ennals, Labour's Secretary of State for Health, was forced to concede:

"In the present economic climate, the Government could do little more than provide for the increasing number of old, leaving a small margin for improvements in methods of treatment".

In 1978, the health budget was cut by 3 per cent. in real terms. Capital spending was cut by one third in real terms—the largest cut ever inflicted on the NHS capital programme. Aneurin Bevan, eat your heart out. Between 1974 and 1979, in real terms, nurses' pay fell by 21 per cent., doctors' pay fell by 16 per cent. and surgeons' pay fell by 25 per cent. Waiting lists rose by 48 per cent.

Dr. James Cameron, chairman of the British Medical Association, described in 1978 how

"the national health service is sick in Britain, it is inadequate and impersonal and is losing the confidence of the medical profession and the public".

The Royal College of Nursing congress at Harrogate in 1978 talked of

"a crisis of manpower, finance and morale in the service".

In 1978-79, the national health service went on strike, led by the Confederation of Health Service Employees and by the National Union of Public Employees. Telephonists were on strike and clinical staff were manning public call boxes to get calls into hospitals. Clean linen was not allowed though picket lines. Foul linen was destroyed because the unions would not even let it out of the hospital. Meals were provided by volunteers and cleaning was non-existent.

Let us cast our minds back to the news stories of the time. They did not reveal a health service nurtured by a caring, sharing Labour Government—quite the opposite. An article in *The Times* in 1978 with the headline

"Hospital is to turn away patients with cancer"

states that

"patients with breast, lung and other cancers, and abortion cases are to be turned away from the Kingston hospital, Surrey, because of industrial action by health service workers and supervisors, the hospital said yesterday. From midnight next Tuesday, even known cancer cases will be denied admission and lives immediately threatened. Investigative surgery, even where there is a strong suspicion of a life threatening condition, will not take place."

That was the national health service under that lot. That is what it was like—a total nightmare. If loved ones died, one could not even bury them because the picket line would not let the grave-diggers through to dig the grave to put them in. That is what it was like.

Mr. Nicholas Brown *rose—*

Mr. Evans: No, I will not give way.

Finally, we come to the confessions of the former Secretary of State for Health, Barbara Castle. During the winter of discontent, she described her attack on pay beds as an "essential political sweetener" for the trade unions. The Labour party is still committed to tossing political sweeteners to unions. In return, the unions toss financial sweeteners to the Labour party. As the leader of the Transport and General Workers Union said last year, "No say, no pay."

So Bambi intends to turn the clock back to those bad old days of the "savage seventies". As if that were not bad enough, he intends to strip power from the health professionals—the doctors and general practitioners—and to put it in the hands of his new regional assemblies. What a recipe for disaster. Yet again, the Labour party refuses to listen to the views of the profession. Instead, it wants to play politics with the health service. Just who does the right hon. Member for Sedgefield think he is—the Milky Bar kid?

If Labour had its way, the NHS as we know it would be destroyed. Decision making would be stripped from health care professionals and given to shop stewards, who would ultimately tear it apart as a result of regional and industrial political battles.

Labour should listen to its friends at *The Guardian*. In an article on 4 January this year, *The Guardian* argued that

"the problem with trying to restore the NHS is twofold: first, the disruption which yet another organisational change would make and, second, the danger of re-introducing the old inequalities and inefficiencies."

Perhaps the lot opposite should turn the clock right back to go back and truly to understand Nye Bevan's intentions' for the NHS. Back in 1946, he said:

"I believe that democracy exists in the active participation in administration and policy. Therefore, I believe that it is a wise thing to give the doctors full participation in the administration of their own professions."

Going by that statement, if Nye Bevan were still an hon. Member today, and if he reflected on the Conservative reforms and Labour plans, I am pretty sure that he would vote for the Government's amendment at the end of today's debate.

7.54 pm

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): There we have it from the historical and intellectual wing of the Tory party. The lack of understanding of the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) on this issue is surpassed only by his lack of understanding on every other issue that he speaks about in the Chamber.

The national health service is the most important of our public services, but we know that the Government's reforms have created a two-tier system, with treatment decided by ability to pay, by whoever one's doctor happens to be, or by the performance of a contract. The service, as we know it, has been split into small, competing health businesses—the internal market. It implies competition between those businesses, purchasing on the basis of cost, and making local hospitals work against each other rather than together. One unit poaches patients from another in a war that is fought and won primarily on the basis of cost. Patients are the losers on that commercial battlefield.

The trend is towards not localisation but a health service where people are shipped around for the cheapest treatment. That is the logic of the Government's reforms. Some hospitals, of course, will always have to buy specialty services that they cannot provide and have never been able to provide, but it goes beyond that. The results are only just beginning to be shown, but I know from my discussions with health managers in my region that that is the way in which trust managers think.

Doncaster Royal infirmary is being forced to develop plans to treat patients from other areas. Although that might be good news for the hospital's staff, it is not such good news for facilities elsewhere. They will be run down as they lose patients, who will be forced to travel for treatment.

The Government's sleight of hand, to put it mildly, with statistics on the NHS is evidence of how far they are prepared to go to cover up their failures. Patients are no longer people. They have become episodes, to be counted not once, not twice, but sometimes even three times by administrators. It is convenient for the Government that they have decided on finished consultant episodes as the best means of measuring the amount of work undertaken in our hospitals. The Government can con their Back Benchers, but they cannot con the people, who know how long they have been waiting for treatment.

The Government claim that waiting times are improving, but the people who are waiting know that that is not true. More and more people—more than 1 million—are waiting for treatment in today's NHS. Patients are waiting for an appointment to be granted, waiting once an appointment has been given, and waiting for treatment after their initial consultation—three waiting lists for the price of one.

The market makes it expedient for trusts to cook the books and it is politically convenient for the Secretary of State for Health to sit idly by while they do so, and then to quote the distorted figures. That distorted picture makes it hard to determine what is happening in the NHS.

My constituents have been made to wait for months for an appointment, or they have had to pay to jump the queue for a consultation, because if they do not receive the treatment, they could lose their job. It is becoming a pay-as-you-go health service.

The Government have not given an adequate reply on the concerns expressed about the extent of the work done privately by consultants. An extension of private work can only mean a retraction in national health services and longer waits for patients who do not have the means to pay. The two-tier system is emphasised by GP fundholding, which gives some patients a fast track to hospital care while others lose out. Again, that can mean only that clinical need has gone out the window as a basis on which to decide who gets treatment.

Finally, there is a problem of contracts being completed while there are patients still needing treatment. These people have to wait for treatment because the year's money has run out. Health care is being turned into a lottery, and everywhere we look we see the same signs.

The Government have managed to upset dentists so much that many are refusing to treat NHS patients. A dentist in my constituency has stopped treating them and is instead asking patients to take out Denplan insurance. In response to a letter to me, he wrote:

"To remain wholly within the Health Service is like having all your eggs in one basket . . . with the person holding the basket intent on emptying it".

The Government have turned dentists away from the NHS and have, in the process, fragmented and commercialised the services that they provide.

Less than two months ago, the Secretary of State claimed that the reforms had

"effected a fundamental and irreversible shift in favour of the patient."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 632.]

The evidence says not; the evidence says that it is the insurance companies and private sector that stand to gain the most and the patient who has gained the least.

The Government's claims for patients do not fit very well with the facts. The Government's aim is to privatise our health service by taking away its truly national meaning, introducing inappropriate competition and making patients pay for more of what they get. The inevitable conclusion is that the NHS is not, and never has been, safe in their hands.

The Government have systematically excluded the voice of professionals and that of local people and replaced them with the voice of business, with more than half the chairs of family and district health authorities appointed by the Secretary of State having a business background. We can see where the Government's priorities lie—with the commercialisation and

[Mr. Kevin Hughes]

privatisation of health care rather than democratic decision making about the allocation of resources within the NHS.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Does the hon. Gentleman think that there was a better state of affairs when Greenwich local authority placed on its health authority three prospective Labour parliamentary candidates, or when Lambeth health authority had placed on it someone who was not fit to serve on the local authority and who was a disqualified councillor? We are in a very much better position now that we have people committed to the delivery of health care to which they bring a range of skills. They are not politically motivated and making ludicrous points and undermining the institutions that they should be protecting.

Mr. Hughes: Through the Secretary of State, the Government have systematically replaced local people with business people, usually those who have connections with the Tory party or those who, if they are not members of the party, undoubtedly make donations. Often, such people do not live in the areas on whose boards they serve. The Government are reducing democracy in the health service at the local level.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I hesitate to interrupt this English exchange, but may I point out that we in Scotland have experienced the same thing? Literally hundreds of Tory placemen and women, including failed candidates, have been put on NHS trusts the length and breadth of Scotland and its islands.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. The people of Scotland are undoubtedly facing the same problems that we are facing in England.

The inescapable conclusion is that the Government are edging towards privatisation of the health service by a process of fragmentation and commercialisation. They are filtering more public funds into the private sector and their ultimate aim is a small public sector element dealing with residual purchasing and strategic planning. It is privatisation by the back door, but with denials issued every step along the way; but that is the logic and the effect of the Government's reforms, which is why we shall continue to oppose them.

8.5 pm

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): I must first declare an interest in that I am an adviser to the Western Provident Association which, as everyone who knows anything about health is aware, is a non-profit-making organisation.

I read the motion most carefully and I was amazed because I had thought that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) was turning—or trying to turn—the Labour party into the acceptable face of Channel 4. He is clearly failing, because, to judge from the motion, this is the same old Labour party. The motion could have been drafted by Dave and Deirdre Spart; it is full of spite and envy and, of course, full of jobs for the boys.

The Labour party has drifted to the left. *[Interruption.]* I was going to congratulate the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) on a swash-buckling speech, but it contained more buckle than swash. He asked what evidence there was for the reforms' success, so I shall tell him. He should read what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said about the Government's reforms. Its July 1994 report criticised the command and control system—the Labour party should know about that as it almost invented it—inherent in the pre-reform national health service. It said that the pre-reform NHS lacked

"flexibility, incentives for efficiency, financial information (and hence accountability) and choice of providers of secondary care".

It went on to highlight the "possibilities" opened by the reforms and the improvements introduced by national health service trusts and GP fundholders who

"seem to have done a better job of purchasing than district health authorities".

Mr. Nicholas Brown *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: I am coming to the hon. Gentleman's policies—I found a few last night. The report that I have quoted is not from some Tory think tank or Conservative central office but from the OECD.

Mr. Brown: The National Audit Office, to test the efficiency of the exercise, did its best to ascertain what resources had gone to GP fundholders and what was therefore left for non-fundholders. However, it was unable to draw any conclusions because, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, not a single region could provide it with statistics for non-fundholders. How does the hon. Gentleman arrive at the conclusions to which he is treating the House?

Mr. Hayes: If the hon. Gentleman had read the report, he would know that it commended the purchaser and fundholder. He should remember that it was the Conservative Government who created the Audit Commission, thus leading to the financial profiles of every single health authority being given for the first time.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is confusing the National Audit Office and the Audit Commission. He has not answered my point.

Mr. Hayes: I have done my best to answer the hon. Gentleman by saying that the reforms were commended by the OECD and the National Audit Office. I was drawing his attention to the fact that, for the first time, the Audit Commission has given a financial profile of every health authority. That is a very good thing and I hope that the Labour party will accept it as such.

The hon. Member for Doncaster, North asked what the people thought. We know from the survey of attitudes that the overwhelming majority of people are satisfied with the service that they receive from the NHS.

Mr. Kevin Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: I shall give way in just a moment if the hon Gentleman is patient. I am giving way a little too much.

Why are the majority of people satisfied? Because far more money is put into the health service than ever before—66 per cent. more than the rate of inflation since 1979. There is far more choice than ever before. Waiting lists have gone down way beyond anybody's dreams and are continuing to go down. As well, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, there are patients charters that deal with referrals from consultants to hospitals, which was a major bone of contention.

I am not suggesting for one moment that everything is perfect in the health service. It never will be. But a few years ago, before the reforms, no one knew the cost of anything in the health service. If people do not know their unit costs, they cannot plan for the future. That is the essence of the reforms.

Mr. Hughes: I agree that people are generally satisfied with the service that they receive from the national health service. The point is that they are satisfied only when they eventually get it.

Mr. Hayes: They are getting it far more quickly than they ever did under a Labour Government. It is all very well for Labour Members to sit there as if polyunsaturated butter would not melt in their mouths, but they were responsible, as my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) said, for the largest cut in revenue in real terms in the history of the health service. They cut capital expenditure by 27 per cent. Do Labour Members live in the real world? Do they understand that, every eight days, there is a multi-million pound capital project in the health service? Oh, no. All they talk about is the closure of hospitals. They do not say that, for every closure, a new day surgery opens.

Mr. Nicholas Brown *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman should not get too excited. He should come to Harlow, where we have just had a £10 million extension of our accident and emergency facility. He would be more than welcome to come to Harlow to see our two new trusts, which are very popular.

Mr. Brown *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: I shall give way in a moment because I am building up for the hon. Gentleman's state tour of Harlow. He ought to see our new computer-aided tomography scanner. He ought to see our new magnetic resonance imaging scanner. He ought to know, before he suggests that we are stuffing the trusts full of Tory placemen, that I proposed two candidates. Guess what, they were not Conservatives, they have never voted Conservative in their life and they probably never will.

The fact is that those people believe in the policy and they are competent. That is what the appointment system is all about. That is why those who sit on trusts include people such as Helene Hayman, a former Labour Member of Parliament. She runs a trust. She is a socialist. She does not vote Conservative, but she believes in the policy because she believes in patients. Rabbi Julia Neuberger is not a Conservative. She probably never will be. Why was she appointed? Because she is competent and believes in the best possible care for patients.

Mr. Brown: I intervene briefly to accept the hon. Gentleman's invitation. I look forward to taking him up on it very soon.

Mr. Hayes: Harlow holds its breath.

Last night, we had a little time to spare because of the Liberal Democrats, as often happens, so I went into the Library. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they?"] Looking, I suspect, for policies. I found some policies last night. I had the misfortune of looking through every single policy and consultation document that Labour has published in the past two years. It was not an edifying experience, because every other document had a glossy picture of the Front-Bench team smiling like snake-oil salesmen. There is a picture of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown). I shall show it to him later, as he probably does not want it to be shown on the television here.

Labour Members are pretending that they are consulting, because they do have the nerve to put their policies to the British public. They do not want to upset the beautiful luvvie view of the Labour party. We all know that it is a mirage.

"Health 2000" is well worth a look. What will Labour Members do about compulsory competitive tendering? They say:

"We are already committed to ending CCT for hospital services. This, plus the maintenance of a national framework for bargaining including a minimum wage, the retention of Pay Review Bodies and a full acceptance of T.U.P.E."—

I suppose that should be NUPE—

"will do much to raise morale and develop increasing commitment to the service."

That is absolute codswallop. The minimum wage will cost at least £500 million, according to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). He is on record as saying that. We know that ending CCT will probably cost patient care more than £100 million.

What about the internal market? I would love to give Labour Members an opportunity to explain their next proposal. "Health 2000" says:

"We propose"—

I hope that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East is paying attention, because I shall test him on this in a second. It says:

"We propose an alternative to the 'internal market' which would allow funding for agreed minimum programmes of work within a given period of time (service-level agreements). These programmes could be continually updated so that long-term planning of hospital and community services would be possible. This would also avoid treatment being cancelled because the workload had been under-estimated and the budget contract"—

oh, dear—

"had been exhausted."

What on earth does that mean? The hon. Gentleman does not know, and it is his policy.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: He is consulting and trying to find out.

Mr. Hayes: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend.

What about general practitioners? The consultation document says:

"We will"—

this is very important, this is a real debate—

"abolish fundholding and replace it with a system which brings GPs and their local health authority together to provide the best possible care for their patients and the community they serve. Easing the burden of running a business will allow GPs to spend more time with their patients and less time on paper-work."

The very fact that we give them a grant for doing that and the fact that doctors' lists are going down—

Mrs. Bottomley: Ten per cent. down.

Mr. Hayes:—10 per cent. down, as my right hon. Friend says—is of no consequence. By the next general election, more than 50 per cent. of GPs will be

[Mr. Hayes]

fundholders. What are Labour Members going to do? Will there be a massive upheaval of a policy which is popular at the moment, as all the opinion polls show?

Let us move on to the trusts. "Health 2000" says:

"As a priority we would remove the unaccountable self-governing and self-perpetuating Trusts which run hospitals and community health services. The non-executive members of trusts are currently Tory Government appointees—this is unacceptable. Drawing together those with a commitment to the NHS would offer a forum for the involvement of local people in their hospitals and community facilities as set out in *Health 2000*."

The fact that 96 per cent. of hospitals are national health service trusts and that at least 99 per cent. of them will shortly be trusts would mean another massive upheaval for the people who are working so hard on behalf of patients in the health service. The very fact that trusts are far more efficient than directly managed unions ever were is totally ignored by the Labour party.

Probably the most important proposal of all concerns accountability, about which "Health 2000" says:

"There are a number of ways of achieving this. Possible options include some form of nomination"—

now there is a surprise—

"direct elections,"—

there is a surprise—

"or integration with local government."

There is no surprise there at all. It goes on:

"We will consult closely with patients and health service workers to establish real democracy and accountability."

We all know what this means—jobs for the boys. It means trade unions and health authorities, which are more interested in politics than in patients, and it means regional authorities dealing with health.

Mr. Nicholas Brown *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman must accept that. That is part of the policy. It is here in the document.

One or two people are not terribly happy with that. The British Medical Association is not very happy. Of course, the Labour party always ignores the BMA, except when it needs it. The Royal College of Nursing—again, not exactly a branch office of Conservative central office—does not think that it would go well.

There is probably someone more important than that. Some time ago, in the House of Commons, someone said:

"It is quite impossible . . . to hand over the voluntary hospitals to the local authorities."

He said:

"People appointed to the regional hospital boards will not be there merely as representatives of local authority intereats, but will be selected for their knowledge of hospital needs and hospital problems and will, therefore, be interested in hospital development, and not retarded, all the time, by considerations of a local character, particularly the incidence of local taxation."—[*Official Report*, 30 April 1946; Vol. 422, c. 49.]

That was Nye Bevan, the founder of the health service, an icon to the Labour party. Even he said, in those pioneering days, that it could not possibly work, so why do Opposition Members put forward policies that they know cannot possibly work?

I now refer to efficiency. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry if the hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) is disappointed. I hoped that he was listening and learning. Obviously, I have failed. At the moment, £1.5 million is being cumulatively saved to the health service—not to go to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor but to go back into patient care. By abolishing regional health authorities, which is happening at the moment, we will save £150 million to go into patient care. In that great policy document we hear what Labour Members would do. They would set up an efficiency unit at the Department of Health. What a good idea. I wonder who would be on that committee. All the hon. Gentleman's chums, of course.

Let us explode once and for all the myth about an overmanaged health service. It has 2.6 per cent. of the work force and 3 per cent. of the wages bill. There is one manager for every 26 front-line staff. Opposition Members should know the disastrous realities of their policies.

The limited list of restricted drugs saves a lot of money to the health service. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the health service spends about 10 per cent. of its £32 billion budget on its drugs. What would the Labour party do? Labour Members say:

"The government has been engaged in an exercise aimed at decreasing the choice of prescribable drugs. Choice is important to patients and health professionals who prescribe and this will be respected by a Labour government."

Is it the intention to scrap the limited list, or are those just weasel words from the Labour party?

The real Disneyland of Labour proposals, such as they are, is to be found in paragraph 9.27 of the document, which states:

"Labour will therefore examine the contribution which might be made by the establishment of a panel, including those working professionally in the field and representatives of patients, in order to develop national guidelines for the allocation of scarce resources. Advice might also be offered where difficult or ethical judgments have to be made."

Surely the history of government is that Departments cannot run anything from the centre. Centralisation and bureaucracy—*[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has given power to the national health service and community trusts. She has given power to the local people. Opposition Members want to give power to their friends and bureaucrats. That would do a grave disservice to the patient.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There are 57 minutes available before the winding-up speeches, and five hon. Members, who have been in the Chamber for most of the day, hope to catch my eye. The Chair hopes that they will be able to do so.

8.23 pm

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I wish to reflect on some comments of the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) about the origins of the national health service. He failed to say that the creation of the national health service was opposed by the then Tory Opposition. The national health service is probably the greatest leap forward in social progress that the country has seen this century.

People are rightly emotive about the health service, especially those who, like me, lived in the days when there was no health service. We appreciate all the efforts of the post-war Labour Government in establishing a

national health service that was free at the point of need and available to all. Our health service was the envy of the world. Sadly, there has been a deterioration in it; the Government cannot sit back and pretend that the Opposition want to do nothing other than be critical of the Conservative Government.

The facts are available for everyone to see. Why are a growing number of people organising action committees to save their hospitals? Why are hospitals such as St Paul's in Liverpool, an excellent, long-standing eye hospital, being closed under the Conservative Government? Why did the Royal hospital want to extend its activities and develop a hotel in the hospital grounds? Theoretically, it was to move patients rapidly from beds into the hotel. The hotel would have had no medical staff, only telephones, television and a meals service. I asked what would happen if a person who was being moved from an acute ward into the hotel had a haemorrhage during the early hours of the morning. I asked where the hospital staff would be to deal with it. No answer was given. I fear that that is the direction in which the national health service is going.

That same hospital applied to extend its incineration facilities, not to incinerate its own medical waste but to enter into a sub-contract commercial deal to take waste from as far away as the Republic of Ireland and even further. That hospital would have endangered the lives of people who live in the centre of the city of Liverpool. The plan was withdrawn only after a successful campaign was organised not by the Labour party or trade unions but by the community. That forced the trust to drop its proposals. The national health service is being run by people whose first interest is the long-term commercialisation of it and of some hospital services.

Broadgreen has been an issue almost since the York report was published. Whenever we question the Secretary of State about the future of Broadgreen, there is a stony silence. Broadgreen hospital catered for a large community, including my constituency. There is no hospital in my constituency. My constituents depend on Broadgreen hospital, which is at least eight miles away. Its accident and emergency unit is being closed. We asked why it is being closed, and we were told that it was a decision of the trusts. We now find that the two independent trusts are merging into a single trust.

There is no doubt in the minds of the people of the Broadgreen action committee that the hospital will wither on the vine. The hospital responsible for almost all the area will be the Royal University hospital in the centre of Liverpool, which now takes patients from the former eye hospital and is also responsible for accident and emergency patients from Broadgreen.

That is what is happening in the NHS. People quite rightly feel afraid that the NHS is not safe in the Government's hands. Conservatives opposed the creation of the NHS in 1948 and never had to depend on it. The majority of Tories at that time enjoyed private health insurance, and one of the things that concerns some of us now is the apparent link between private insurance companies and the chairmen and members of trusts.

I fully support the views expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy) in relation to the chairman of the local trust, Sir Donald Wilson. He is a medal-hunter—no more than that—and he has as much interest in the NHS as the man on the moon. People in Broadgreen are maintaining their support for the retention of important hospitals and accident and emergency units.

Is it any wonder that people are beginning to see that the Government have gone only part of the way in reforming the NHS? I have no crystal ball, but I read the books and that is better than gazing into a crystal ball. I see either a two-tier system, with a first and second grade of care within the NHS, or the eventual privatisation of the NHS. The latter will be hotly denied by the Government, but nevertheless all the signs at this stage are that that is their intention.

To the Tory Government, public expenditure is the work of the devil. Analysis of Government policy on the NHS shows that they believe the NHS to be a burden on the taxpayer. We know where the Government stand in relation to the NHS.

The service will retain its excellence only by having the necessary funding. We must recognise that changes have been made, and Labour's mistake was not to identify the changes that were taking place not only in the hospital service but in the health service generally. We should have found out what new methods were being proposed to treat various illnesses.

In the pre-war period, the hearse was a constant visitor to the street where I lived. Almost every house contained three or four families, which was why ill-health prevailed. Tory Governments did nothing to remedy the problems. Mothers lost children—sometimes three or four out of a family. My own mother lost a baby because we lived in poor conditions, along with the other people who lived in the slums of Liverpool. The slums were the cause of that. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may smile about those people living in slums. They were prone to illnesses that Conservative Members would not even know about.

Death was imminent in every family who lived in such impoverished conditions. The action of the post-war Labour Government ended that. The NHS contributed so much to the health of nation. Post-war babies were six inches taller than babies born 30 years previously. Babies and their mothers were healthier, and mothers were able to give birth in decent hospitals rather than in slum homes.

There has been a massive change since those days, and the NHS means something to the working class of this country. Working-class people will defend the NHS. They will not be motivated by political activists, but they know that the NHS is a treasure that they must defend. Whatever the Government are saying at the moment, we know their intention. They say—as they always do—that money for the NHS must come from taxation. They should be taxing their rich friends to maintain a decent NHS for those who need it.

The Government should be condemned for the way in which they have dealt with the health service. One reads in the papers every day—the right-wing press, the left-wing press or the middle-of-the-road press—more and more complaints about the NHS. People are saying that the NHS is not being run in the interests of patients and patient care. That should be a lesson for the Government.

People are saying loud and clear: hands off our NHS. It is not the Government's health service. It was brought into being by the post-war electors who came back from the war, determined not to go back to the slums and unemployment of the 1920s and 1930s. People used to stand on street corners, waiting for something to turn up.

[Mr. Eddie Loyden]

We must not go back to that. The people of this country recognise what the Government are doing to the NHS. I will be out fighting for the retention of the NHS, and I hope that the next Labour Government will clear away all the legislation that this Government have introduced.

No longer can one get answers from people in authority in the NHS; they are unaccountable in every sense of the word. The Secretary of State has lost control, and she and her Ministers believe what the trusts tell them. Hon. Members in my area have to write to the trusts to ask what is going on at Broadgreen. The Secretary of State, her Ministers and the Department of Health are not simply out of touch, they are out of control. They no longer control the NHS, which is now free-running, with the trusts doing all the management.

The Government's propaganda was referred to earlier. Propaganda is one of things at which the Government excel, and I give them full credit for that. They send an unbelievable amount of stuff saying that everything is fine, along with other misinformation or irrelevant information. They send almost nothing about how long patients have to wait for treatment, about the closure of accident and emergency units at Broadgreen or about the fact that the NHS cannot recruit junior doctors because of their conditions.

All those things show that the NHS is not safe in the Government's hands. The Secretary of State had better get control of the situation, and start acting as a Secretary of State. She must find out what is going on in the trusts, which often are making decisions when they have not even considered the effects of those decisions on the hospitals concerned. In other words, the Government are completely out of touch with people's needs.

Recently, a man—I do not know the guy—told an interviewer on a radio phone-in programme in Liverpool that he had been waiting two and a half years for a hospital appointment, and he duly turned up at the hospital when he was summoned with nine other patients. The patients were told to stay in the corridors and to get a cup of tea if they wanted. They were there about eight hours. Staff were trying to find out how many people would be discharged that day—beds would still be warm when the new patients got in. In the end, he was sent home, along with other patients, because there were no discharges that day. Is that any way to run a national health service? What justification can there be for that?

This debate has made it clear that the people have an emotive regard for the national health service. They cherish it and recognise that it will be safe only when a Labour Government are back in power.

8.40 pm

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): I mean the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) no discourtesy, as he is an honest man and he represents a constituency that I know well as it is not far from mine. I know that he will understand if I robustly, but genuinely, disagree with some of his arguments. In the few minutes that I have to make my speech, I shall touch on several of the issues that he mentioned and relate them to the area that I represent in the north-west, which in recent years has witnessed one of the greatest reductions in waiting times in the United Kingdom and the greatest increase in the number of patients treated.

The picture is entirely different from that painted by the hon. Member for Garston. He said that the national health service was one of the greatest leaps forward in social policy and I do not disagree, but, heavens, that was decades ago: things have moved on. Old hospitals have to close—they become clinically unviable. The Government have built new, bigger and better, clinically more viable hospitals and nowhere is that more evident than in north Merseyside, central Liverpool and the north-west of England.

I am concerned that we heard too much scaremongering from Opposition Members. My hon. Friends have done their best to put the record straight and, in the time available, it would not be right for me to trot out yet more statistics. My hon. Friends have more than adequately drawn our attention to the improvements that have been made in recent years as a result of the reforms that Ministers have pioneered.

In my constituency, which is in northern Merseyside, there is growing satisfaction with the way in which the NHS operates. I referred to the reductions in waiting times and the increase in the number of patients treated. It is pertinent that national health service trusts now treat 3,000 more patients per day than the same hospitals three years ago. Waiting times have reduced dramatically. Half the patients who need treatment are seen immediately and half of the remainder are seen within five weeks.

One striking aspect of this debate is that, if the Labour party had the opportunity to introduce its plans for devolution and breaking up the United Kingdom, it would also have the opportunity of handing many of the powers that have been devolved locally, nearer to the patient, away from clinicians to the politicians, with the setting up of regional assemblies. I am very mindful of what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said about moving to "irrelevant and unwanted" talking shops.

We have not seen new Labour this evening. We listened intently to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) trotting out many news cuttings from *The Guardian*, but we did not hear anything of policy. My hon. Friends said that it was little wonder that the patient did not always come first as the union interest came first because the Opposition receive so much money from unions and from the Confederation of Health Service Employees in particular.

I hope that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) will have the opportunity to reply shortly—I see him shuffling in his place—and that he will at least have something positive to say about what the Government have done in recent years. It is not all doom and gloom, but I did not hear the right hon. Member for Derby, South make one positive point, despite the statistics to which my hon. Friends rightly referred.

In my constituency and the north-west of England tremendous improvements have been made. I very much regret the remarks of the hon. Member for Garston about Sir Donald Wilson, as he has done more than the hon. Gentleman in this place or at home in Liverpool to improve the service to NHS patients in Merseyside. The hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of his remarks.

We have heard the politics of envy about salaries. I regularly meet people who work in the health service in north Merseyside and in Southport and Formby district and the well-paid staff and administrators provide the public with a very good service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) proposed some of his former political opponents to serve on trusts. Some of my political opponents sit easily on the board of the Southport and Formby Community Health Services trust. They work well and are committed to the Government's reforms.

Those reforms are paying dividends and I speak as someone who has been an in-patient at Broadgreen hospital and Southport and Formby district general hospital. One cannot compare the two, however. Much good work goes on at Broadgreen and I pay tribute to its staff, but we need to move forward, especially with the private finance initiatives that have been pioneered so well in north Merseyside—with imaginative proposals for new building—and in partnership with the private sector. We need to move forward and to improve hospital infrastructure. Sadly, if that means closing older hospitals, that is what we must do if it is in the patient's interest.

We heard that the average waiting time for operations has been cut by half, but we heard no mention of that fact from the right hon. Member for Derby, South. She did not pay any tributes. I recall only the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) paying tribute to those who work in the health service. Perhaps I did not hear the tributes, but I do not think that they were paid, and that is regrettable.

This Opposition Day debate started at 3.45 pm, but the Opposition Front-Bench spokeswoman—in a speech that lasted nearly an hour—said nothing about what a Labour Government would do, if there ever were one. She said nothing of their plans for the future, let alone giving us serious costings of how those plans might be paid for.

I hope that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East will set the record straight. It is time to stop consulting and to let the public know what the Opposition would do, if they ever had the opportunity to implement their plans.

I cannot let the remarks of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) pass. I challenged him and gave him an opportunity to answer when I referred to his consultation document. In a mealy-mouthed response, he said that he was appointed to his present post after the consultation paper was published. Is it not about time that we heard where the Liberal Democrats stand? Instead, as the editorial of the *Health and Social Service Journal* of September 1994 stated, we have to hope that

"With luck, someone might be kind enough to offer some directions."

I gave the hon. and learned Gentleman the opportunity to tell the House and the people where his party stood. He promised to do so and to give us a sense of the direction in which he and his colleagues are going—I wrote it down—but, as the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) said, by the time that the hon. and learned Gentleman had sat down he had given us no sense of direction.

Mr. Alex Carlile *rose—*

Mr. Banks: I gave the hon. and learned Gentleman the opportunity to answer and he did not take it, but I will give way again briefly.

Mr. Carlile: I shall be very brief. Which question that he claims I have not answered is the hon. Gentleman asking me to answer? I would be delighted to help him further.

Mr. Banks: Unfortunately, the hon. and learned Gentleman will not have time to answer my questions in this debate but we shall certainly look for a fuller explanation later. My question will be in the *Official Report* tomorrow for all to see and it will be clear that I received no answer. I asked whether the hon. and learned Gentleman believed in retaining the division between commissioner of services and provider of services, and the retention of NHS trusts and GP fundholding. His party changes its policy from one day to the next. It is up to the hon. and learned Gentleman in his own time to put the British public and the House straight on where he stands. Like other Liberal Democrats, he says one thing in this place and another back in his constituency. Moreover, he says one thing at one end of his constituency and another at the other end, depending on who he talks to. The whole House knows that I tell the truth on that.

I draw my remarks to a more premature conclusion than I would wish by returning to my concern about the scare stories put about in my constituency and the north-west. My constituency had to wait for the election of a Conservative Government before funds were found to build a brand new hospital. My hon. Friend the Member for Harlow referred to the cut in the hospital building programme because the Labour Government had got the British economy into such a mess. The hospital to which I referred, where I have been an in-patient, should have been built years ago but we had to wait for the election of a Conservative Government in 1979. I pay tribute to the clinical staff and administrators at the Southport and Formby NHS trust.

I make no apology for expressing my concern tonight on a parochial point. My predecessor, who was a Liberal Democrat, had little knowledge of health matters despite the fact that he was national spokesman on health. When health became an important issue, he had to be moved sharpish because he was so hopeless. He has been saying publicly that the current local health service review will close the maternity services that cover the Southport and Formby area. So concerned is the trust—it is not concern on the part of the health authority conducting the review—at what that gentleman has been saying that it has had to call him in for a private briefing because he has been going off the rails.

There will be no loss of maternity services in my constituency. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister will continue to listen carefully to representations that I have made privately, and now publicly, to ensure that there will be a proper capital allocation so that when the Christiana Hartley maternity hospital closes because of a lack of clinical viability, and when the private finance initiative, to which I referred, allows for new and further building at our new hospital in Southport, maternity services will be transferred within the town to the main hospital site at Kew.

I hope that we shall now hear something positive from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East, because we heard nothing positive from the right hon. Member for Derby, South earlier.

8.52 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I have listened to the entire debate and am surprised that the Government have not recognised the fact that they have packed the trusts and boards to the gullet with Tory supporters. They have wiped out any democratic opinion from other sources—from people who are neutral, people from other political parties and people with opposing opinions but who nevertheless wish to see a successful health service. In my area, all the trusts and quangos are packed stupid with Tory placemen.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the same conditions apply in Northern Ireland, where every quango has been packed with individuals who have no Ulster Unionist credentials?

Mr. Graham: I am grateful for that information. If we travelled the length and breadth of Britain, we would find no balance of opinion on how the national health service should be run in either the trusts or the boards.

I place on record my absolute praise for health service staff: consultants, doctors, and our wonderful nurses who look after people magnificently. I also praise those who back them up—auxiliary nurses, porters and those who make our hospitals function. Ultimately, it is they, not the Government, who make our health service function. The Government do not deliver the service; they simply cripple it and they continue to cripple it. I express my great appreciation to all those who work in the industry and deliver the services.

Since the Tory party introduced its great reforms, we have seen a huge escalation in staff. Instead of patients receiving better treatment, the service is creating more and more paperwork. I and my whole family have been treated as patients at the Paisley Royal Alexandra hospital. Indeed, some members of my family are grateful for being alive today because of the treatment that they received from people trained in our educational establishments and the national health service, not in trusts.

Now that the hospital has become a trust, things have changed. A friend of mine had an operation in the hospital, was sent home too early and had to return to the hospital. On waking up in his bed, he found a man sitting at the end of it. When he asked, "Who are you?" the man replied that he was waiting for his bed because he would be leaving. My friend then had to consult the doctor about whether he would be leaving. What an incredible scene.

In another case, a father in my constituency phoned the emergency doctor, who said that he would need to get the man's daughter into hospital immediately. But the local hospital had no beds and, having phoned around other hospitals, the doctor eventually found a bed in a hospital well into the Glasgow area. When they reached the Glasgow area, they were told that that had been happening all the time. I hope that the Minister is listening because folk in my constituency rely on the Government listening to their pleas.

The Royal Alexandra hospital is a big, brand new hospital that epitomises the best on offer, yet the other week it had no bed for a constituent of mine who needed one in an emergency. In the same hospital, an elderly woman with a broken bone had to wait more than 48 hours before seeing a surgeon. Eventually, she saw a surgeon because her family phoned me and I asked what the blazes was going on and why my constituent had not been treated. I was then sent a lovely letter explaining what had happened. What the letter did not tell me, however, was that a woman in the next bed should have been seen before my constituent and was therefore broken-hearted. Although that woman was ready to go in for treatment, my constituent went in front of her because I, as a politician, had argued my constituent's case. I did not know that at the time, but it is an indictment on a trust hospital.

We heard tonight about hospital closures. In my constituency and some other parts of the country, mentally ill and mentally handicapped people who are in desperate need of care and attention can be seen walking the streets at night. I saw them last night in London and the other week in Glasgow. Those people should be receiving the best of care. Are they receiving care? They are in cardboard cities, lying under the bridges and arches. They cannot receive treatment. If we check up, we find that those folk were put into institutions and released without the necessary back-up.

What do the Government propose in my area? They set up a quango and appointed Tory clones who are recommending that Ravenscraig, Bridge of Weir, Merchiston and Dykebar hospitals should close. The Tory clones say that they must quickly meet the Government targets. They are not interested in meeting the target of looking after patients.

Mr. Beggs: We in Northern Ireland share the problems that the hon. Gentleman has in his constituency. Does he agree that inadequate provision is made for young people aged between 14 and 18 with mental illnesses such as schizophrenia? There should be separate and special provision for those young people throughout the United Kingdom. They should not be lumped in with adults.

Mr. Graham *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I said earlier that it does not help if hon. Members make long interventions.

Mr. Graham: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs), with whom I entirely agree.

Dr. Godman: My hon. Friend mentioned Ravenscraig hospital in my constituency. Scores of constituents have contacted me regarding the threatened closure of that hospital. I sincerely hope that we can conduct a campaign to keep it open.

Mr. Graham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

The Minister should be aware of our constituents' feelings. The Government are running the health service badly. To rescue the health service we probably need a general election. We need to go in a different direction with a different political party—we need people who are committed to running the health service and want to see it grow, develop, be innovative and deliver the best services.

I shall speak for another two minutes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and finish when I have spoken for exactly 10 minutes.

I remember raising in the House the problem of one of my constituents, Mr. Kennedy, who could not see a urologist or get an appointment. He was eventually given an appointment after I had continually harassed the Government to ensure that he was looked after. Mr. Kennedy was eventually looked after and had his operation. What is he like now? He is a brand new man,

enjoying the full fruits of life. He is an elderly, retired gentleman of over 70. I met him at Christmas, when he was dancing, singing and enjoying a drink—a new man. This country needs a health service that puts people back on their feet.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): My hon. Friend must understand that the Tories have a hidden agenda. They want to privatise the health service, and are beginning to do so with trusts. The health board in my district this week signed a contract with a private American company that will lead to profits going across the pond. What does my hon. Friend think of that?

Mr. Graham: I do not have time to answer my hon. Friend's question as I have just one minute left.

The people of Britain no longer have any trust in the Tory's trusts. No one has any faith in the Government's ability to ensure that our health service is the best in the world. The Government no longer treat our young doctors as humans. They make them work like slaves—80 hours a week with hardly any pay. They treat nurses as cannon fodder and do not recognise their skills with proper wages. I have questioned Ministers a million times, but they hang their heads and say that they will never do what is needed. The only thing that we can hope for is a speedy general election. I hope that the Prime Minister is daft enough to call an election next week.

I have been delighted to take part in tonight's debate to argue the case for my constituents. The Minister should give us some heart and give up now.

9.3 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I welcome the opportunity to make a brief contribution. There have been distinguished contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) and for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) and from my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke).

There have not been many cross-currents during the debate, but one came across the House from the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), who talked of the need for everyone, including those in low-income groups, to have high expectations for health. That struck a note on both sides of the House. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is particularly interested in maintaining high expectations in health and her policies for improving the health of the nation have gone a long way towards achieving that aim.

My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South hit the nail on the head when he said that the speech by the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) became interesting only at the very end when she began to talk about her views, her vision and the Labour party's policies. She said precious little in the rest of her speech and simply trailed before the House every press cutting from Labour's press file.

The right hon. Lady answered most of her own questions when she said that in any large organisation things can go wrong. She began by relating some admittedly serious-sounding incidents, but she then moved on to some rather mundane ones, including the examples of a bed being moved and Hull Royal infirmary asking people with minor injuries not to go to the accident and emergency department.

The right hon. Lady's speech was not really worthy of an Opposition day debate about the national health service. It suffered from two principal defects: first, there was a lack of detail about Labour party policy; and, secondly, she went over very old ground. Any Opposition Member could have made the same speech at any stage in the past 15 years. That sort of sensationalism and trivialising of individual stories does the right hon. Lady no credit at all—indeed, her credibility is threadbare.

The Opposition's big revelation is that the Government are trying to privatise the health service. Opposition Members have been saying that for the past 15 years and it has not happened. Indeed, there is evidence to confound it utterly. During that time an increasing volume of resources—measured in real terms, set against health service inflation or viewed as a proportion of gross domestic product—have been allocated to the health service. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) said, the Government are committed to the national health service through public expenditure.

The health service suffered real cuts and was constrained and driven down by the last Labour Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield spoke eloquently about that and I do not want to go over the same sad story. We heard also about Baroness Castle, who seems to be rather a ghost in our proceedings. She recorded in her diaries what took place under that Labour Government and she recalls a verse which was penned by one of her Labour colleagues about the activities of the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, now Lord Healey. It went like this:

"All things bright and beautiful, all projects great and small, all things wise and wonderful, the Chancellor cuts them all.

He cuts the old age pension, although he cuts by stealth, and while he looks for savings, he cuts the national health."

That is the record of the last Labour Government as revealed by one of their distinguished former Cabinet Ministers.

We have made a great deal of progress since then, not just through increased funding, but through improvements in efficiency and management—managers have been much maligned by Labour Members—and through the Government's health reforms. When the right hon. Lady talked about the reasons for improvements in the health service I could hear the goal posts being moved—in fact, I could hear them being sawn down and taken to a different stadium.

I will remind hon. Members of what one of the right hon. Lady's predecessors, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), said when he set out the acid test of the success of the Government's reforms. I advise Opposition Members never to set targets which might be a hostage to fortune: if the targets are surpassed they will be made to look foolish. In the House in April 1991, the hon. Gentleman said:

"Is the Secretary of State prepared to measure the success of those trusts that opted out by the simple test of whether they do more or less work on NHS patients?"—[*Official Report*, 17 April 1991; Vol. 206, c. 457.]

According to the hon. Gentleman's own test, the Government's reforms have succeeded. More patients are being treated now under the reformed national health service than ever before—3,000 more per day for the whole country and a rise of 20 per cent. in the health authority which covers my constituency. By any measure,

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that is a substantial increase. The Labour party, confronted with indisputable evidence of the success of the reforms, moves the goal posts. On Second Reading of the Health Authorities Bill, the right hon. Member for Derby, South told the House that her party's supporters resented the Government

"claiming credit for those improvements, as though they all flow from the Government's reforms and changes. In fact, they have absolutely nothing to do with the Government's reforms and changes. Indeed, in many cases those changes have seriously impeded the development of better health care".—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 649.]

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Yes.

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman said yes. It is a fairly safe bet that if there had been a fall in the number of patients treated since the introduction of reforms, members of Labour's Front Bench would not be saying that that had little to do with Government reforms but would blame it on those reforms. We cannot win. However many more patients are treated, it is said that has nothing to do with Government reforms—even when the rate of increase in NHS activity has improved. We have seen a move from Cook's law to Beckett's law. One could almost say that the move is to Beckett's fork, because I am most reminded of Morton's fork of Henry VII fame. We cannot win, whichever way we go.

Health service reforms are working. For all the sensational stories from Labour, the proof is there in the greater number of patients being treated and shorter waiting lists. The maximum waiting time for my constituents has been reduced not only to the 18 months in the charter but to 12 months, because of the target that the health authority set itself. The average waiting time has reduced from seven months to three months.

I welcome the Government's introduction of a new measure of waiting time in respect of out-patients wishing to see consultants. That is another step forward and further evidence that the patients charter is working. New targets are set all the time and the health service is being driven forward for the benefit of patients.

The challenge for Opposition Members is not to search every hospital for every bed that has been moved or mistake made, but to declare how they would do things better and achieve more. We heard precious little about that in the debate, and nothing about the future of trusts. There was vague talk about accountability. Does that mean that trusts will be left the same but that they will be joined by a few Labour councillors as the magic, miracle ingredient for success? We have already heard the views of the people of Merseyside, and they might have something to say about that. Would they have one of the most successful health authorities in the country if they had the benefit and wisdom of certain Liverpool city councillors, or of the regional councils being imposed on England as a quid pro quo for Labour's mess over Scottish devolution?

Labour Members make it up as they go along. They said nothing about policy. At least the right hon. Member for Derby, South did not fall into the same trap as her predecessor, who had outbursts of frankness and candour—for example, when he said that the status quo was not an option in respect of London health reforms. For his pains, he was banished from Labour's Front Bench when that subject was debated.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to drive forward reforms and to aim at ever-higher standards, to show the commitment of the Conservative party to the national health service.

9.13 pm

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): Time is short, so I will be brief. The most interesting and alarming part of the Secretary of State's speech was her assertion that if one wanted to know what is happening in the national health service today, one should go to the London School of Economics—and if one is not satisfied, to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. That was meant to trump the evidence of people who work in and use the health service. It is a rather strange kind of evidence.

I cite three experiences from my area. The first concerns complaints. Like all Members of Parliament, I am visited from time to time by people who tell me that they want to complain, or they have complained, and they are usually dissatisfied with the outcome. They usually receive a letter from someone with a title such as assistant customer services manager—telling them nothing but reassuring them that everything is basically all right.

Complaints do matter, however. As the Minister said earlier, they should be the jewels in the crown. They are actually more like a kind of buried treasure. We have had an inquiry into the NHS complaints system. Since the Wilson inquiry, we have been given endless promises about the implications of the report and of the Government's proposals. We have it on the authority of the Secretary of State that the present complaints system is

"fragmented, confusing, cumbersome and slow".

Back in May, a report in the *British Medical Journal* said that

"the Health Secretary, Virginia Bottomley, said that she accepts the broad thrust of the report *Being Heard*; she has begun a three month consultation period before introducing legislation".

The least we expected today in this health debate was that the Government would announce that they had clear plans to reform the unsatisfactory NHS complaints system.

When asked when they intend to take action, the Government always tell us that it is imminent. I happened to discover a document issued just before Christmas by the health service in Scotland. Entitled "The Patients Charter: What Users Think", it says:

"The committee chaired by Professor Wilson to look at NHS complaints procedures has also recently reported its findings and the Government will be making a response to the recommendations in January."

Fortunately for us, this is the last day of January; so I presume that when the Minister rises to reply, he will give us a dramatic announcement—no doubt the cause of muted cheers behind him—about a new start for the jewels in the crown, the complaints about which the Minister spoke earlier. Nothing less will be satisfactory; anything less will be a breach of promise.

A few weeks ago I had occasion to visit the mental health trust in my constituency in Staffordshire. I met the chairman of the trust, a decent gentleman, and asked him how he had become chairman. He said that he had been a timber merchant but had wanted to hand over to the next generation. I said that that was interesting, but asked what it had to do with running an NHS trust. He said,

"Well, I had a friend who was a consultant. I phoned him up and asked him whether it would be a good idea for me to take the job on. He said it would."

I happened to discover later that this same gentleman is chairman of the local Conservative association. And this is a trust whose consultants have just passed a vote of no confidence in the chief executive, and, by extension, in the board. The health service is being run as a kind of occupational therapy for retired timber merchants with Conservative connections. No wonder it has lost all legitimacy in the community.

Cannot the Government understand that they are eroding the foundations of respect inside the service? This is not our argument: listen to Simon Jenkins, no friend of my party, writing in *The Times* last week:

"As for the 15,000 health authority posts that had to be filled in 1991, it was the most undignified case of catch-as-catch-can in the history of public patronage. On seeing his list, one health administrator paraphrased Wellington and hoped they would 'terrify the consultants as much as they terrify me.'"

This is a scandalous story; little wonder that people have lost faith in the system.

Every so often a piece of paper will come under my constituency office door. One came recently from a nurse—whether a he or a she I do not know. The nurse felt unable to come and speak to me about what was going on in the health service, but nevertheless wanted to communicate with me. What a situation we have reached. Health service employees feel that they have to come covertly in the middle of the night and put pieces of paper under the doors of Members of Parliament to let people know what is going on. Revealingly, when the Government recently issued a document on how NHS staff can take up complaints with the media, they were told to approach their Members of Parliament—in the first instance through their line managers. No wonder the Government were told off by the Select Committee for saying such things. They have since had to back-track.

I do not want to return to how the world was before 1979. There was always an agenda of health service reform. It was about efficiency, quality and accountability. The tragedy is that we have gone down a false road, a cul-de-sac. The Government have managed to grow 10 accountants when there was one before. They have grown 20 managers when there was one before, and have recruited graduates from the Eric Cantona school of public sector management to do it. It is that which is eroding the health service. The agenda remains—of quality, efficiency and accountability. That is the agenda that will have to be taken up by the next Government.

9.20 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) on his vigorous contribution to the debate. Indeed, hon. Members on both sides of the House concentrated their fire on right hon. and hon. Members on the Front Benches. As I understand it, the charge against us from Conservative Members is that we have no policies. I will have something to say about that in a moment.

Our charge against the Government is that they have the wrong policies, and I have something to say about that now. Before doing so, however, I pay tribute to Britain's health care workers, to the medical staff and to the non-medical staff, including the management. The workers in the health service are not responsible for Government policy. Indeed, their recent protests have in part inspired today's debate.

The charges against the Government on secondary care are well known and have been well rehearsed in the debate. Since 1979, one in five hospitals have closed; one in three general hospital beds have gone; and one in four acute beds have gone. Since 1987, a third of all NHS psychiatric beds have gone. More than 1 million of our fellow citizens are on hospital waiting lists. Between July and September of last year, more than 10,000 operations were cancelled, either on the day or the day after admission to hospital, and 10 per cent. of those were not readmitted within one month.

In primary health care, GP fundholding has created a divisive two-tier service—patients are fast-tracked from fundholders' practices, disadvantaging the patients of non-fundholders. It has cost more than £100 million in management allowances to put that unfair system into place. Budgetary concerns have been put before the needs of patients. It has undermined, as my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) said, the necessary trust that must exist between a GP and the patient. Worst of all, although the Secretary of State likes to boast about the National Audit Office report as an endorsement, no region has been able to supply it with hard information on the reliable costs of fundholding versus non-fundholding.

The reforms, of which the Government are so proud, have almost ended national health service dentistry. Prescription charges have risen tenfold in real terms since 1979. The provision of community care is disfigured by demarcation disputes between health authorities and social service departments. They are mostly about money as well as responsibilities. The Department of Social Security's rules are rigged against the public sector provision of community care facilities, such as council-owned care facilities. Indeed, the distinction that it draws between the purchaser and provider is wholly consistent with the Conservative party's general approach to the issues.

The Secretary of State and the Minister claim that fundholding is popular, at least with the profession. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) pointed out that GP fundholding is not popular. Indeed, "Pulse", a professional magazine, conducted a survey of GPs to find out how popular the idea was. The survey shows us that more than 75 per cent. of GPs want fundholding abolished. What is the Government's response to that? General practitioners are saying that they want the fundholding structure abolished. Indeed, just under half of fundholders want it abolished. That is not a ringing endorsement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) spoke about the special problems of London. He is right.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) quoted examples not from the previous Labour Government—that was fashionable with Conservative Members—but from last night. I also have the list with me, but time is short, so I shall not read my examples from it, although there are enough of them. Instead, I make the following points.

In London, there is a high prevalence of social deprivation. People there have higher than average levels of ill-health; there is a large transient population and

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higher ground rents and labour costs than in the country as a whole; and it is a centre of excellence for secondary medical care, something of which we should be proud rather than undermine. Yet the Government will not establish a London-wide health authority or a London health care planning strategy. The Government use London-wide arrangements for their internal planning, but they will not put the structure in the public domain.

There is no London-wide review of accident and emergency services, although we have heard of the enormous tensions that there are in the capital. There has been long-term underfunding of London health care and, although it is the nation's capital, London has some of the country's lowest rates of general practitioner registration, putting further strain on the hospital services. Therefore, there is a particular crisis in London which is not being met by the Government.

The Secretary of State claimed that under the previous Labour Government when the financial year came to an end there was fear and terror throughout the NHS as people tried to get the budgets to balance for the year. I can tell her that that has not changed but is still going on now. I have an example from my own region, or regions as we think of them—the north and Yorkshire.

My regional health authority has a financial monitoring report which sets out the position as at 30 November 1994 which David Florry, the director of finance, has sent me. I do not know whether he knows that he has sent it to me, but I have it now and I am sure that he would not mind me sharing it with the House of Commons. At least, in the interests of open government, I shall share it with all the Members of the House of Commons and the public when they read *Hansard* tomorrow. He says:

"the overall regional forecast is an underdraw against cash limit of some £34m."

That is just for our region. He draws the following conclusion:

"Contracting and other pressures are now clearly showing across a number of Authorities with reserves of some £6.0m having been deployed to meet these costs and continuing pressures may lead to deficits being forecast which will need to be funded from non-recurrent sources or working balances. Particular attention will need to be given during the remainder of the year to managing the overall regional resource to that agreed within the NHSE."

That is exactly what the Secretary of State complained had happened under the previous Labour Government. We have not moved on far there.

Another issue that has been raised in the debate quite forcefully is the question of the democratic deficit in the NHS—how appointments are made to non-executive posts. Mr. Roy Lilley, a mentor to Ministers on such issues, says:

"Non-executives are like bidets—stylish to have, but no one knows how to use them."

Those words were spoken by a man who clearly from his other actions, misuses his bidet.

The Secretary of State says that politics play no part in appointments to office within the NHS and the Minister of State said the same thing in a written answer to me. However, I have a letter from a retired health care professional who applied to be a non-executive trust member having seen the advertisement in the paper. Writing to my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South, she says:

"In 1993 I applied for a post advertised locally as a 'non-executive Trust Member' of the new Haywards Heath Hospital. On the application form was an *actual* request for me to supply one's political affiliation. Needless to say, I was not appointed".

My hon. Friends, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes), are right to believe that the Government's protestations of not taking politics into account are not to be taken at face value. It would be remarkably coincidental, if they were able, at random selection, to appoint their own relatives, friends and former supporters to those boards without reference to the rest of the population. What do Conservatives, those who have a responsibility for party management, as opposed to the conduct of ministerial office, think about that? They say this. Mr. Maples—whom I remember from my time in Labour's Treasury team—says:

"We can never win on this issue".

I can almost see him shaking his head sadly as he says:

"People perceive the reforms as clumsy and believe what doctors and nurses say about them, which is almost universally hostile".

Wide-eyed and innocent! No doubt that was received with a certain amount of pain in the Secretary of State's office.

What is the Government's response? Since 1989, they have spent some £1.1 billion on their market-led reforms; over the same period, the managers' pay bill has increased by 206 per cent., the number of managers has risen dramatically and the number of nurses has fallen almost as dramatically. Sixty per cent. of hospital staff budgets are now spent on non-medical activities. Public-private partnerships for capital projects, which have predominated this year, have been entered into on an uneven basis: profit and certainty of outcome are transferred to the private sector, while the risk is transferred to the public sector.

My hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North pointed out that when the Government boast about the number of patients treated, it is important to remember that, when considered for statistical purposes, patients are episodes and not people. The same accounting device is used when the Government boast about waiting lists. In fact, more than 1 million of our fellow citizens are still awaiting hospital care as we speak, and not receiving the treatment that they ought to receive.

My hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden spoke of our values and the Government's values. I said that I wanted to set out the Labour party's approach to the national health service, and compare and contrast it as fairly as I could with that of the Government. We in the Labour party believe in a unified service; the Conservative party believes in a fragmented service, and, indeed, takes pride in that. We believe in a public service; the Conservatives praise privatisation. We believe in achieving efficiency within the public sector; the Conservatives believe in a market mechanism, which they argue will achieve economic efficiencies.

We believe in professionals taking responsibility for the service that they provide. The Conservative party believes in management checks, sometimes—in one instance, at least—pursued to the absurdity of hiring private detectives to follow consultants. We believe in a co-operative model of health care for different professionals to share; the Conservative party believes in, and indeed boasts of, a competitive model. We believe that public representatives

should represent the public interest, and that if the public interest is to be represented in the laity of health service structures it is best for the public to choose their representatives. The Conservative party believes—if it is to be judged by its actions—that those representatives should be chosen by the Secretary of State, or on her behalf, from the relatives and friends of her ministerial and other parliamentary colleagues.

We believe that hospital services should be in the public sector, and that other provider services should be public sector responsibilities. The Conservative view—I have heard the Secretary of State express it on the radio, and I have heard the Parliamentary Under-Secretary express it in Committee—is that it does not matter whether the provider of the service is in the public or the private sector. I draw a clear distinction there between provider and purchaser.

That is clearly a green light, at least ideologically, for the privatisation of the providers, including trust hospitals. As we have heard today, the trust hospital structure has been set up for privatisation purposes. We believe that general practitioners' first duty is to the patient; Mr. Roy Lilley has said, presumably from a Conservative perspective, that their first duty is to the paymaster and the service. We believe in setting national pay and conditions for a national service, on grounds of fairness and economic efficiency; the Government believe in local pay bargaining, presumably on grounds of unfairness and economic inefficiency.

Clear distinctions exist, therefore, between the point of view of the Labour party and that of the governing party. I hope that, in setting out those distinctions, I have given the Conservative Members who asked for it an idea of where the Labour party is going in the consultations and policy review that it is conducting, is drawing to a conclusion, and will have drawn to a conclusion by the time of its conference this year. There will, therefore, be plenty to debate in the run-up to the general election, which, as was helpfully announced from the Conservative Benches, will be in 1997.

Where are the Government going? Back in 1988, Dr. David Green, director of the grandly titled Institute of Economic Affairs health unit, proposed health vouchers as a way of getting around the difficulty with the status of general practitioners—are they purchasers or providers? His idea is to have an age-weighted cash payment to purchase private health care insurance and thus private medical care. In his model, everything except regulation would be run as a private sector function.

For people who think that the voucher idea is a long way off, let me point out that vouchers are already in place to pay for spectacles. Dr. Green was echoed by Mark Bassett from the European Policy Forum. His argument is that every individual should receive a weighted insurance entitlement. It is a similar argument to Dr. Green's. He calls it a "health cheque". For the avoidance of any doubt, he meant cheques, in case people thought that he meant regular medical checks. The purpose of that payment would be to insure for comprehensive ordinary health and social care. He argues that it would create

"an individual cost-awareness that is currently absent.

The commissioners of health services would include private insurers and would be subject to public licensing and oversight. These roles"—

and I think he means those roles alone—

"would be assigned to the health authorities."

Madsen Pirie of the Adam Smith Institute argues for the creation of health maintenance organisations for the entire population. He argues for competition between different producers of health care, and for subscription-based health care from private or public sources. One final ideologue has a contribution to make—Dr. Ann Robinson, head of the influential Institute of Directors policy unit.

It is important to know that those people play an important part in the thinking of the Conservative party. What they say today, Conservative Ministers say from the Dispatch Box tomorrow, probably because they are paid to do so, which is the allegation that they always make about Labour Members and the unions, so why not throw it back at them?

The head of that influential policy unit says in criticising the Government's trusts:

"They cannot make profits, establish subsidiary companies to trade, nor go to the money markets to borrow money. And they cannot become bankrupt no matter how poorly managed they are."

She is right. We argue that, because of those things, a real market does not exist, and that it would be better to have a unified, publicly owned health service.

Dr. Robinson goes on to argue, and no doubt this is the Conservative party's point of view:

"Running a hospital should be subject to the same disciplines as business. If it becomes insolvent, it should go into receivership or administration and a new management with tighter financial control installed".

That is where the ideologues, who drive the Conservative party and who create its dogma, are trying to take that party.

There are two visions. Ours is of a national public service and the Conservative vision is of a fragmented private health care market. In urging my hon. Friends to vote for the motion standing in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), I should like to give the last word to Dr. Lee-Potter, an inspiration for the debate, and a man who is frequently chaired—*[Interruption.]* I mean cheered. If he had stayed on, he would have been chaired. He is frequently cheered from the Conservative Benches. He says:

"I am sorry to say it but I have given up on this Government. Surely they cannot believe what they are doing is good. If they believe it, then that is another reason not to talk to them . . . If the election were tomorrow I would not like the Conservatives to win."

I agree with him on that. I think that he was speaking for doctors everywhere when he said—*[Interruption.]* I am sure that he is. Very well, I shall correct that—he is speaking for doctors everywhere but not for Members on the Tory Benches. He said:

"We are valued less than the managers, boards and authorities put over us, but lions led by donkeys have a habit of eating the donkeys in the end and John Major would do well to remember this."

The problem for the Prime Minister is that if things carry on as they are he will be eaten not by the lions but by the donkeys.

9.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): Having listened to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), I think that we heard a rather better effort from the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham), aided by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr.

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Loyden), in terms of summing up the Labour party's point of view. I suppose that Renfrewshire meeting Welwyn is as good a summing up of the debate as any.

By and large, it has been a good-humoured and sometimes thoughtful debate. We heard a song of pride from the Tory Benches, and occasionally from the Labour Benches—pride in the achievements of our new national health service and in what the men and women who work in it have done. We heard calls for further progress, and rightly so. We have been pressed to remove the occasional example of poor and even bad practice, and that is right, too. However, the calls from the Tory Benches are made in the knowledge that more is achievable because so much has already been achieved.

I shall deal briefly with some of the points that have been raised. We heard a great deal about political appointments, but I must tell the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East that I have here pages of appointees, starting with Audrey Callaghan and including Helene Hayman, Baroness Jay, Brian Stoten, Roy Widdowson and Brian Hanson—I wonder whether they would claim to be card-carrying members of the Conservative party.

In their contributions, the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and others showed that they did not understand the difference between waiting lists and waiting times. What is important is how long one has to wait for treatment, but we are very much aware of the need to do more, which is why we introduced the patients charter, extending a patient's rights to out-patient appointments. Of course, there was no patients charter of any sort when Labour and the Confederation of Health Service Employees were in power. Then, patients waited longer on every list.

Much has been said about beds which are, of course, important—not just the number but the type, the appropriateness of their use, the management of and advances in beds. I recently opened the first London hospital-at-home scheme and I realised how the bed argument should move forward. The Labour party should examine its record on beds.

Reference was made to mental health. Let us look back to Labour's record on medium secure beds. The Glancy report which called for medium secure beds was published in 1974, but how many were there by 1979? The answer is not one. We now have 1,300 secure and interim secure beds and we shall increase the number this year and next.

We also heard about the supposed privatisation of the health service. Patients want services commissioned by the NHS, but they do not especially mind the status of the provider as long as the provision is good. That is, after all, what they have been used to all their lives. They have been used to receiving such service from their general practitioners because every GP is an independent contractor to the NHS, and the voluntary sector and private nursing homes have long been doing contract work for the NHS, bringing a great quality of service to people in need. The Labour party's ideological slip is showing across the Chamber, perhaps even as a threat to the independence of GPs.

If Opposition Members do not want to listen to me, let them listen to Labour's health spokesman in another place, Baroness Jay, who endorsed the market approach to meeting patients' needs and wishes. She said:

> "If patients can be persuaded to treat the health service like a service industry they will naturally expect and insist on high standards of personal care in all things, ranging from good food to single-sex accommodation."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 January 1995; Vol. 560, c. 739.]

She went on to applaud the contract culture of the national health service, and I applaud her for doing so and hope that the right hon. Member for Derby, South will have a word with her, too.

We have heard a lot about community care. Again, the ideology of hostility to the independent sector, of not listening to the Audit Commission's message that much better use could be made of the independent sector for the benefit of patients, shines through. It is a partnership that we look for in providing community care. That is why we are proud of the partnership between our health service and our social services. That is why we have committed our support, through specific grants for acquired immune deficiency syndrome, drugs and alcohol and for mental illness, and why we have taken that partnership with the voluntary sector through with section 64 funds. I am pleased tonight to be able to announce that we are extending that support by taking section 64 money over £20 million for the first time.

A good and thoughtful speech was made by the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith). It was thoughtfully answered by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) on behalf of the Select Committee on Health. In many ways, her response answered the hon. Gentleman, and it would not be right for me to pre-empt our careful consideration of her Committee's report. We shall certainly consider it well. What she says is entirely in tune with what we believe.

My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) and the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) referred to St. Bartholomew's. As my right hon. Friend said, the consultation is in process. He asked for special care to be taken over the results of that consultation and, of course, we agree to do that. He asked for the preparedness for emergencies in the City to be looked at carefully. That, too, we will do. He paid tribute to the co-operation since the decision on accident and emergency units. I am grateful for his acknowledgement that good can come from change.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) raised a number of issues, including trolleys. Of course, the patients charter goes some way down that line. He referred also to waiting times for out-patients. I have already referred to the patients charter in that role. He referred to whistle-blowing. I hope that he has read carefully the guidance which we have issued to ensure that staff have a route to use.

The hon. and learned Gentleman referred to psychiatric care. Of course he is right that it should not only be supervised discharge. We never suggested that it was. Sir Louis Blom-Cooper said in his report that that was the missing element in our provision and that is why we have come to the House with that measure. The hon. and learned Gentleman is right and I hope that he will acknowledge that we are right in saying that the care programme approach is central to the care of people in

the community. Our clinical discharge guidance is central to ensuring that those who need hospital care receive it for as long as they need it and until care in the community is provided.

The hon. and learned Gentleman asked the Labour party questions. I did not hear them being answered, but no doubt he will pursue that mini-duet of a debate at another time. He did not mention much about Liberal Democrat policy, as my hon. Friends have said. I understand that. The one Liberal Democrat policy of which I am aware is the proposal to merge health and local government. As the hon. Member who represents a borough right next to the London borough of Lambeth, the thought that my neighbouring friends in Lambeth may have their hospitals run by Lambeth council is a little startling to me. I suspect that that could be copied around the capital.

Mr. Morgan: Lambeth is the hon. Gentleman's local authority.

Mr. Bowis: It is not my local authority. Mine is Wandsworth—a good authority and a good health authority. Authorities are doing their own jobs in their own ways and working and co-operating together. That is not Liberal Democrat policy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) made good points about good management of budgets and the need to monitor the fundholding world and to monitor consultants fulfilling their contracts.

The hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) mentioned mixed wards and I replied to her during the debate. She did not like the draft continuing care guidelines. I hope that she likes what she sees in the full guidelines that we shall issue before long.

I shall return to the comments made from the Opposition Front Bench, especially those made by the right hon. Member for Derby, South. We can say tonight, as did Dorothy Parker, that the right hon. Lady ran the whole gamut of her emotions from A to B.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have paid tribute to the NHS and to its year-on-year, day-on-day progress, and their tribute rings true. Why cannot the Opposition bring themselves to salute that progress, too? I do not mean the lip service that they pay to the health service or the genuflection that they make to their Unison bosses; I mean full, whole-hearted, public recognition of the light years of progress that have made since their stewardship of the NHS ended in striking hospital workers, broken promises, broken morale among doctors and nurses, cuts in pay, cuts in health spending and cuts in health investment.

I do not expect Opposition Members to say sorry for their failures in the past. I do not expect them to pay tribute to the Government, who have steered that great service into the waters of success. I want them, just once, to praise the NHS, instead of trying to bury it. If they did that, we would accept their strictures on those rare occasions when someone, somewhere, in one of the biggest enterprises in the world gets something wrong.

When I hear a justified complaint or report, I take it seriously, but I also recall that, each year, there are more than 8 million in-patient treatments, 34 million people receiving out-patient treatments, and 256 million people visiting their GPs. In a year, there are nearly 300 million treatments and visits. That is the context in which the small number of errors takes place. Each and every error is one that we try to put right. Each and every single error is portrayed by the Opposition as typical of the NHS. That attitude does more than anything else to undermine the morale of staff who, all over the country, are dedicated to their patients and to the NHS, and it undermines public confidence, too.

We have heard quotations from the Transport house press cuttings service from the right hon. Member for Derby, South. We had many press cuttings and readings from her, but we do not seem to have heard yet from the letter that she received from a man in Manchester. He wrote:

"Dear Mrs. Beckett,

In any large organisation like the National Health Service there are bound to be one or two mistakes . . . When you blow those few mistakes out of all proportion, splash them all over the media you can actually change the perception of the Health Service in the minds of the public. That may be very good for your party and for you personally but what does it do for the morale of the people who actually work in the NHS and the people who have to receive the treatment?"

He went on to give the example of his own excellent treatment in hospital, with the care and attention of people in the service. He said:

"This kind of service does not happen in an organisation that is falling to pieces or where the staff are totally de-motivated, it can only happen where it is well managed, well funded and well run . . .

I don't expect to hear this matter raised on the floor of the House because it happens thousands and thousands of times every day and you are not interested in what is working well, only in the very few mistakes people make."

Mrs. Beckett: That gentleman might have sent a copy of his letter to the Minister, but he has not sent one to me—and, by the way, I do read all my letters.

Mr. Bowis: Perhaps that explains why the right hon. Lady has not responded to that man—why he has not had the courtesy of a reply. I am sure that the letter is somewhere in the right hon. Lady's postbag. If she gets her office to work on it, she will have to decide whether to raise that man's testimony on the Floor of the House. I suspect that she will not.

Everything that we have heard from the Labour party today shows that it seeks only to knock the NHS. Knock, knock, who's there? It is the Labour party saying its prayers, longing for disasters and praying for delays.

Let me return to Labour's policies. That is a little difficult to do. We have waited courteously and patiently for the right hon. Lady to master her new brief. We have looked forward to debates and Question Times in which we might see a glimmer of policy emerging from her lips, or even a glint of policy from her eyes. I even combed the right hon. Lady's article today in the *Evening Standard* looking for policies.

Perhaps the Newcastle minder imposed on her by the Labour leader has not allowed her to come out. Can I persuade her tonight to be brave, and to loosen those apron strings? Will she just say a word about her policies? Will she tell us a little—not a lot? Will she give us a soupcon, an appetiser, a tantalising and titillating taste of things to come under a Labour Government? Let me tempt her, if such a phrase is not unparliamentary, to give us the Labour policy tune.

We remember a penetrating response from the former Labour leader, who said that where you stand depends on where you sit. So let the right hon. Lady tell it to us from

[Mr. Bowis]

where she sits. Let her perm any two from four. Is the Labour party in favour of NHS trusts? It used not to be, but then it nearly was and now it does not know. Will it keep GP fundholding? It said that it would not, then said it would and now thinks that it will not.

Will the Labour party stick by the pledge of the right hon. Lady's predecessor as health spokesman to raise NHS spending by £6 billion? Is it now £10 billion or £12 billion, or has the computer broken down? If it is any of those figures, how will the Opposition pay for it? The right hon. Lady suggested that no such pledge has been made. I refer her to the pledge of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) to spend 7 per cent. of gross domestic product on the NHS—an extra £6 billion.

What about bureaucracy? How many layers are the Opposition planning? There will be Government Departments, regional assemblies, regional health authorities, district health authorities and hospital authorities. If one puts on that many blankets, one will smother the patient. The Opposition policies certainly will not do the NHS much good.

I am not asking for much. If two answers out of four are too much, I shall go for one. Surely to goodness, Alastair Campbell will let the right hon. Lady come out with one policy. Is not the truth that health is the sop to the left? Has not health been given a spokesman of the left, and will not health have policies of the left? We must never forget an early Beckett line:

"I have my faults, but changing my tune is not one of them."

The words are those of Samuel Beckett, but that is the theme song of his namesake who seeks to lead her health troops to the left, left and left again, back to days when the Confederation of Health Service Employees, and not patients, felt comfortable in the NHS.

The record of our health service is the envy of the world. During our stewardship, the facts speak for themselves. The facts are sometimes the statistics of improvements—for example, the fact that, under the new NHS since 1990, the average waiting time for hospital treatment has fallen from nine months to under five months; the fact that the number of those waiting for more than one year for hospital treatment has fallen from more than 200,000 to under 65,000; the fact that NHS hospitals see and treat over 3,000 more patients every day than they did three years ago.

Those are facts, but facts are not just statistics. They are the reality that I see as I go around the country—the children cured of diseases which would have cut short or wrecked their young lives only a few years ago, the young adults helped slowly and painfully back to normal life by drug and alcohol rehabilitation units and the independent living awards which are helping to advance the horizons of technology for people with disabilities. They are the elderly living in a nursing home environment of comfort, care and dignity, instead of a geriatric ward, or those who are able to live in their own homes with a package of care from the health and social services. They are the former residents of antediluvian institutions who are now able to live in sheltered homes in the community.

One must talk to families to hear how similar moves have transformed the life of their son or daughter, and how a light in the eyes of someone without articulate speech shows new awareness of the surroundings. The new light shows the happiness within.

That is the health service of which I am proud, the health service to which I feel proud to be able to contribute, as a Minister and the health service on whose behalf I feel angry that all I hear from the Labour party is sniping and carping and not a single word of support. The NHS deserves better than that and better than this negative and nasty Labour motion—it deserves the support of the House and the House's overwhelming support for the amendment.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 300.

Division No. 59] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*

Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Aberdeen)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Rt Hon Gordon
Newton, Mike *(N W'shire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oliver, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lewisham East)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. Joe Benton.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John

Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Wirvesey)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepard, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sidney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

Question accordingly agreed to.

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates National Health Service staff in hospitals and in the community for providing ever more and better care for patients with 122 patients being treated for every 100 four years ago; welcomes the health reforms which have provided a coherent structure to enable them to do so; recognises the challenges faced by the National Health Service resulting from medical advance, the ageing of the population and rising public expectations and believes that the new National Health Service is better placed than ever to meet these challenges; welcomes the 68 per cent. real terms increase in National Health Service spending since 1978-79 and the Government's manifesto commitment to further real terms increases; and condemns Her Majesty's Opposition for its ill-thought-out commitment to abolish the reforms, an act which would inflict chaos and confusion on the health service, deprive patients of the benefits of National Health Service Trusts and general practitioner fundholding and prevent the health service from responding to the changing needs of the public.

Orders of the Day

Police Grant

Madam Speaker: I have limited Back-Bench speeches in the debate to 10 minutes. I have no authority to limit Front-Bench speakers, but I hope that they will note what I have said and will restrict the length of their speeches accordingly.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sure that what we are doing under your guidance is procedurally correct, but the report that we are about to debate was laid before Parliament only yesterday and has not been before the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. Is that procedurally helpful?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is quite correct, as hon. Members will see from the Order Paper. However, the report was put before the Joint Committee today, so everything is in order.

10.15 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I beg to move,

That the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 1995-96 (House of Commons Paper No. 164), which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

The motion relates to the Police Grant Report for 1995-96, which was laid before the House on Monday in accordance with the provisions of the Police Act 1964, as amended by the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994, and on which the House may vote tonight. This is the report which was placed in the Library in draft when my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced details of the police settlement in December 1994. I should like to explain to the House the basis on which my right hon. and learned Friend has made his decisions about the allocation of funding to individual police authorities.

This year's settlement for the police is, I believe, a very fair one. At a time when, as the House knows, we are anxious to keep public spending under control, the police will receive an extra 3 per cent. or nearly £200 million. That is a clear demonstration of our continuing commitment to the police service in England and Wales.

In addition, there will be a special grant amounting to £95 million for certain forces to help those authorities whose entitlement to regional support grant and police grant have been most affected by the change to the new distribution system. The grant will assist in reducing the level of precept, which affects council tax levels.

This means that, overall, the funds available for the police are going up by more than 4 per cent. That is much more than the net increase of 2.5 per cent. in police pay from September 1994, which is the largest element by far in police budgets. With the provisional capping criteria, it means that all forces will be able to increase their budget requirement in 1995-96, and more than two thirds of forces will get more than 3 per cent.

In addition, all forces will benefit from the fact that they will not, as in past years, have to pay further for common police services in 1995-96. These are services such as the national criminal intelligence service, which is organised centrally and provided to all forces.

It cost police forces £43 million to provide common police services in 1994-95 and that money was recouped from police authorities through charges. Now that police grant is cash-limited, we have taken that cost into account before determining the total amount of police grant to be distributed. For each force, that represents about 0.8 per cent. of their budget.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Does not my hon. Friend agree that what he has just told the House gives the lie to the Labour party's accusations during the proceedings of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act that the provisions it contained would mean that the police would be short-changed? That has clearly not happened, and if there are fewer police officers on the street after April this year it will be because of the decisions of chief constables, not because of Government funding.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct, and I shall turn to that point now.

The figures obviously speak for themselves. The largest element in costs to police is pay, which has increased by 2.5 per cent. All told, police resources will increase this year by more than 4 per cent. There is clearly more than enough money in the settlement for the police force to maintain police numbers if it wishes to do so.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Minister, who represents a neighbouring constituency, knows that there is deep concern throughout Cumbria over cuts in policing, particularly in village areas. In so far as there will be a £3 million shortfall, will that money ever be made up? How can the Minister assure the House that money is being made available for proper policing, when Cumbria constabulary and Conservative councillors are complaining about the settlement?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman must be careful when he bandies about the word "cuts". Cumbria can increase police expenditure by 2.5 per cent. next year if it wishes, up to its capping level. The largest element of police expenditure is pay, and that is rising 2.5 per cent. Merely because the police authority can increase its expenditure by half the amount it wants, that is not a cut. Cumbria is getting more money next year.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Liberal Democrats won control of Dorset county council on the basis that they would spend more money on policing? In fact, they have taken from the police the £2 million that exceeds the amount suggested by the Government and are spending it elsewhere, without telling council tax payers. Can my hon. Friend provide a county-by-county table showing where money is being taken away from policing by county authorities—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. This is a short debate, in which many hon. Members want to participate. Long interventions do not help.

Mr. Maclean: I might not be able to provide such a table, but my hon. Friend's facts speak for themselves.

[Mr. Maclean]

Liberal or Labour authorities will be unable to underspend on the standard spending assessment next year, because the money will go straight to the police authority.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): West Yorkshire, and my constituency in particular, is suffering a shortage of police officers on the beat. When will there be a sufficiency to meet community demand?

Mr. Maclean: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman does not realise that, from 1 April, we will no longer control the number of officers deployed by chief constables. I believe that West Yorkshire gains 3.7 per cent. or 3.9 per cent.—I will confirm the exact figure. It is certainly higher than the increase in police pay. There are more than ample resources for West Yorkshire, if the force there wants to use them to buy more constables. It may want to spend those resources on other things.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Is my hon. Friend aware that Derbyshire is pleased that formula funding for police recruitment has changed? Derbyshire county council ignored for years the police authority's pleas for increased spending. We welcome my hon. Friend's moves, and hope that he will go further.

Mr. Maclean: There is no doubt that the problems in Derbyshire built up in the 1980s because of action by the then county council. It is unreasonable to expect me or my right hon. and learned Friend to solve all Derbyshire's problems overnight. However, I assure my hon. Friend that the Government will save the police service in Derbyshire, and we have made a start with an allocation of 5.9 per cent.

If Derbyshire wishes, it can spend up to its cap of 7.9 per cent. That is beginning to redress the problems that accumulated in Derbyshire because of the way it was run in the 1980s.

Mr. Barnes: Will the formula be such as to allow Derbyshire to regain its certificate of efficiency? Will the Government's policy—*[Interruption.]* May I continue?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already told the House that this is a very short debate, and long interventions do not help—nor does harassment from the opposite side of the Chamber.

Mr. Barnes: My point is that Derbyshire has been hit by the Government formula. The policy of civilianisation, now encouraged by the Home Office, means that the number of officers on which future grants will be based has been restricted—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Obviously my words are going unheeded tonight. I must insist in short debates of this kind that interventions be brief—the more so since many hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Maclean: Derbyshire has not been hit by the Government formula; it was hit by its lunatic council which, in the 1980s, effectively damaged its police service so much that it failed to get certificates of efficiency. Derbyshire has now been saved by a Government formula which, instead of allocating a flat rate of 3 per cent. around the country, is giving Derbyshire 5.9 per cent. this year. If the police authority there wants to, it can spend up to almost 8 per cent.

A good look at the arithmetic shows that we have secured enough extra money for chief constables throughout England and Wales to maintain the same numbers of police officers in 1995-96 as they did last year, if they choose to do so. The fact is that some forces will be able to increase numbers if they choose to do so. Others may hold recruitment.

In any new formula, there is inevitably a redistribution of resources across the country, but there is no reason why the total number of police officers throughout England and Wales should drop, unless chief constables think it right to reduce manpower spending in favour of capital investment or equipment.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): The money is being redirected to Tory areas.

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman should remember that he represents an authority that is gaining 10 per cent. It will be news to many of my colleagues to learn that Northumberland and the hon. Gentleman's constituency are Tory areas.

Turning from the overall cake to how we are to divide it among police forces this year brings us to the new funding system introduced by the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. The House will recall that this year two major changes are being made to the way in which the police in England and Wales are financed. First, police specific grant is being changed from an open-ended grant based on actual expenditure to a cash-limited grant. Secondly, the Home Secretary will, from 1 April this year, have no control over the establishment of each police force, which formed the basis of the police standard spending assessment in England.

The great advantage of the new system is that it ensures that all the money provided by the Government for the police goes into policing. That, as my hon. Friends will know and have pointed out, is not the case now. Local authorities have made their own assessment of policing needs. The practical result is that some forces have a history of being funded well below their police SSAs—including Derbyshire, by £500,000 in the current year.

Funding for the police will in future go straight to police authorities. In addition, police authorities will have far greater flexibility in how they determine their spending priorities. Detailed controls on manpower and all but major capital expenditure will be removed. That means that taxpayers can be protected while decisions about the best use of resources are made locally by police authorities and chief constables.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): How will the money required to fund police pensions be dealt with? In Staffordshire, we have a critical problem, of which I think my hon. Friend is aware. I hope to be able to discuss it with him, as he kindly agreed to come soon to my constituency to do just that.

Mr. Maclean: I had hoped that my hon. Friend would not announce to the House that I had agreed to come to his constituency. It was perhaps many months ago when I did so.

There is no doubt that, throughout all police forces, pensions are a cause for concern, because of the large amount of resources that they take up. The allocation for pensions is not hypothecated to each individual force, but is set on a national average. Of course we are willing to

look at whether the figure has been set at the correct level. We are willing to look in the next year as we discuss the formula with the Association of Chief Police Officers, with police authorities and other Government Departments how the allocation for pensions can be refined even further, but we must bear in mind closely the police view, which was not to hypothecate the amount of pensions. They preferred the present structure.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): There is great concern in Suffolk about the funding of the police next year. Indeed, there will be a debate in the House on that subject tomorrow. Following on from the point just made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), will the Minister comment on the fact that the chief constable of Suffolk seems concerned, because he is not sure just how many of his police officers will decide to retire next year and require handouts as a result? How is a chief constable supposed to manage his force from year to year if he has no idea how many of his officers will want to retire in that year?

Mr. Maclean: Nothing has changed with regard to that problem. It is a management difficulty that the police have encountered for many years. Nevertheless, a chief officer can estimate the number of officers coming up to retirement. He knows their ages. There will be certain parameters—the minimum and the maximum number who may retire. If it helps, I can tell my hon. Friend that the settlement for Suffolk is an increase of 4.7 per cent. With police pay rising by 2.5 per cent., there should be ample flexibility within that fairly generous settlement to deal with the problems that my hon. Friend raised.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): In his review, will the Minister undertake to look at police officers who retire facing disciplinary action and ill health, which seems to be a major problem that is not predictable?

Mr. Maclean: That is a related but separate matter, which we are looking at. It does not directly affect the allocation that we are discussing tonight, but we are keen to look at that measure.

On the formula, the changes that we have had in the structure of police authorities in the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994 meant that we needed a different method—a more equitable system—for distributing the extra resources that we have given the police this year. We chose to do that by means of a formula for distributing both police grant and standard spending assessment. The approach is similar to that used in assessing local government spending needs. Broadly speaking, it means that police authorities will be funded according to the population and area characteristics that create the most work for the police service.

Using a formula to distribute funding brings the police service into line with other local government agencies, such as social services, highway maintenance and all other services with a local authority component. The formula provides an objective way of assessing relative need as a basis for distributing the resources available.

Devising the formula was complex. In essence, it means that policing needs have been identified as falling into six main areas: maintaining a stable presence in the community; responding to calls for assistance; dealing with crimes; traffic management; maintaining public order; and community relations. Some 50 per cent. of the formula is based on existing establishment levels. That will assist in providing stability and continuity of policing by limiting the extent of change next year.

The formula has been used to determine provision for the Metropolitan police as well as to allocate funding to provincial forces. But of course, a formula to be applied across the country cannot reflect the unique demands on the Metropolitan police, arising from the fact that London is the capital city, the permanent seat of government and the primary residence of the royal family. Special provision of £130 million over and above the figure indicated by the formula will therefore be made available to the Metropolitan police in 1995-96, in recognition of its national and capital city functions.

Anyone who has experience of devising formulae like these knows that, when one grafts them on to a funding system—everyone acknowledges that the present system is based on a less objective basis—one can expect some pretty large swings. That is what would have happened had we not taken steps to limit the change.

First, we included an element for establishment levels, and 50 per cent. of this year's formula is based on existing establishment levels. Secondly, the special grant that I have already mentioned will also help forces which would otherwise have been adversely affected by the introduction of the new formula.

During the consultation period, we had the chance to consider the figures and revise the formula where appropriate. The pensions element of the formula is one of the issues which we have considered and on which I have asked officials to work in the year ahead, because we recognise the stresses that pensions put on the police budget in every police force in Britain. More work will be done on that.

Work will also be done on other areas, such as the special policing problems of inner cities and how and why we might be able to take into account criminals who travel from one area to commit their crimes in another.

I know that a number of my hon. Friends from rural constituencies believe that the formula has been too generous to cities. I can assure them that that is far from being true, but it is true that we have as yet found no statistically valid basis to support an element for rural sparsity. If that statistically valid basis can be found, I assure the House that we shall consider it for inclusion in 1996-97, and no one will be happier than I will be to do so.

My officials are already discussing with the police the way in which—

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Maclean: I must push on, because I know that many hon. Members wish to speak and I have taken several interventions.

My officials are already discussing with the police the way in which the work should be handled. I am very keen that, whatever basis of distribution we use, it should be accepted as valid both by the police and by the police authorities.

The formula is there for the benefit of the police service. It is not there for the benefit of the Home Office or the Treasury. This year, we are allocating more than 4 per cent. The formula is an attempt to deliver and distribute the extra resources in the fairest possible way.

[Mr. Maclean]

All hon. Members, and those in the police service and in the police authorities have a deep and abiding interest in making the formula as fair and as accurate as possible, and I look forward to that work progressing next year.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I recognise that, unlike the old system, the formula introduces an element of objectivity, but does my hon. Friend agree that areas such as West Mercia feel disadvantaged to the extent that they have areas of quite high population density in areas of rural sparsity? Therefore, it is felt that, unless the formula is based on an enumeration district basis, which is the basis for only the call management rather than the crime management formula, it is likely to miss out. To that extent, West Mercia will have an increase of only 2.7 per cent. this year, against 3 per cent. on average. Will the Minister agree to review the formula in the light of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but we are having mini-speeches disguised as interventions in a debate that lasts for only one and a half hours.

Mr. Maclean: We shall be delighted to do that. There may be other areas largely regarded as rural, with towns or small cities with populations of less than 100,000, of which the present formula does not take account. Of course we are willing to consider that as well. I had a good discussion with colleagues from West Mercia and the authority there.

If we can obtain good evidence on rural sparsity, we shall take it into account. We shall also consider road lengths and motorways, and any other factors which police authorities consider should be taken into account because there is a specific policing cost.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Maclean: I do not need to give way to my hon. Friend, because I know that he is going to mention travelling. Of course we shall look at the travelling element and the possible additional cost, but I cannot make that change based on my political instinct that there might be a cost. I have to do it on an objective formula and for objective reasons, and rightly so.

Mr. Ainger: Can the Minister assure the good people of Dyfed-Powys that the extra £2 million coming into Dyfed-Powys announced by the Secretary of State on Monday will be a permanent change to the formula, not a one-off sum this year to get the Minister and his colleagues off a difficult hook in Wales, particularly in north Wales and Dyfed-Powys?

Mr. Maclean: Of all the interventions that I have taken, that is possibly the silliest. The hon. Member knows fine that no one can make a commitment to the level of public expenditure next year. I can certainly say that the Dyfed-Powys police service has done exceptionally well under the Government. It has a good police service, with a very effective clear-up rate. I might add that Dyfed-Powys asked me for about £2 million, and received slightly more than that. It is an excellent settlement for Dyfed-Powys, and for the other Welsh authorities.

We consider the allocation of police grant to be an important part of police reforms. In attempting to identify the factors that dictate police work load and fund accordingly in the formula, we have been breaking new ground with the help of the police, local authorities and Her Majesty's inspectorate. In the first year of the new funding systems, many authorities will benefit, and we have taken care to protect those which benefit less.

It appears that the House is to divide on the motion. That seems rather extraordinary to me, and it must put some Opposition Members in a difficult position. How will the shadow Home Secretary explain to Lancashire police authority that he has voted against a 5.6 per cent. settlement—over 6 per cent. if Lancashire spends up to cap? I hope that the Opposition have slipped, or paired, their leader tonight: with Durham receiving 10 per cent. extra, it must be rather embarrassing for him to vote against the increase.

Other Opposition Members have also benefited exceptionally from the redistribution formula. I shall be interested to hear what excuse the Labour party uses for voting against a settlement amounting, overall, to more than 4 per cent. If Labour Members are saying that it is not enough money, I think that we need to hear from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) whether he has been consulted about whether Labour has been given permission for all the extra police spending on top of what the Government have done.

The police settlement for 1995-96 is fair. It fully reflects the priority that the Government give to tackling crime and giving our police service the means to do it. It puts into effect the Government's real commitment to a properly resourced police service in England and Wales.

10.41 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): This is the first police funding order to be made under the new arrangements introduced by the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. We shall be voting against it, for four reasons. First, it is inconsistent with the Government's own clear manifesto promises on police numbers. Secondly, some police services say that they will have to cut police numbers. Thirdly, we do not believe that the new funding formula meets the Home Office's own criteria. Fourthly, the new system lacks the flexibility that is needed when relatively small local police forces in places such as Sussex must meet the cost of wholly unanticipated spending to deal with public order crises relating to national political circumstances—in the current instance, animal welfare.

Let me deal with those reasons briefly in turn. Page 22 of the 1992 Conservative manifesto states:

"We are continuing to increase police numbers. There will be 1,000 extra police officers this year."

That was the promise, but in fact the number of officers available for ordinary duty fell by 401 between April 1992 and April 1993.

What is more, according to Mr. John Hoddinott, president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, the settlement is likely to lead to the loss of 900 police officers in the forthcoming year. In a press briefing that he gave a week ago, Mr. Hoddinott said that

"the effect of all the funding problems to the average man or woman in the street would be a reduction in the level of service to the tune of 900 officers."

The Minister asked on what basis we would vote against the order. One of the functions of the House is to judge Governments by what they promise at elections. On that test, they have palpably failed the House—and, more important, the police and the public.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): The hon. Gentleman referred to my county police force of Sussex. Will he confirm that last year it spent £4 million less than it would have been able to on standard spending assessment, and by doing so did not attract the pound-for-pound grant from the Home Office? It was therefore £8 million down, by choice. Will he confirm that, in the forthcoming year, it will be able to spend an additional £18 million, which more than covers the cost of policing at Shoreham?

Mr. Straw: If that is the best that the hon. Gentleman can do to explain the financial predicament of his constituents as a result of their having to bear the cost of nearly £2 million for policing at Shoreham, I am not surprised that he is running scared about his prospects at the next election. That cost was not anticipated by the Sussex police authority in its budget. On his weasel words about the £4 million and £8 million, when I was shadow Environment Secretary this time last year, I do not recall the hon. Gentleman at any stage coming into the House and demanding that East Sussex or West Sussex county councils should spend another £8 million on the police. Did he come into the House and tell us that? Come on.

Mr. Stephen: If the hon. Gentleman believes in local democracy, he will understand that the decision on what to spend on the police is a matter for the police authority and the county councils concerned. It is not for this House.

Mr. Straw: There are words for that which would be unparliamentary, but the hon. Gentleman's constituents will take note of the fact that, this time last year, he supported cuts in the budget of Sussex county council. He did not call for an extra £8 million. Now, when it is too late, he is calling for it. He will be judged by what he said.

Mr. John Greenway: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I must get on. I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

One of the reasons why there is a discrepancy between what the Minister is saying about the settlement and what the Association of Chief Police Officers is saying about it is that part of the famous 4 per cent. that the Minister mentioned will not, and cannot, be used to finance front-line services. The 4 per cent. needs to be set against a gross domestic product deflator of 3.4 per cent. Mr. Hoddinott has spelt out that, because of the new arrangements, police authorities, for the first time, will have to build up their own reserves of 2 per cent. of their budgets. As the hon. Members for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) and for Stafford (Mr. Cash) have pointed out, police authorities also face significant increases in pension contributions, which I understand are to rise this year by 9 per cent. They question whether full account has been taken of that in the formula that the Minister spoke about.

Our second point is that some forces are likely to suffer absolute reductions in police numbers. According to the information that I have read, which is based on estimates from police authorities, those forces include Derbyshire, Dyfed-Powys, Lincolnshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Thames Valley. According to ACPO figures, of the 41 forces in the country, four have said that they will be able to improve their services, 17 will be in a standstill position, and 22 will have to make economies.

I gather that, in an intervention, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) talked about the Minister putting money in the way of Tory areas. It is rare for me to have to correct him. *[Interruption.]* It was my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) who made the point. I apologise for pulling him up on this matter, but one of the historic events of 1993 was that, for the first time in 20th century history, not a single area of the country had a Conservative-controlled police authority. Such is the lack of confidence that the British people have in the Conservative Government.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): The Metropolitan police.

Mr. Straw: If the people of London had a say, the Metropolitan police too would be run by a police authority that was not controlled by the Conservatives.

Our third objection to the order is that the funding formula does not meet the Home Office's own criteria: it should be objective, based on the best available data, stable from year to year, command a wide measure of support and be free from perverse incentives. A chapter of accidents, about which the Minister was silent, have hit the development of the formula and £30 million was lost in the system, and chief constables, at a late date, received further information about changes in the formula. They may have involved only £1 million or £2 million in budgets of £150 million, but, as one chief constable said, when pay accounts for 85 per cent. of police costs, variations of £1 million or £2 million can make a huge difference to whether a particular service can be developed or has to be cut.

Mr. Ian Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is proving that he is a master of his brief and I compliment him on that. Given that he is a master of his brief, will he tell us how much more the Labour party thinks that we should be spending on the police? Will he spell out the Labour party's commitment?

Mr. Straw: The debate is about judging the order against the criteria that the Home Office and the Conservative party set in 1992 and this year. I share the hon. Gentleman's confidence that the Labour party will win the next election. If he retains his seat, I invite him to sit on this side of the House and listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) announcing in his first Budget the details of our spending plans.

Our fourth objection is that the system lacks the flexibility to enable relatively small local forces to deal with what, to them, can be the huge extra costs arising from unexpected public order situations, such as the demonstrations at Shoreham in Sussex. I have here a letter from Councillor Steve Bassam, the leader of Brighton council, in which he complains about the costs which, at that stage, were running at almost £1 million a week. He said:

"This is not a cost which the authority can sustain for very long without affecting other front line policing priorities."

[Mr. Straw]

He wonders whether

"one off events of the sort currently occurring at Shoreham . . . have a distorting and long term effect on policing in the County."

He continues:

"Crime is a major issue here in Brighton with high levels of burglary and auto-thefts, anything which diverts police time and finance away from tackling these issues is not popular".

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does my hon. Friend recognise that it is not only small forces that are affected by such incidents? Even the Lancashire force, which is quite large, has to deal every other year with an incident which adds considerably to its policing costs. I refer, of course, to the Conservative party conference. In that one week, my hon. Friend's constituency, like mine, provides extra police to Blackpool and we in Lancashire have to pay the costs.

Mr. Straw: I agree and the matter has been the subject of continual representations to successive Home Secretaries. Some change has been made in the formula set out in the police grant report, but the Home Secretary and his colleague need to examine much more carefully what happens when police authorities have to bear the cost of what amount to national incidents or occasions. Can the costs better be pooled? It would certainly be better for unanticipated events such as the demonstration in Shoreham, which meant the local police force bringing in assistance from other areas. I accept that there is no perfect solution, but I think that a pooling arrangement would be an improvement.

Mr. John Greenway: I think that all hon. Members have some sympathy with his argument, but the hon. Gentleman has made it clear that he is not prepared to state what the Labour party's total spend on the police would be, even though it would be a finite sum of money. He criticises the Government's position for its lack of flexibility, but he would cream off money from other forces to pay for a problem in one particular area.

Mr. Straw: There are some functions—pre-eminently those carried out by the Metropolitan police—which are national police functions. That is reflected in the formula as the additional £130 million takes account of the Metropolitan police's national police functions. There are occasions elsewhere around the country—party conferences or unanticipated incidents—that take on national dimensions. Depending on the size of the local police authority, the cost of dealing with those national incidents may be too much for it to bear. I understand the point made by the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). I am not saying for one moment that there is an easy answer, but I am not certain that this motion is the answer.

Mr. Lord: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: This is the last intervention that I shall allow because we are under instructions to be brief.

Mr. Lord: One of the concerns of Suffolk police is the size of its contingency fund. As I understand it, it is anxious to build it up over the years in case it encounters events such as those at Shoreham, Brightlingsea or wherever. That could result, if we are not careful, in police forces all over the country building up contingency funds that they may never need. Perhaps we should rethink the whole business, dispense with contingency funds and allow police forces, when something strange happens, to apply to central Government.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is exactly right. My understanding is that the police forces are this year required to build up balances of 2 per cent. One of the benefits of the old system—it was not always beneficial—was that forces could use the balances of their much larger parent county council or metropolitan council. If there were the kind of pooling arrangement about which I have been talking, the hon. Gentleman would be exactly right to say that there would be less need for those balances.

The most that the Secretary of State could say about the settlement in evidence that he gave to the Select Committee on Home Affairs was that across the country as a whole, it would enable the police service at least to maintain the existing number of police officers. I invite my hon. Friends to weigh those words with care, for the Secretary of State is admitting that some forces will suffer real cuts. That is light years away from the bullish claims which the Secretary of State and his right hon. and hon. Friends made before the last election.

It is no wonder that Mr. John Maples, the Conservative deputy chairman, had to admit in his now famous memorandum that crime is worse under the Conservatives. This settlement will do little to make crime better.

10.56 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): As an hon. Member who represents a constituency in the Metropolitan police area, I welcome the increase in grant of 3 per cent. of resources for the police service for 1995-96. That represents a budget of £1.619 billion compared with £1.6 billion in 1994-95. In addition, the £7 million cost of escort duties, which is no longer the Metropolitan police's responsibility, remains in its budget. I am especially glad that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has agreed that up to 2 per cent. underspending on the Metropolitan budget can be rolled forward in future. That will be worth £35 million and is a sensible way in which to handle any underspend that may result from the difficulty of hitting a precise budget of £1.6 billion.

My constituents, on whose behalf I speak in the debate, have good cause to be pleased with the excellent service that they are receiving. Only this week, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, Sir Paul Condon, advised me and other Members who represent London constituencies of the success of the service over the past year and of his hopes for the future. There is good news for the people of the Metropolitan police area, resulting in no small measure from the financial resources that have been provided.

The anti-burglary campaign, Operation Bumblebee, has achieved a 17 per cent. reduction in residential burglary. There has been a 37 per cent. reduction in armed robbery at business premises and a reduction of 17 per cent. in car crime. In addition, the Metropolitan police is meeting its ambitious targets of responding to urgent calls in under 12 minutes in 90 per cent. of cases. As the Commissioner has pointed out, many of the successes that the Metropolitan police is achieving are due in large part to the communities with which it works. So Londoners are getting excellent policing.

However, I have one concern. The Metropolitan police appears to have lost some 270 posts from the establishment level. No new officers have gone on to operational duties as a result of the change in responsibility for the escort service, despite the fact that, as I have said, for 1995-96, it was able to retain the £7 million cost of those services in the budget.

As the House knows, with the hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien), I am a parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation of England and Wales. I shall comment briefly on the allocation of resources as the federation sees it. In doing so, I emphasise that my role is to advise the federation on what Parliament is thinking and to inform the House what the federated ranks are thinking about this year's settlement. I am not a spokesman for the federated ranks—that is to say, those who hold the rank of constable, sergeant or inspector. I speak only to tell the House what they are thinking and to ask from my hon. Friend the Minister of State frank views in return.

The federation welcomes the 3 per cent. increase in the allocation for the police for the coming financial year. However, it points out that when account is taken of the prevailing rate of inflation, low though it is, 3 per cent. or, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State pointed out, about 4 per cent. represents what is virtually a standstill for police spending overall. It will mean that when chief constables take responsibility for force expenditure in April, there will be no really significant extra money to meet constantly rising demands on the service, with some exceptions. In other words, the federation sees the settlement as a standstill. It also means that the cost of policing will be 32p a day per head of the population.

The federation believes that the public might be willing to pay a little more to secure the extra policing that many people talk about, especially more officers on the beat. However, I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has fought his corner hard with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor in securing this year's increase, and that must be taken into account in any mature consideration of the matter.

As the House knows, the new funding formula for police forces will come into effect on 1 April. It is the federation's view that, despite the 3 per cent. increase, the majority of forces in England and Wales will face some financial difficulties. There is concern that nearly half the forces will have to reduce their police officer and civilian establishment rates. There is a fear that about 1,500 police officers and civilians will be lost. Can my hon. Friend the Minister of State comment on those fears of the largest police staff association?

As my hon. Friend the Minister of State said, there has been a major change in the way in which funding is calculated. Unfortunately, it appears to the federation that a number of forces have been severely affected by the way in which the new formula works. We have already heard this evening about Cumbria, Derbyshire, Dyfed-Powys, Lincolnshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Thames Valley, which is next to my constituency of Uxbridge. My hon. Friend the Minister of State will have seen representatives of all those forces. They recognise that some forces have received considerably more money than they received last year. They are concerned that, because of the operation of the new formula, they have not received the resources that are necessary and that they may not be able to meet their local policing needs.

Cumbria, I am told—perhaps my hon. Friend will confirm or deny it—will lose 77 officers and 34 civilians. Derbyshire will lose 30 officers, and Dorset will lose 40. Dyfed-Powys will be particularly badly affected and, I am told, will lose 100 officers. Greater Manchester and Thames Valley will lose 350.

There is another serious problem to which I should like an answer this evening, and it is the inability of forces to pay commutation to officers who have been obliged to retire on ill-health grounds. Those officers, I am told, are being retained on full pay, although they are unable to work. Surely, when the Government have pressed the police service to get rid of officers who are unable to work and to retire them on sickness grounds, the service should be able to pay them their commutation rather than having to retain them on full pay.

There is continuing concern in the federation about the manning levels during the 1995-96 financial year. As it sees it, there will be a significant reduction in the overall establishment of police forces in England and Wales. If that proves to be correct, it is worrying, in view of the duties imposed on the police, not least by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, which the chairman of the Police Federation described as "music in our ears".

If the Conservative party is to maintain its reputation—I know it will—as the party of law and order, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can assure the House that the number of police officers on force establishments will not be allowed to drop and there will be further consideration of the problems that I have mentioned.

I turn now to the role of special constables. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, the federation accepts that the role of specials is very important as an adjunct to the regular trained force. But they cannot be a replacement for the regular police officer. Why is it, then, that the special constabulary development course was introduced with the objective of ensuring that specials achieve the same professional standards as fully attested officers?

Both the specials and the new parish constables will, I understand, be part of the force structure under the command of the chief constable. My hon. Friend the Minister will therefore understand that the increasing number of specials and the new parish constables could—I emphasise that word—be seen by regular officers as a cheap alternative to alleviate the manning shortfall. Can my hon. Friend assure me and the federation that that is not the Government's intention, and that they will maintain full support for the concept of forces which are properly manned by regular officers and supported by specials and parish constables where appropriate?

I shall make one final point. Can my hon. Friend the Minister assure me and the federated ranks that transfer of powers to local authorities to deal with parking offences and the ability of local authorities to provide off-street parking facilities with the money they receive from fines will not reduce the funding of police budgets? After all, the proceeds of those fines previously went to the Exchequer. Can he assure the House that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

11.6 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): When people from a large number of force areas compare the Minister's comments tonight and the Home Secretary's earlier promise that it will be possible for police establishments and numbers to remain the same with their chief constables' statements that they are being forced to reduce police officer numbers by a combination of the effect of this settlement and other pressures, who are they likely to believe? I think that they are more likely to believe the chief constables, whom they recognise as holding a non-partisan point of view and as simply seeking to carry out the good policing of their areas.

Chief constables in a number of areas are having to say that because of many inherent problems in the settlement that cannot be solved without the necessary funding being provided. In the latter part of his speech, the Minister began to make clear what some of those problems are. If he had not done so, interventions by several of his hon. Friends and the remarks made on behalf of the Police Federation by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) would have demonstrated the problems vividly. I know that a succession of Members have been to see Ministers, along with deputations from various local authorities, to explain the problems that many of them will face following the settlement.

There are a number of common threads to the situation. A number of forces are already making savings to meet earlier budget pressures or capping limits, and they are having to squeeze hard to keep within existing budgets. Some forces—including mine in Northumbria—are working hard to thin out their higher ranks to put more officers in the front line. That is a valuable but difficult change to manage, and it has other consequences. It involves retiring senior officers, and therefore putting additional pressures on pension provisions. I shall return to that point.

Mr. Maclean: Will the right hon. Gentleman concede that it would be perfectly valid and appropriate if a force such as his local constabulary made an overall reduction in the number of police officers but increased the number of bobbies on the beat?

Mr. Beith: It is possible to achieve greater use of current manpower, but most chief officers have told the Home Office in the past year that they believe that, even with such efforts, they need additional total manpower. Not one of them was granted additional establishment manpower by the Home Office in the past year.

There is a dispute between most of the chief constables and the Home Office over precisely how much can be achieved and how many more additional officers are needed. Other factors create problems. The way in which rural areas are dealt with has been referred to, and that affects the force in the Minister's area of Cumbria. It also affects Dyfed-Powys, and other rural forces throughout the country.

There are no reserves for the new police authorities. Funds cannot be transferred from local authorities, as under the previous system. Reserves will have to be set aside, will build up only after some years and already represent a claim on funds for the first year.

Special factors affect certain forces, some of which have been mentioned, such as the huge cost of policing party conferences. The Conservative party conference in Bournemouth, which is far more expensive to police than any of the others, will probably affect Dorset every two years and will impose an extremely heavy burden on the police budget.

The Cromwell street investigation imposes a huge cost on the Gloucestershire force and the effect of the Shoreham case on Sussex has also been mentioned. Those are all large items in police force budgets.

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): My right hon. Friend mentioned Gloucestershire police force. During the past four years, Gloucestershire county council has spent above its standard spending assessment on the police. Can he think of any reason why the Home Secretary has turned down the special request for a grant to help with the Cromwell street investigation, which has cost £1.4 million so far?

Mr. Beith: No, and I refer the Minister to his own words about the position of the Metropolitan police force and its special responsibilities. From time to time, other forces have to carry especially heavy responsibilities and we need some mechanism by which we can provide for them if we are to budget sensibly. Otherwise, as has been pointed out, there will have to be much higher provision for contingencies, which will make sensible day-to-day police operations more difficult to manage.

Pensions are another important common thread of most of the complaints. The Home Office estimated that pensions would cost police forces 9 per cent. of their budgets, but in most forces the cost seems to be between 10 and 14 per cent.—certainly, in many of the cases that have been referred to me. The reasons include the Sheehy report, the retiring of senior ranks, people serving an extra term and getting the lump sum commutation and the fact that officers recruited during the 1964 recruiting bulge are retiring. Those pensions have to be paid and they represent a higher burden on authorities than that for which the Home Office seems to have provided.

Those problems are compounded by the miscalculations, some of which have been corrected during the second round of the settlement, although others have not. The errors in the revenue support grant settlement showed that the departments were not getting it right. It thus becomes easier to understand how the mess has arisen.

Let us consider the size of the shortfall that some of the forces face. Suffolk has a £2 million shortfall on the cost of pensions and is threatened with the loss of 86 officers. Thames Valley has a total shortfall of £7.5 million and might lose more than 300 officers. Dorset is one of only three forces to have received a cut in funding. Even by spending to the capping limit, Dorset is allowed only 2.2 per cent., as against 2.5 per cent. Greater Manchester has been talking of the possible loss of more than 300 officers. Dyfed-Powys has a £2 million shortfall. Cumbria has been mentioned and, in Devon and Cornwall, the cost of pensions is estimated to be 14 per cent. The Metropolitan police force wanted 150 more officers, but it will not get them.

When we look at all those examples—as our constituents will—we cannot be satisfied with the settlement. There are two ways to resolve the problems. The first will require a reworking of the formula, which will lead to resources being taken from some forces to assist others—any resettlement has some element of that, but this problem will not be solved by that means alone.

Inevitably, additional resources are necessary to make a fundamental reorganisation feasible without producing huge changes or unfairly limiting the forces that would otherwise be expected to contribute.

Mr. Stephen *rose—*

Mr. Beith: I will not give way as we are all under a time constraint and I want to bring my remarks to a close.

In our costed budget proposals, in the autumn, we included a proposal to increase the number of police officers to the extent that chief constables then requested—2,675 officers, at a cost of £80 million. The Home Secretary granted no increase in officers in 1994 and is now telling police authorities that if chief constables choose to do so collectively—I assume he means collectively—they will be able to keep forces at their present level. He is not assuming an increase in the number of officers and a significant number of chief constables will ultimately have to tell him that it is not a matter of their choosing—unless by "choosing" he means that, having kept the same number of officers, he stops them using vehicles, denies them essential equipment, allows no overtime even when it is essential and in various other ways negates the value of appointing those officers, so extensive will be the cuts in other services in order to maintain them.

Under this settlement, the Home Secretary's promise will not be kept throughout the country. The task of fighting crime will be immensely more difficult because, even with the best will in the world and the most effective reorganisation, many forces will be unable to keep even the same number of officers in the front line, and some may have fewer. The Minister's remarks showed a glimmer of recognition that the formula is not right, that it has had some bad consequences and that it needs to be changed. But additional resources will be required to solve that problem and give our communities the policing that they need to ensure that they have not only a sense of security but effective crime fighting.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Liberal Democrat spokesman to complain about the increased cost of policing when his party has—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for me, and it is not in order to waste the House's time in such a short debate.

11.16 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I have no doubt that the settlement is a good deal for the country as a whole and a genuine manifestation of the priority which the Government set on good policing and law and order. After all, a settlement of more than 4 per cent. for the coming financial year is generous, given that inflation is barely half that.

Opposition Members seem to dislike my introductory remarks. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who attempted to make a number of strictures, sounded hollow and unconvincing because he notably declined every opportunity that was given to him to say how the Labour party would do any better. I do not intend to dwell on the Labour party any longer.

I listened to the speech by my hon. Friend the Minister of State with admiration for the general settlement that he has achieved for the country as a whole, but with a growing and intense sense of painful envy because my county of Lincolnshire has not shared in the general bonanza which other police forces seem to have enjoyed. Unlike Derbyshire, we have not been given an opportunity next year to spend up to 8 per cent. more. We learnt a few moments ago that Sussex is relishing the prospect of spending £18 million more next year. We have not been given that opportunity. Next year, Lincolnshire's police budget will be capped to within £150,000 of this year's budget—the 1994-95 actual spend—so a real reduction will be imposed on us. My constituents regard that as an invidious, undeserved and grievous blow.

Unlike the areas represented by Opposition Members, Lincolnshire has not suffered from a lunatic council. We have heard all about Derbyshire's lunatic council, for which that county now appears to have been rewarded. Until last year when we lost control of it, for 20 years Lincolnshire had a Conservative council which set an exemplary record of good, responsible and prudent local government, so it is incomprehensible that we should have been treated in that way.

My hon. Friend the Minister is aware of Lincolnshire's profound reaction to his proposals. When one makes a national settlement that is as generally well conceived as this one, it is inevitable that some anomalies, difficulties and unfairness will arise, particularly when a new formula is introduced.

May I make a strong two-fold plea to my hon. Friend the Minister? First, he said that he will seek to find a way to ensure that the sparsity factor is included in the formula in future. That is of obvious significance to Lincolnshire because sparsity is a major factor in a large county such as Lincolnshire. It takes a lot longer to get a police car to an incident; more resources are needed to achieve the response time that is more easily achieved in densely populated districts. As I understand it, the purpose of the standard spending assessment formula is to put everyone on the same basis. I cannot believe that it is beyond the range of human ingenuity to devise a way in which sparsity can be included in the formula.

Secondly, whatever my hon. Friend the Minister does to the formula will not help us in the coming year. If, as I suspect will inevitably occur, Lincolnshire police committee decides that the only right, responsible and possible course for it to take in the circumstances is to set a budget which is, at least, at the same level in real terms—and therefore above the capping limit—I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will not reject it out of hand. I hope that he will give it careful consideration, listen fairly to all the arguments that are put to him and give Lincolnshire police committee a chance to convince him of the case, even if my words have failed to do so.

11.21 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): The Minister of State, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), is the Paul Daniels of the Government Front Bench—whether he does it by mirrors or by prestidigitation. I read with amazement the figures for Merseyside police that accompanied the Home Secretary's letter. It is pointed out that the puny increase of 0.8 per cent. in the budget becomes 2.5 per cent. if the full capping limit is exploited, but it is not pointed out that the chief constable needs the courage to increase his precept by 20 per cent.—on Merseyside, that is no small challenge.

[Mr. Edward O'Hara]

The Minister said that there were representations from the Merseyside police authority, as result of which the formula was changed. But let us consider the way in which it changed. The interim police grant went up from £105.8 million to £106.7 million. The revenue support grant increased from £62.3 million to £63.3 million. But, by a process of mirrors, the special damping grant was reduced from £1.5 million to nought, so the net increase was simply £400,000.

Furthermore, because of the way in which the police grant has been calculated, the Home Secretary takes credit for the fact that £1.774 million will not have to be found by the Merseyside police authority for common police services such as the computer. But everyone knows that that was a mistake and the position is guaranteed only for 1995-96. No one feels secure about that element of funding for the next year. According to the Home Secretary's figures, the pensions allocation for Merseyside has been increased by £1.81 million. But that is by no means adequate compensation for the £2.5 million increase in the recurrent costs and the £3.5 million increase in lump sum payment in the past year.

The formula penalises Merseyside. The Minister made great play of the formula's objectivity. We know from bitter experience of the Government that there is no such thing as an objective formula. Formulae contain selected factors which are weighted. In this case, the selection and the weighting are utterly wrong for Merseyside. As the establishment element is phased out, Merseyside will face a £13 million budget deficit. The number of personnel—both police and civilian—will have to be reduced by 100, and there will be more cuts as the situation worsens. Unless the Government radically rethink the formula and look carefully at pensions—preferably more carefully than the Minister suggested in his opening remarks—the prospects for Merseyside are catastrophic.

11.25 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I will make a brief contribution to the debate because the House wants to move to a Division and I think that my hon. Friend the Minister intends to say a few more words.

It is clear that hon. Members on both sides of the House would like an increase in police spending. No issue concerns our constituents more than law and order and the lack of police presence on our streets—particularly in rural areas. This is the first occasion since the enactment of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill that we have had a chance to consider the effect of the new funding arrangements for the police service.

Viewed in the context of the total public spending round and the settlement for local authorities, which the House will consider tomorrow evening, the police settlement is very helpful and generous. I would like every police authority in England, Wales and Scotland to receive more money, but the fact remains that it is not easy to allocate public funds at present.

The Government's achievement in this police grant settlement is far more helpful to police authorities than many hon. Members feared it would be when the Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill was introduced. I remember telling the House on that occasion that it is all very well giving chief constables the flexibility to decide how many police officers to recruit, or to decide to spend more money on technology and new equipment such as computers or new police cars—many of them will take those decisions—but we must ensure that there will be at least an inflation-linked increase in total police spending or, better still, a real terms increase. We now have a national real terms increase.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have pointed out that the single factor which undermines police spending power most is the vexed problem of police pensions. The formula cannot address adequately the fact that more and more police forces are having to contribute significantly to officer retirement—mostly on the ground of ill-health. We must find a better solution to that problem.

I conclude by admonishing the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who said that a worst estimate under the new formula and this settlement might mean that there will be 900 fewer police officers. That scenario has also been suggested by the Association of Chief Police Officers. Chief constables will have to decide their spending priorities.

Has the hon. Gentleman come to the House in the past 15 years and congratulated the Government on the fact that there are 16,000 more police and civilian officers and that more money has been spent on the police service than on any other part of the public sector? He has never done that and he never will. The settlement demonstrates that support for the police service is a Government priority and I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my hon. Friend the Minister of State on securing such a good deal for the police service.

11.29 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) showed remarkable cheek in attacking my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and trying to defend the Government's record. Does not the hon. Gentleman recall that he, like all Conservative Members, fought the last general election promising an increase of 1,000 police officers that year but that the Government delivered a cut of 401? The hon. Gentleman and Ministers should apologise to the House, rather than criticise my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn.

The House should bear in mind the background to the report. The Conservatives have been deeply damaged by their failure to combat crime. Recorded crime has more than doubled and crimes of violence continue to soar. Specific victims and whole communities feel neglected. The British crime survey shows that actual crime has been rising two and a half times as fast as recorded crime since 1991. The best that the Home Secretary can offer is to walk with a purpose and to cut compensation for victims of the most horrific and violent attacks, including police officers injured on duty.

The last two Home Secretaries have sought to attack everyone in a blatant attempt to escape the blame that is rightly put at the Government's door. Those at the front line in our prisons and probation officers—who are at the front line in communities—are among the regular targets in this long-running farce. Above all, the police have been under constant attack on a variety of fronts, from the ill-judged Sheehy review to the attempt to take central

control over the police enshrined in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. There has been continued insecurity.

The Government have broken their promises, and the report before the House shows their failure to produce a fair, transparent formula for setting police grant in the coming year.

There are some positive, welcome points. The publication of standard spending assessments for police authorities in Wales flushed out both the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Wales. We pleaded with them to end the secrecy surrounding the Welsh figures and demanded that they got their act together. In recent years neither the police grant nor cash to local authorities has been adequate, and the increase in cash for South Wales police this year—the first of transparency—shows just how right we were.

Our communities have been condemned to two years of turmoil and fear, while police officers have felt neglected and undervalued. Transparency has at last forced those Secretaries of State to accept that Welsh Labour Members and councillors were right and the cash levels inadequate, and to put right that iniquity.

Even this week came a curious change, as those same Ministers had to admit that they got it wrong in Dyfed-Powys and north Wales. I am glad that the Government have listened since last November and increased the cash for those forces, but where is the money to be found? The overall police grant is to be redistributed, and the Welsh Office sum will go direct to police authorities—but the figure precepted on local authorities will have to come from their already stretched budgets at a time when we need our councils to increase and extend their work on crime prevention, protecting the youth service and partnership with the police on crime-cutting initiatives.

Given that only one crime in 50 ends up being punished in court, and only one in 750 or more ends in a custodial sentence, the capacity for developing local partnerships cannot be underestimated. I do not believe that the welcome increase in cash for the police has been compensated by the cash given to local authorities. That last-minute change tells us that the formula is not dependable and transparent.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): My hon. Friend is aware of the concerns of the Police Federation of England and Wales, to which the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) referred. The federation says that up to 1,500 police officer and civilian posts could be lost by the new formula. If chief constables and the federation are not assured by the formula, how can we be assured?

Mr. Michael: I acknowledge the strength of the case made by my hon. Friend, of which the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) is clearly aware—although the hon. Gentleman almost apologised for making the points that he did. I understand his embarrassment. The hon. Gentleman referred to a 3 per cent. increase, which is shown by the figures to be more accurate than 4 per cent. Given a 3.4 per cent. gross domestic product deflator, the need to construct a reserve fund, the burden of unfunded pensions and the fears expressed by the hon. Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord), a 3 per cent. settlement is hardly generous.

The proportion of budgets taken by pensions in 1990-91 was 6.8 per cent. of the total. By 1994-95 they are expected to take more than 9 per cent.; and the actuarial studies show that that trend will continue well into the next century.

When the draft formula was seen in the autumn and there was an outcry over the figures, we were told that they were for exemplification only. "You don't like the figures," said the Home Secretary. "Okay, here are some different ones." If the formula is satisfactory, should not it produce a dependable outcome, and not be subject to major fluctuations as the Home Office wrestles with it and tries to squeeze out of it a result that makes sense? It is not good enough to have uncertainty for the future and the likelihood of large fluctuations from year to year. The Minister even acknowledged that they were likely.

Trained and experienced police officers cannot be turned on one year and off the next like a tap. The formula should not be open to distortion; it should not need major intervention by the Home Secretary each year; and it should allow sensible planning by chief constables and police authorities.

Mr. Lord *rose—*

Mr. Michael: Today's report fails to provide us with a formula that is dependable, transparent and stable from year to year. That is what the police and the community want. The problem is not new. We have pressed successive Home Secretaries to treat the matter with the seriousness and urgency that it deserves. This report should be marked: "Could do better—must do better—try again." That is the signal that we will give the Home Secretary through our votes tonight, in the best interests of the police and the public.

11.36 pm

Mr. Maclean: It is perhaps not surprising that tonight we have heard more from those who believe that their local police force will be disadvantaged than from those who are about to see the benefits of the application of a new objective system of funding the police. We have also seen the Labour party wriggling, trying to justify voting against an increase for the police service of more than 4 per cent., and using as an excuse its concern about police numbers. Labour was the party that left office with the force 8,000 bobbies under establishment. Police officers were leaving the force in disgust, at the rate of 5,000 a year, because the Labour Government refused to pay them a decent living wage.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said that we need some mechanism for dealing with exceptional circumstances. He mentioned some. I must tell him that we have such a mechanism. Any police service can approach the Government, and if the criteria are met, it will get 100 per cent. funding for any exceptional circumstances. That was last used in the right hon. Gentleman's county; following the Newcastle riots, Northumberland benefited from its special approach to the Home Office.

The right hon. Gentleman also bandied around the word "cuts". Comparing a settlement of as much as 10 per cent. with the budgets that police chiefs or authorities would really like for next year—if money were no object—and calling the difference a cut is just not sustainable. All police services in England and Wales have had an increase in their

[Mr. Maclean]

resources next year. Some have had considerably more. Even those which are gaining a lot would have liked more. The difference, I repeat, is not a cut.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies), in a considerate speech, pointed out the difficulties that he believes Lincolnshire will face. I have met delegations from there, as well as from many other authorities. The formula is based on need. It attempts to distribute resources to forces on that basis. I give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance that we will look carefully at sparsity factors. I am heartened by the evidence supplied by various rural forces, which have sought to identify a special police funding element based on rural sparsity. If that is statistically valid, I will be happy to build it into the formula.

My hon. Friend also asked me about the capping limit. If the police authority sets a budget above the cap, the Government do not reject it out of hand. We are bound to examine the argument made: it has made every effort to live within the cap but cannot reasonably do so. In those circumstances, the Government must decide whether to invite the House to confirm the cap, to accept the budget level established by the authority or to propose a new capping limit between the two. That is the official and legal position.

Mr. Stephen: Does my hon. Friend recall that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), in the course of his speech, misled the House by suggesting that last year I supported a cut in my local county council's SSA? Is my hon. Friend aware that, in fact, that county council received a substantial increase in its SSA last year?

Mr. Maclean: Of course I am aware of that. My hon. Friend is right to point it out.

I reject the argument made by the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara)—that the effect of the fund on Merseyside will be catastrophic. Everyone knows that Merseyside is a well-funded force and is highly successful against crime. We believe that its element of funding this year is adequate and consistent with the need for policing in Merseyside.

I welcome the wise words of my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who pointed out that the Labour party failed to take account of the 16,000 extra police officers in Britain today—it is more than when the Labour Government left office.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) made some interesting points. I welcome the fact that the Police Federation welcomes the 3 per cent. extra—taking into account the damping grant, the 4 per cent. extra. I understand the concern about manning levels, but I must point out that we shall no longer be fixing police establishments. I cannot give categorical guarantees about the numbers that any police force will have. That will depend entirely on the decisions taken by chief officers. My hon. Friends must treat all the figures cautiously.

I perfectly well understand—it is not a criticism—that some police forces have prepared a menu of the changes that they might make, whether they might freeze some establishment levels or close some stations. I have seen some of them touted around as a collective list of all the things that will happen. That is not the case, and my hon. Friends should study the lists carefully to get at the facts.

Mr. Lord: Like many Conservative Members, I understand the great difficulty in being precise and totally fair about the matter, and I very much welcome my hon. Friend's words when he says that he is prepared to look at the sparsity factor again. Will he please look, if not this year, at least in subsequent years, at the huge distorting effect that has become apparent in the debate of the funding of police pensions?

Mr. Maclean: The funding of police pensions is a key area for us to examine, both to try to find a solution to a fully funded pension scheme perhaps 30 or 40 years hence, and to look at the formula for next year and subsequent years.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge that we shall look at sick retirements in the police service. The Government's campaign to increase the number of specials from 20,000 to 30,000 was established long before the present funding settlement, and we intend to pursue that campaign, irrespective of the number of regular police officers that we have.

I now deal with the hon. Member for Blackburn. It is extraordinary—my hon. Friends will be quite surprised to hear this—that one of the official excuses that the Labour party is using tonight to vote against the motion is that it is worried about a possible drop of 400 in the number of police officers between two carefully selected months last year. The months were carefully selected to show that when police officers go to training schools, the number in the service, obviously, increases. If one picks a month before the training schools have an intake, one will see that the service is short by a higher number of officers. To hear the Labour party complaining about 400 police officers when the service was short by 8,000 when it was in power really sticks in the craw. The Conservative party will be judged not by a selective period of four months last year but on our law and order record over the past 15 years. Those were 15 years of increasing the number of police officers in Britain; there are 16,000 more regular officers and 16,000 more civilian staff, with the net result that we have more constables than we had last year.

The Labour party likes to try to get hooked on the overall number of police officers. It seems to ignore the fact that because of the restructuring that has taken place in police services resulting in fewer senior ranks, in the first 10 months of last year we had 600 more constables than ever before. That is the Government's record on law and order.

It is just not believable for the Opposition to go into the Lobby tonight to vote against a settlement for the police service of more than 4 per cent.—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of the debate, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [19 December]:—*

The House divided: Ayes 288, Noes 248.

Division No. 60] **[11.45 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*

Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Pu'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Riffkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger

Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'd, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Byers and
Mr. Peter Mandelson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 1995-96 (House of Commons Paper No. 164), which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

HOME AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Mr. Edward Garnier be discharged from the Home Affairs Committee and Mr. Walter Sweeney be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

ADMINISTRATION

Ordered,

That Sir David Madel be discharged from the Administration Committee and Mr. Derek Conway be added to the Committee.—*[Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Newbury Bypass

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

11.57 pm

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): I am grateful to Madam Speaker for the opportunity to raise in this Adjournment debate the matter of the Newbury bypass and the delay in its start. In doing so, I am supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), and by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), who I see in his place across the Chamber.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads will reply to the debate. I should like to take him briefly through crucial aspects of the matter. I shall give, first, what I would call a geographical description of the position of Newbury; secondly, the history of events; thirdly, the economic case for an early start; and, fourthly, the environmental aspects as they affect my constituents. With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member for Newbury will talk about the effects on his constituency.

The town occupies a pivotal position on the A34, a road that is designated as Euro-route E05 and that has, as its southern approach, thre and a half miles of single carriageway from Tothill. It is the only single carriageway section of the route between Madrid and Glasgow. We are talking about a Euro-route, yet there are at this point three and a half miles of 7 metre-wide single track.

The average daily flow of traffic is 26,000 vehicles on what is known as the new town strait, the bit south of Newbury. On the dual carriageway part in Newbury itself, the daily average flow is some 50,600 vehicles. That figure almost meets the Treasury requirements for an M road. One should bear it in mind that they are average figures and that within those figures there are peaks and troughs. Although, during the troughs, not many people are trying to get through Newbury in a reasonable time, the delay is intolerable in peak hours. I am talking about five-mile traffic jams to the south of Newbury and five-mile traffic jams to the north.

The history of the bypass is that there have been two public inquires, one in 1980 and one in 1988. The Department's consultants examined no fewer than 39 possible routes. There was widespread consultation, and the second inquiry took no less than five months and involved 2,000 hours of examination and 150 witnesses. All possible opinions were trawled, and all alternative routes were examined. The inquiry recommended the western bypass.

Inevitably, there was—and still is—a small vocal minority opposed to having the bypass at all, and especially on the western route. Of course I respect the desire to preserve the environment but—I say this as an aside—it is interesting to note that, on his arrival, the inspector was at first against the western route on environmental grounds but, as the inquiry proceeded, he found that the Department's case got stronger and more convincing. That is why he finally found in favour of it. Also as an aside, 6,000 petitioners expressed their approval.

At the 1988 inquiry, the Department of Transport estimated that there would be 21,000 vehicles on the single carriageway south of the town by the year 2000. The reality is that there are 25,000 vehicles now, so the expectations of traffic going through the town and the need for the bypass were substantially understated at the time of the public inquiry, which found in favour of the western route.

I deal now with the economic aspects of the case. The A34 is an arterial link between Birmingham and the country's manufacturing base there and the ports of Southampton, Portsmouth and Poole. North of Newbury, there is often a five-mile traffic jam involving vehicles heading to the coast, and 19.5 per cent. of them are lorries, because of the road's strategic importance as a route to the ports. The five-mile traffic jam heading north to the midlands comprises vehicles carrying raw materials and semi-finished goods needed by industry, and cannot represent anything other than a substantial and unnecessary burden on industry.

I have stood in the Minister's shoes, and I am aware of the Department of Transport's problems with the Treasury when it comes to securing the resources that one would like for many desirable forms of expenditure. Therefore, I hope that the Minister can use the economic cost as a strong argument so that the Treasury accedes to the resources needed.

I have been talking to the Confederation of British Industry about the matter, and it thinks that it is reasonable to argue that

"congestion on the A34 adds millions of pounds every year to the costs to businesses who use the road, not only in the South but also in the Midlands and the North."

That, too, is part of the economic cost.

I turn from that to the environmental case. I accept that there is an environmental cost to a bypass. Any route inevitably incurs that. But there is also an environmental plus for Newbury, because of the reduction of congestion, pollution, vibration, damage to buildings and accidents involving people as well as vehicles. There is an environmental advantage for my constituents, because at present, they cannot get in and out of Newbury at the times when they want to travel. It is all right when nobody is commuting to work or back. At the slack time, there is no great difficulty. But when people want to travel, there is considerable delay.

Many of my constituents live on roads immediately adjacent to the A34 south of Newbury. Because of the traffic jam, they are virtually sealed into the roads on which they live and cannot get out to get into the traffic to move either north or south. That is a considerable complication for people trapped there.

For all the reasons—the strategic block on a Euro-route, the history of the public inquiries, and the economic and environmental cases—it is essential that that bypass should proceed, and proceed shortly. The Secretary of State has referred the matter to the Highways Agency and told me that he wishes to be quite sure the proposed bypass is the right solution, and he has asked the Highways Agency to review all practical options.

I recognise that we have a new Secretary of State for Transport, who cares deeply about the environment. I can well understand his wanting to ensure that such a major scheme involving a substantial bypass has been totally and thoroughly investigated. But the bypass has been through two public inquiries, as I said. It has been examined critically, and every alternative route has been examined critically. So it is difficult to discern what can

[Sir David Mitchell]

be discovered at this late hour as an alternative route. That is the heart of the problem which I draw to the attention of the House and the Minister.

If the Secretary of State had said that his budget was so constrained, that it was part of a national effort to get a balanced budget so that we did not get inflation again and did not enter a Lawson boom and bust cycle, that he did not have the money, and that the bypass must be postponed for a year, we would grumble, but we would accept it as not unreasonable. However, we face the prospect of an alternative route.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will clarify the position that the road is to be moved only a couple of yards. Even if that is so, we need to hold a fresh public inquiry. That means a five-year delay, which would be totally intolerable against the background of figures which I have given to the House.

I plead with the Minister: if he cannot give us an answer, will he at least take the problem away? Will he recognise that it is very important on commercial, economic, and environmental grounds and because of the undertakings given in the past that we know the time scale for a decision and where we stand on the future of the road? I now hope that the hon. Member for Newbury may be able to join the debate.

An extraordinary letter has reached my hand. It was sent from the Highways Agency to the director of development services of Newbury district council, and it states:

"If even minor changes are made to the route new legal Orders may be needed. These could take some years to go through the statutory processes, so for the purposes of development control I recommend that we now work on the basis that there will be no additional capacity through Newbury before 2003."

That may be in the totally different context of a rather conservative approach to advice on planning and development, but it is a frightening suggestion from the Highways Agency. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to clarify the position and the status of that document.

12.10 am

Mr. David Rended (Newbury): I thank the hon. Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) for inviting me to join him in supporting the idea that the Newbury bypass should be constructed with the minimum possible delay. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to take part in this Adjournment debate, having already had the opportunity to take part in an Adjournment debate on the subject on the very afternoon that the infamous decision was announced to postpone yet again the start of the construction of that road.

The hon. Gentleman has already made many of the arguments in favour of the Newbury bypass on a general ground, and I wish to concentrate particularly, as he suggested I should, on the effects on the town of Newbury itself—that lovely old market town which lies right at the heart of my constituency. I shall start by talking about the effects on business in the town, because they are very important.

Businesses in Newbury are, without question, suffering badly from the effects of the current hold-ups in the town. Clients and customers are unwilling to risk coming into Newbury town to visit businesses because they are aware of the huge delays and hold-ups which happen all too often in and around the town.

Even more important, I want to talk about the environment in Newbury and the effects on the people of Newbury—the people who are suffering day after day from the pollution that is spewed out by the cars and lorries moving all too slowly straight through the centre of our lovely town. Those people are, perhaps, children in school playgrounds. They might be people going shopping, or people going about their business, visiting banks and building societies or whatever, in Newbury. Those people are suffering from the noxious fumes and the pollution that is being spewed out at present all over our town.

Let me quote a letter which I received recently from a young girl who tells me that, for the past two years, she has been an asthmatic. Until last summer, she had been able to come off her medication for two months. She told me that it took her one and a half hours to travel the seven miles through Newbury. She said:

"My breathing got very bad and by the time I got to my destination I was having a full blown asthma attack, needing to double up medications and start taking the steroids again . . . I cannot be the only one who suffers in this way due to traffic fumes . . . So why are the Government enforcing a growing number of the local and passing population of Newbury to suffer in this way?"

That is not a politician trying to get a bypass for the town: it is a young girl just at the start of her life, looking for some way to overcome the health problems she meets as a result of the dreadful traffic in our town.

Let me remind the Minister what he himself said in a letter written on 27 October last year:

"I recently visited Newbury and saw for myself the pressing need for a bypass. A bypass is needed to remove the noisy smelly traffic from the town."

The Secretary of State says that he has to review all the options, but all the options have been reviewed time and again. As the hon. Member for Hampshire, North-West has said, inspectors' reports have shown that all possible options have been reviewed. We cannot simply go back to square one yet again.

The route that has been chosen is the least environmentally damaging route possible. The bypass will bring huge environmental benefits to the town of Newbury. How many more inquiries must we have? How many Secretaries of State do we have to persuade that this really is the right route?

At present, Secretaries of State are changed every year and a half. Every new Secretary of State demands a new inquiry, which takes a year. We then have a year to set up the new tenders to get the work done, but the next Secretary of State will be in place before the tender can be signed again. It could go on for ever. Each new Secretary of State makes a new decision. That is not good enough.

How many more Secretaries of State will do this? How long will it last? Will it really take until the millennium and beyond before we achieve our bypass for Newbury? Newbury needs its bypass, and it needs it now.

12.15 am

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) on securing a

debate on this important subject which has invoked much interest in the House and outside. Over the years, my hon. Friend has taken a close personal interest in the A34 Newbury bypass, as his speech to the House today has shown. I am pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the points which he and the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) made.

As I live in Berkshire and represent a constituency at the other end of the county, the congestion problems in Newbury are well known to me, as my letter of 27 October, from which the hon. Member for Newbury quoted, indicates. I believe that there is an urgent need to find a solution to the problems of congestion in Newbury and the surrounding area to which my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman referred in graphic terms.

It may be helpful if I say a little about the background to the scheme and the decision to review it. As my hon. Friend said, this scheme has been the subject of full public consultation and two public inquiries held by independent inspectors. The decision to proceed with the western bypass route was therefore not arrived at quickly or easily.

The environmental sensitivity of the area around Newbury has rightly been an important issue in considering the route options for the scheme. Indeed, most of the 1988 public inquiry was concerned with the environmental effects of the western bypass proposals, which were considered very carefully and taken into account before the decision to proceed was taken.

Despite this very thorough environmental assessment of the proposals, there has been some criticism that a formal environmental statement under EC directive 85/337/EEC was not published for this scheme. However, the Government have long held the view that the directive, which is essentially concerned with procedural requirements relating to the granting of development consent, does not apply to cases in which the application for development consent was made before the date of entry into force of the directive, as indeed was the case with the A34 Newbury bypass.

The Government disagree with the European Commission's interpretation of the law on this matter, and have explained their position fully to the Commission. It has also been argued that, since the decision to proceed with the scheme was taken in July 1990, there have been a number of new factors which are of such significance that the western bypass route should be looked at again. These include the proposed designation by English Nature of new sites of special scientific interest in the Kennet and Lamborn valleys across which the proposed western bypass route would pass.

In a position statement published by English Nature on 9 September last year, it said that it had not defined a boundary for the proposed sites, although an "area of search" had been identified within which it is likely that the final boundaries of the designated sites will fall. Nevertheless, English Nature has made it clear that the rivers were being proposed for notification as SSSIs in the full knowledge that the Newbury bypass could be constructed through the "area of search".

It has also been suggested that the proposals are in breach of the European Commission's habitat and species directive. To date, no designations under this directive have been made.

Notwithstanding this, we are conscious of our obligations and, in the context of the western bypass route, we have been taking appropriate action to ensure that any endangered species are protected by approved means. In this connection, we have been working closely with English Nature to ensure that the requirements of all relevant legislation are met.

Some concern has also been expressed about the effects of the proposed western bypass route on the battle of Newbury sites. I fully understand that concern, although both those sites have suffered serious encroachment from the urban expansion of Newbury in the recent past. Nevertheless, the proposed route would cross only the western extremities of the battlefields and, contrary to some people's assertions, would not destroy them.

The channel tunnel has also been cited as a new development, since the 1990 decision on the bypass, which should be taken into account before we proceed with the scheme. I assure the House that we have carefully considered the effect of the channel tunnel on the use of the A34. We have concluded that the tunnel would have no significant effect on the needs of heavy goods traffic using that trunk route.

Finally, it has been suggested that concerns raised by the National Rivers Authority have not been adequately addressed. Since it was established under the Water Act 1989, the NRA has been involved in discussions on the design of the scheme. Among other things, the discussions focused on the disposal of surface water and the proposed structures for the new road.

The NRA has expressed its concern about the risk of flooding and the effect on the ecology of the River Kennet and Lamborn corridors. Having considered those representations and commissioned further studies, we have been satisfied that further changes to the geometric criteria of the bridges over the rivers are unnecessary.

The House may be assured, therefore, that all the legitimate concerns that have been raised have been properly addressed. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wants to be sure that we have the right solution before proceeding. I understand the frustration of the hon. Member for Newbury, who asked what would happen if every succeeding Secretary of State reached the same point and wanted another review.

It is not unreasonable, however, that my right hon Friend should be satisfied that the scheme that he is authorising is the best possible solution before he takes decisions that will have a long-term effect on the area and will commit substantial sums of money. For that reason, he asked the Highways Agency to look again at the plans for the bypass, review the options for relieving congestion in Newbury and report back to him as soon as possible.

The review is being undertaken by an independent team within the Highways Agency, comprising staff not previously associated with the project. They will reconsider the published route and other practical alternative options. All factors relevant to the choice of route will be considered.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West said, a great deal of time and resources have been spent in public consultation and public inquiries to find a satisfactory solution to the problems of congestion on the A34 through Newbury. It has been suggested that the decision to put the scheme on hold renders all that abortive. That is not the case. The scheme has not been abandoned, or cancelled, and the statutory orders for the western bypass route remain in force. The scheme is on hold.

[Mr. John Watts]

I fully recognise the importance of the A34 route, however, and the problems of congestion in Newbury. I also understand the concern that has been expressed by local businesses and residents of Newbury and by a number of right hon. and hon. Members of this House, both in the Chamber and outside, about the delay that the review is causing.

That is why we have asked the Highways Agency to carry out the further review as a matter of urgency. I assure the House that another announcement will be made as soon as possible after my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has considered the further report. I cannot put a precise date on that, but I assure the House and my hon. Friend that there will be no undue delay in completing the review, or in putting matters before my right hon. Friend for a decision.

There has been much speculation about the reasons for putting the scheme on hold. I assure the House that there is nothing sinister in this. It is my practice and that of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to visit the sites of proposed rail or road developments, so that we can see them for ourselves and make our assessment in addition to the professional advice that we are given. There is nothing sinister about that.

The decision to put the scheme on hold was not taken in response to the royal commission report on environmental pollution or the report by the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment on induced traffic, although the Government welcomed both reports and are responding to them. All the schemes within the roads programme will be the subject of assessment under the new modelling techniques, which we have adapted in the light of the advice from SACTRA. The relevance of the SACTRA analysis will be considered case by case.

I reject the idea that the decision to review the scheme is "a victory for the green lobby". We mounted a strong and successful defence against the recent application to the High Court for judicial review to establish the fact that we were legally entitled to implement the scheme, which had completed all statutory procedures, and the court's decision fully vindicated our action. That is an important point of principle.

My hon. Friend mentioned a letter from the Highways Agency to Newbury district council planning department, and asked about the implications of reviewing the scheme for planning applications. Clearly, any planning application for development which depends on the provision of the bypass must be considered premature until the review is completed and my right hon. Friend makes a decision.

However, it is not helpful for me or the Highways Agency to speculate about alternative schemes—particularly not alternatives that might involve a mere tweaking of a route, which could lead to consequential and substantial delays—or to speculate about the time scale.

The scheme is on hold pending the outcome of the review. It has not been abandoned, and it should be understood that it is just as probable that the outcome will be that the western bypass scheme will proceed as that my right hon. Friend will prefer another option. I hope that that clarifies the position.

I hope that my hon. Friend and the hon Member for Newbury will conclude from my remarks that we are fully seized of the concerns of their constituents and others, and that we shall take forward the review process with all due speed and without undue delay.

Sir David Mitchell: The Minister said that all relevant factors will be considered. Will he assure me that "relevant factors" include the potential delay factor of changing the route?

Mr. Watts: Yes, because one of the major elements of assessing the cost benefit of all road schemes is the cost of traffic congestion, particularly its effects on business. A delay that adds to the date on which a scheme can be implemented is clearly an important part of that process.

So there will be no undue delay. We are not simply seeking ways of gaining time to no good effect. The reasons for my right hon. Friend's decision are as stated. There is no sinister motive or hidden agenda. He wants to ensure that, before we go ahead with a major scheme that will set the pattern of road traffic through and around Newbury for many years ahead, we have the right solution.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Wednesday 1 February 1995

The House met at Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Northern Ireland (Rules of Engagement)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

10.4 am

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the most important issue of the rules of engagement which govern those who serve us in Northern Ireland. One particular case has received a great deal of publicity, but the wider problem of the uncertainty in the minds of many of our soldiers serving in Northern Ireland has not received equal prominence.

I shall maintain four points today. First, we should never allow charges less than murder to be brought in a case of deliberate killing. Secondly, we should put on hold the present review of the law of murder in the Home Office until the Select Committee on Defence has had the opportunity to consider the wider issue of the rules of engagement, and until the House has had the chance to debate it. Thirdly, we should expedite cases involving members of the security forces who are charged while serving on active duty, so that they do not have two-year waits. Fourthly, I shall make some brief remarks on the Clegg case.

I hope that it is in order for me to draw on an illustration from the other side of the world. In 1947, six miles south of Haifa, a party of British soldiers were escorting a civilian convoy—a mixture of Jewish and Arab civilians—when they were stopped by a gun battle between Jewish and Arab gunmen up ahead. The young officer concerned went forward with a party of his soldiers to clear the path, when a civilian vehicle with armoured plating came racing down the road.

The officer told the soldiers to stop the vehicle. It was pulled aside and suddenly, a few seconds later, it pulled away and drove rapidly off. Faced with that extremely suspicious behaviour in the middle of a dangerous situation, the young officer, my father, who was aged 20, tried to open fire on the vehicle with a Piat anti-tank rocket launcher. Thank God it misfired, because when that vehicle was eventually stopped, it turned out to contain a large number of women and children huddling in the back.

I make that point only because the House must be clear that, in a situation of conflict of any sort, from time to time tragedies can and will occur, which can cause the most terrible bitterness in the wider community. That does not mean, however, that anyone is culpably to blame. Our forces in Ulster have behaved with a degree of restraint that is not only remarkable, but that we have come increasingly to take for granted in a fashion that may be becoming almost unhealthy. They operate within rules of engagement which are probably the strictest that any army anywhere in the world has ever operated under.

I have attempted to obtain the statistics for soldiers charged on active duty in Ulster—so far, without much success. The only statistics that I have been able to find came in an answer to a parliamentary question and relate to murder charges. I am not sure whether they are complete. In particular, they appear to exclude the Ulster Defence Regiment.

The material that is available, however, shows a sinister trend. In the 17 years from 1974 to 1990, only six charges of murder are recorded, involving four incidents, and in every case the soldiers concerned were acquitted; yet in the three and a three quarter years from 1991 to the ceasefire, four incidents took place. Five charges were brought in the same number of incidents in a much shorter period. Of those, one resulted in an acquittal, and two, involving Private Thain and Private Clegg, in convictions. The remaining incident involving two soldiers is still sub judice.

An extraordinary statistical freak may have taken place, or discipline is suddenly breaking down across a cross-section of four different regiments in the Army, which I do not believe, or we must face the possibility that the criminal justice system has changed and hardened its attitude towards offences allegedly committed by soldiers while on duty.

The figures also show that, in almost all those cases, the soldiers concerned, whether or not they were acquitted, waited for between 18 months and two years for a verdict. Those soldiers were in a different situation from members of the public awaiting their trials in custody, because they were there not just because there were charges against them, but because they had volunteered to serve in the British Army and had been sent to Ulster. Their families faced the prospect of their men being in custody for two years.

A much larger number of lesser charges have been brought against our soldiers. Anybody who has spoken to people who have served in Northern Ireland—I know that some hon. Members who wish to speak have served there—will know of the concern caused from time to time by the rules of engagement and the yellow card.

The Clegg incident was first raised with me by soldiers in my local regiment, 2nd Battalion, the Princess of Wales Regiment, when I was privileged to visit them in Ulster last year. Individuals told me again and again that they were deeply concerned that the case left them uncertain about where they stood.

The House will expect me to say something about the Clegg case. As a former Territorial Army officer and someone who was privileged to serve for a while in the Parachute Regiment, I have to say that there are aspects of the case that leave me deeply troubled. I know that I was not there, but it seems extraordinary that a junior rank should be charged with and convicted of perverting the course of justice, when an officer who was present at the time was not even disciplined.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby) *rose—*

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West) *rose—*

Mr. Brazier: I hope that my hon. Friends will forgive me if I press on and allow time for them to speak later.

Sir Jim Spicer: Will my hon. Friend give way on this point?

Mr. Brazier: I will give way.

Sir Jim Spicer: There is another disturbing aspect of the Clegg case. How can it be possible for a soldier who is to be charged with a serious offence to be on duty out on the street for a further six to nine months with that charge hanging over him and with no action being taken by the authorities? That is inexcusable.

Mr. Brazier: That is a good point.

Another aspect that deeply concerned many people is the disgusting montage erected in the barracks afterwards. It must have caused tremendous offence to Karen Reilly's family and to the wider community.

That said, those aspects are of limited relevance to the subject that we are discussing today and, in fact, are of limited relevance to the Clegg case. People may try to manufacture evidence not only because of guilt but also for a very different reason—because they have no confidence in the system of law. When I discussed this issue with people who have served recently in Northern Ireland, the message I heard again and again was that they are not sure where they stand.

If a man is seen throwing a bomb at a patrol and a soldier shoots him before the bomb leaves his hand, he is within the rules of engagement. If he is shot just after the bomb has left his hand, the person firing could be committing a serious criminal offence. If he is shot just before the object leaves his hand and it was not a bomb after all, the person firing the shot may be in serious trouble.

Another point is made time and again. Only three days ago, I had a conversation with an officer who had just come back from Northern Ireland. He had nothing to do with the Parachute Regiment, and was not even an infantry officer. He said that, as a result of cases such as this, soldiers are increasingly uncertain whether they can trust the yellow card.

The House knows most of the facts of the Clegg case. Cars have been used frequently as lethal weapons against our soldiers. They have sometimes been packed with explosives but, more commonly, they were simply used to deliberately run down and kill soldiers. In fact, a soldier in B company of 3 Para, Clegg's company, was killed in that way earlier in the same tour of duty, when a car scooped him up on to its bonnet. The car was driven for several hundred yards, and the soldier was then sadistically crushed to death.

It is against that background that the whole of an eight-man patrol, two groups of four, opened fire. Somehow, the court ruled that they were justified in opening fire, but that the man who fired the second lowest number of shots—only four—was doing his duty on the third shot and, within half a second, became a criminal with his fourth shot.

I shall quote from the late noble Lord Diplock, from a time when it was still possible to have jury trials in Northern Ireland:

"the jury . . . should remind themselves that the postulated balancing of risk against risk, harm against harm, by the reasonable man is not undertaken in the calm, analytical atmosphere of the court-room after counsel with the benefit of hindsight have expounded at length the reasons for and against the kind and degree of force that was used by the accused: but in the brief second or two which the accused had to decide whether to shoot or not and under all the stresses to which he was exposed."

Private Clegg did not have a second or two between his third and fourth shot: he had about half a second.

Far be it from me to abuse the privileges of the House and suggest that any judge in this country, in Northern Ireland or any other part of the United Kingdom, does not understand fully—I am sure that they all do—the letter and detail of our common and statute law. However, I believe firmly that, had this case been heard by a judge from Lord Diplock's generation, someone who remembered the war, we would never have had a verdict which so jarred the feelings of justice of the British people. I believe that that would have been the case whether it had been a murder or a manslaughter verdict.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I realise, probably more than most, the sensitivity of the matter under discussion. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he is leaving out an important factor, which is that the evidence was given by a police officer who was with that patrol? The evidence from that officer was clear, and totally substantiated the story that the hon. Gentleman has referred to as the concocting of evidence. I cannot for the life of me see why the sympathies of any police officer in the North of Ireland would be towards harming the soldier. Surely the police officer was giving objective evidence about a serious incident.

Mr. Brazier: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. I did mention the manufacture of evidence earlier, and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, another soldier was convicted and imprisoned for that. None of that alters the fact that a man was convicted of a serious criminal offence—it makes no difference whether it was manslaughter or murder—in the half-second interval between a third legitimate shot and a fourth shot, at a time when shots were ringing out everywhere and no one had any way of knowing whether they were all coming from one side.

I am pleased about the close interest that the Cabinet and the Government are taking, and I am pleased to see my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, and my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on the Front Bench. I notice that the Home Office is carrying out a review of the law on murder as a result of the recommendations by the judiciary. The change would allow manslaughter charges.

I mean no offence to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, for whom I have the greatest respect, when I say that it is slightly odd that, of the three Departments concerned—the Ministry of Defence, the Northern Ireland Office and the Home Office—the Department selected to lead on this inquiry is the only one of the three with no internal military advisers. Nevertheless, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary assures me that he will be taking advice direct from the Army as well as from his colleagues in the other two Departments, in whom I also have the greatest confidence.

Of all the things that I have seen in Parliament and that sadden me as a Member, perhaps the saddest instances have been those rare occasions when we have seen the House make a terrible and grievous mistake by legislating in a hurry to change a law, often as a result of some

well-publicised incident, in which the Front-Bench spokesmen have agreed on a policy which has been widely supported by the establishment outside but which the people on the ground know to be impractical. I believe that we have the chance to make such a mistake now.

If we were to accept the recommendations of successive judges, starting 15 years ago and most recently endorsed by the House of Lords, that we should allow charges less than murder—perhaps some new concept of military manslaughter—to be brought against soldiers in uniform when a deliberate killing has taken place, we would remove the discipline on the courts in which it has to be murder or nothing.

That would not help any soldier. Private Thain would not have come out a day earlier had he been convicted of manslaughter instead of murder, but, should the hostilities start again—we desperately hope that they will not—we should be opening the way for a string of borderline cases in which civilian judges would in effect be allowed to rule on whether they thought someone had been negligent.

Incidentally, the recommendation was made in a wider civilian context. I believe that also to be profoundly wrong, although there is no time to argue the point now.

Instead, we should be considering ways to bring the rules of engagement into the law. One option, suggested in an early-day motion supported by 118 colleagues, is to embody them directly in the law. If that is thought to be too inflexible and impractical, an alternative would be to allow an absolute defence in law—not a defence that would somehow downgrade a murder charge—that a soldier reasonably believed that he was operating within the rules of engagement laid down on the yellow card on the advice of the Government's Law Officers. I suggest that the best body to examine the matter would be the Select Committee on Defence which could take advice from all levels in the Army, as well as from other interested parties and various local bodies involved.

I have four recommendations. First, and perhaps most important, we must reject the idea of removing from our soldiers the protection of an "all or nothing" situation. It would be shameful if we were to change the law in this respect under legal pressure. Secondly, we should suspend the internal inquiry in the Home Office until the Select Committee on Defence, if it chooses to do so—which I understand is likely—has had the opportunity to investigate the matter and report to the House, and until the House has then debated the options in the wider context of the rules of engagement.

Thirdly, there is one thing that we could do immediately to reassure our armed forces should hostilities tragically recommence. We could at least ensure that soldiers charged with offences while on active service have their cases heard at an early date. The numbers involved are relatively small, but they should not spend two years in custody waiting for their cases to be heard.

Finally, Private Clegg should be released on licence—as Private Thain was—and allowed to rejoin his regiment. The Northern Ireland Office has the necessary power to arrange that. I believe that we owe these things to the service men and women who serve us so loyally in Northern Ireland.

10.22 am

Dr. Joe Hendron (Belfast, West): We are having this debate because of what happened on 13 September 1990. Hon. Members will know that, on that date, two young joyriders—Karen Reilly and Martin Peake—were shot dead by a patrol of the 3rd Parachute Regiment, which included Private Clegg. That same regiment had shot dead 13 unarmed people in Derry in 1972.

I wonder whether hon. Members, especially those on Conservative Benches who might have signed an early-day motion, know all the facts of the case. On 13 September 1990, and on every other night in west Belfast in that period, joyriders were out every night of the week, not only on the Upper Glen road but on Monagh road and Lenadoon avenue. Everybody in Belfast, and especially in west Belfast, and members of the security forces and police officers, were well aware of that fact. Joyriders are a plague; they can kill people and be killed themselves, but they do not deserve to be shot dead. They are not shot dead in England, Scotland or Wales.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Hendron: No, I must be brief.

Hon. Members may be aware that, in the 25 years since the troubles began in Northern Ireland, not once has a car used by joyriders been found to be associated with paramilitary activity. I cannot over-emphasise that point. I have made that statement many times, and never been challenged in any meaningful way. Not once in 25 years has a joyrider's car or the joyriders in it been found to be associated with paramilitary activity.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Hendron: We have been asked to keep our speeches brief.

Do hon. Members really know what happened on the night in question? My hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) mentioned the policeman who gave evidence, but another person—Mr. Brannigan from the Lower Falls road—also made a statement. He came to me within days of the killings. The fact that he came to see me rather than a representative of another political grouping showed that he had a certain credibility.

He said that he came up the Suffolk road and turned left into the Upper Glen road to take a short cut home, but realised that it was not a short cut at all and did a U-turn in the dark. Of course, his car lights were on. Members of the Parachute Regiment's patrol seemed to come out of the darkness, and they surrounded him. He was threatened and ordered not to drive on. He put the car to one side and got out, and was searched with his hands on the car.

As Mr. Brannigan stood there, he heard the joyriders' car in the distance approaching quickly, as joyriders' cars are wont to do. As it came nearer, soldiers of the patrol further up the road, whom he had not seen and of whose presence he had not been aware, started firing. As the car went past him, the soldiers standing beside him also started firing at the car; and as the car passed, more soldiers who were part of the same patrol—also people he had not seen—started firing, too. The car came to a halt.

[Dr. Hendron]

Mr. Brannigan said that he saw no checkpoint, but when is a checkpoint a checkpoint? Is it when a soldier or policeman steps out with a red light? I am not sure of the definition, but Mr. Brannigan did not see a checkpoint. I am not arguing that there was not a checkpoint further up the road in the darkness, but, if the patrol was so innocent, why did it try to subvert the course of justice? Why, according to the policeman's evidence, did one soldier try to hurt another soldier's leg? That is an important point. Hon. Members will be aware that Pierce Jordan was also shot dead on the Falls road while running away.

According to the law, any soldier who kills a civilian is exonerated if he testifies that he believed that his life or that of one of his comrades was in danger. We should remember that tens of thousands of soldiers have been in Belfast and Northern Ireland in the past 20 years and thousands of people have been killed, with many more thousands being injured. It is fair to say that millions of shots have been fired. Yet, of all those shots, it would appear that when only two of them were fired can it be said that the soldiers acted outside the law.

Sir Brian Hutton, the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, said that it was right that Private Clegg should be convicted in respect of the unlawful killing of Karen Reilly and should receive a just punishment. I accept that there is something wrong with the accusation of murder, and that perhaps a charge of culpable homicide or manslaughter should have been considered a long time ago.

Mr. Mallon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The difficulty is that we are trying to solve a legal matter by military means. We should remember the words of Lord Denning:

"Be you ever so high, the law is above you."

Over the years in Standing Committees, in the House and in debates on emergency legislation, I have proposed the introduction of lesser charges—not for the reasons outlined by the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), but so that the Director of Public Prosecutions and the legal process would have an opportunity to deal effectively with serious crime rather than the opportunity being wholly obviated by the single charge, especially as a result of the McIlhone decision made in the House of Lords in, I think, 1970. In effect, that decision makes it impossible for the whole gamut of the law to apply in these circumstances.

Madam Speaker: Order. This is a short debate, in which many hon. Members have a great deal of interest and a direct involvement. If we must have interventions, I hope that they will be very short. I need to call many hon. Members.

Dr. Hendron: The present campaign in Britain appears to want Private Clegg released whatever the evidence shows. If he is set free as a political gesture to that campaign, a new set of rules will have been established—one for soldiers and one for citizens in Northern Ireland. The conviction among many of my constituents that double standards apply in Northern Ireland will only be reinforced.

Let us look at the campaign. I shall quote directly from the *Daily Express*, which reported Private Lee Clegg's words on 20 January. Lee Clegg was supposed to have said:

"If I am released it would not be a victory. Two young people have been killed in a tragic situation which could have been avoided if I had been given the correct rules."

I give Private Lee Clegg credit for stating his regret. But he also said on radio one morning recently that he had been well briefed that morning. Perhaps the issue surrounds not only Private Clegg but that whole patrol of the Parachute Regiment out that night. What about the senior officer or officers who gave that briefing?

On television the other evening, a former lieutenant colonel of the Parachute Regiment was asked on the "Counterpoint" programme in Northern Ireland whether he would offer an apology on behalf of the Parachute Regiment to the family of Karen Reilly. His answer was "Never." I say to that and to other comments, especially in some of the papers such as the *Daily Mail*: let us not have the cheap rhetoric of pseudo-patriots. Let us not have cries that, in reality, seem to amount to "Rule Britannia": that no matter what our boys at the front do, it seems to be all right.

I was asked on a television programme in the past few days whether the people of my constituency were sympathetic to the family of Private Lee Clegg, considering that he was—possibly—facing many years in prison. I answered that they most certainly would be sympathetic to the family of anybody, soldier, policeman or anyone else, if their son were facing a long time in prison.

I also asked whether the people running the campaign, especially Conservative Members, would show sympathy for the families of Patrick Kane, Sean Kelly and Michael Fitzsimons, who seem to face many years in prison for a crime which I believe they did not commit. Would they show sympathy for Mrs. Sarah Conlon, the widow of Guiseppe Conlon, mother of Gerry Conlon of the Guildford Four? Hon. Members have seen, I am sure, the film "In the Name of the Father". Guiseppe Conlon, who was my patient and constituent, was allowed to die in prison. An apology has never been given to his widow, Mrs. Sarah Conlon, who still lives in west Belfast.

The people I represent would support generosity towards prisoners. I most certainly support generosity towards prisoners. I shall not be so arrogant as to say how long Private Lee Clegg should be in jail. However, many others should be there with him, or at least should be facing the due course of the law. When generosity is shown—I believe that it will be shown—let it be across the board and to both communities in the North of Ireland.

10.33 am

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate on behalf of Lee Clegg and his family, as his constituency Member of Parliament. Thousands of words have been written over the past few weeks about this tragic case, and I have received hundreds of letters urging me to do everything in my power to put right this injustice.

Lee Clegg did not set out to kill anyone as he went on his patrol on that dark night. He was a soldier trying to do his duty. He was faced with a split-second judgment: a car speeding towards his colleagues. He thought that the

occupants were terrorists. He fired, and we are asked to believe that the first three bullets were lawful, but that the fourth shot, fired in that same burst, was not. That fraction of a second has resulted in Lee Clegg being convicted of murder and serving a life sentence.

I do not believe that, had there been a jury, it would have found Lee Clegg guilty in those circumstances. Perhaps his case is a perfect and clear example of why we need to get rid of Diplock courts as soon as possible and return such judgments to ordinary men and women, who can bring common sense and a sense of decency to bear. Only in that environment can normality and trust develop to bring about peace and sustained development.

I understand and acknowledge the frustration felt by people in Northern Ireland, who believe that far more media coverage has been given to a British soldier accused of murder than to Irish people faced with injustice. Whoever is at fault in the press campaign, it is not Private Lee Clegg. I say to the fair-minded people of Northern Ireland that it is wrong to want an innocent man to stay in prison just because he is a British soldier.

Injustice must be fought wherever it occurs, and I hope that all cases that have been mentioned in the context of Clegg's case are examined again. The Government have a tremendous opportunity to investigate all cases of injustice in Ireland and on the mainland, to convince people of their continuing vigour to pursue a just and lasting peace settlement.

There are many questions relating to this case that cause Clegg's legal advisers and me considerable concern. The initial investigation by the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Army found no case to answer. A television programme later implied wrongdoing and promoted the existence of a shoot-to-kill policy, citing this case as an example. It is interesting to note that the producer of that programme now says that he has an open mind on Lee Clegg's guilt. That was not the case in the programme.

The quality of Clegg's legal advice is also in question. I find it staggering to hear that there was no detailed questioning and examination of the ballistics evidence. We have heard this morning about the 34 shots fired. There was also the question of who had been involved in the briefing that night. If the security forces knew that the car was driven by joyriders, why were the ordinary soldiers on the patrol not told, as Clegg maintained? Why did not the defence at Clegg's trial pursue that point?

It is clear that, at the time of Private Clegg's conviction, there was a rising tide of belief in the nationalist community that the security forces were out of control. I cannot help but feel that Clegg's murder charge had more to do with politics than justice. I have a suspicion that it was decided to make an example out of someone, and Lee Clegg happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. If there was a problem with the security forces—I am in no position to judge either way—it was not that of an ordinary private soldier trying to do his duty in a difficult and dangerous situation.

Lee Clegg's legal advisers are collecting new evidence for presentation in the very near future. Lee Clegg does not want to be seen as a hero, but nor is he a murderer. The Law Lords in their judgment indicated the need for change in the law, and it is right for Parliament to consider such changes as required, in detail and not in haste. Never again should security forces face such a dilemma. Regulation of the security forces is definitely required, but it must be fair, and it must be just.

The attempt to discredit Clegg should also be resisted. The courts found that he had no part in the perjury of the feigned injuries. He was also not connected with the infantile and insensitive actions of other companies in the Parachute Regiment.

Every day that Lee Clegg spends in jail is an indictment of British justice. I am pleased that the Ministry of Defence has agreed to pay for fresh examination of the ballistics evidence. Lee Clegg and his family have suffered enough. I hope that the Minister who has the jurisdiction will release Private Clegg as soon as possible. That, I believe, is the will of the overwhelming number of people in Britain.

I must also say, thank God we do not have capital punishment. Otherwise, we may have been arguing about somebody who could have been hanged. Conservative Members especially should note that, many of whom vote in favour of capital punishment. Clegg could have been an innocent victim. I hope that Ministers will look at the case and will release Clegg as soon as possible.

10.38 am

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) for raising this important subject so well. I think that, across the House, there is general agreement on many points. I certainly agree with the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) that no injustice should be allowed to go unchallenged, which includes many of the people mentioned by the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron). People have been unjustly treated by Diplock courts, but each case must be judged on its merits.

The hon. Member for Belfast, West asked many questions which I shall try to answer. I spent the best part of a year of my life as a British soldier in his constituency, and I have a certain affection for parts of it. I speak with a little knowledge of the subject. During that time, I operated under the rules of engagement—the so-called yellow card. The rules are very tight and clear. I always believed that they were legally binding, and that is extremely important.

For the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with the so-called yellow card, I will quote from a white photocopy of it:

"In all situations, you are to use the minimum force necessary. FIREARMS MUST ONLY BE USED AS A LAST RESORT."

A soldier is meant to challenge, if at all possible:

"'ARMY; STOP OR I FIRE'".

I suggest that that is difficult in the middle of a gunfight.

Paragraph 5 states:

"You may only open fire against a person:

if he* is committing, or about to commit an act LIKELY TO ENDANGER LIFE".

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I understand that the yellow card is a classified document.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Apparently it is all right to quote from a classified document, so the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) is in order to do that. I learn something all the time.

Mr. Robathan: The document is indeed classified and restricted. I am afraid to say that I have one somewhere in my bottom drawer from my first tour in 1976.

[Mr. Robathan]

The card states:

"if he* is committing, or about to commit an act LIKELY TO ENDANGER LIFE, AND THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO PREVENT THE DANGER."

The asterisk informs the reader:

"*'She' can be read instead of 'he' if applicable."

I hope that that is not political correctness creeping into the military.

It is essential to have clearly understood rules, and soldiers are trained in respect of those rules. They are asked questions about the yellow card during their training. The yellow card also states that a soldier may "fire only aimed shots" and

"no more rounds than are necessary".

The hon. Member for Bradford, South referred to a shoot-to-kill policy. In the light of the yellow card, the idea of such a policy is ridiculous. When we talk about shooting, people expect the best trained marksmen to hit someone in the leg. We always hear people asking, "Why didn't they shoot him in the legs?"

I spent a lot of time shooting and I was damned lucky to hit the target. That is the case with nearly all soldiers, especially at 100 m in the dark. One is very lucky to hit the target in such circumstances, let alone inflict a neat flesh wound in someone's calf. People who talk about a shoot-to-kill policy and want to know why soldiers do not shoot at people's legs show a remarkable naivety and lack of understanding.

The rules of engagement state:

"FIREARMS MUST ONLY BE USED AS A LAST RESORT."

It is essential to understand that.

It is important to understand why soldiers are in Northern Ireland. They were sent there in 1969 to protect the nationalist population. Wiser and greyer heads on the Opposition Benches might remember these things better than me. They were sent to keep both communities apart. Their mission is, and remains, to support the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the defeat of terrorism. Every soldier knows that. Ask any soldier on the streets of Northern Ireland and he will confirm that. Incidentally, I am glad to see that soldiers are not allowed out in daylight these days, not because they are so ugly, but for other reasons.

As soldiers are aware of their mission, and as they walk around day in, day out—night in, night out, as it now is—for six months, they remember that they are supporting the RUC in the defeat of terrorism. Most soldiers are unlikely to see a terrorist. Most soldiers are issued with 30 rounds at the beginning of their tour, and they return the same 30 rounds at the end of their tour, which are carefully checked back in by the quartermaster.

The hon. Member for Belfast, West referred to millions of rounds being fired. That is simply not true. I was shot at, but I never fired a round. About 300 people have been killed by the security forces, but that must be balanced against the 2,800 or 3,000 who have been killed by terrorist action.

The problem about firing is that soldiers are sent to Northern Ireland to react. They can only react. They do not go out shooting. They can only react to an incident as they see it. I am delighted to say that there is currently a ceasefire, which I hope will continue. However, we do not send soldiers to Northern Ireland as targets. They must react when it comes to it. They must protect and support the RUC, but they are no good in Northern Ireland if they will not react when a terrorist appears, perhaps on the one occasion in six months of their tour.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury said, the difficulty is that soldiers are so concerned about the rules of engagement that they will not fire. It is very difficult to make them use their weapons. If that is the case, they should not be there. While we would all agree that it would be preferable if they were not there, they must be able to fire when the need arises.

To be honest, people are restrained, and I believe that that balance is about right. This debate is about keeping that balance right.

I have two examples, one of which took place in the constituency of the hon. Member for Belfast, West. In January 1976, a stolen car on the west circular road in Ballygomartin or Springmartin stopped beside two Protestants who were walking down the road and fired upon them. That car was stolen. The hon. Member for Belfast, West said that no joyrider has ever set out to kill soldiers. Well, one cannot ask everyone who steals a car whether that person is a joyrider.

Dr. Hendron: I referred to a joyrider's car travelling at speed. I was not talking about a stolen car. There are hundreds of stolen cars in Belfast. A joyrider's car travelling at speed has never been associated, or found to be associated, with paramilitary activity.

Mr. Robathan: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that it is very difficult to determine whether a joyrider is a terrorist.

With regard to the west circular road in January 1976, two people were murdering Protestants. None of us would welcome that. A patrol emerged from the bushes and saw what happened. It was able to fire at the car—we can all agree, quite rightly—and it killed the driver.

"And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee."

I regret that man's death as I regret every death, but it must be right that the patrol reacted to someone committing murder. That involved the tragic death of Jim McGrillen. The car sped away.

Let us suppose that the soldiers emerged five seconds later and saw the car speeding away. Let us suppose that one of the soldiers said, "Get it, get it!" and the patrol opened fire. That is the difficulty with which soldiers are confronted.

Mr. Mallon: The soldiers knew that they were armed.

Mr. Robathan: Yes, but if the patrol had arrived five seconds later, the soldiers would not have known that those people were armed. Soldiers must obviously have the right to fire, and they must be well constrained. However, we must consider the confusion that may exist on the ground in darkness.

My second example relates to an incident in early 1989, when New Barnsley police station came under heavy fire—millions of rounds, to quote the hon. Member for Belfast, West—from somewhere in Springfield avenue. A patrol of soldiers rushed out, came under fire, went behind a house and looked down Springfield avenue. The soldiers saw two men running away with what they thought was a rifle. The soldiers fired and hit a man. Sadly, the

ammunition was not much good, and the man got up—leaving, I am glad to say, the rifle behind. He got away without being charged.

We would all say that it was absolutely right for the soldiers to fire. They fired about 10 rounds, but hit the man only twice. It was dark, and the soldiers were perhaps fearful. There was confusion. One of the soldiers believed that the terrorist had got into a stationary car, and he shot at it. That is the kind of confusion that can occur. Luckily, no harm was done. We must understand the difficulties on the ground. The difficulties lie in applying the terms of the yellow card in the heat of the moment.

Our soldiers are public servants. They are sent by us to work out the rules of engagement. They are given lethal weapons, and they are sent to do our bidding.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the hon. Gentleman's clarification of the soldier's position, and I share his argument. However, he referred earlier to Diplock courts and mistakes. As I objected to those courts at the very beginning, does he accept from me that, even in Great Britain, where there are juries, there have been mistakes in judgments, which have sometimes brought wrong convictions and which have sometimes released guilty people? It is not necessarily that Diplock courts are so wrong, it is a matter of the human influence.

Mr. Robathan: I entirely accept what the hon. Gentleman says. Any miscarriage of justice, be it in a jury trial or with a judge sitting without a jury, must be deprecated.

As I was saying, our soldiers are public servants and they have excellent training, but accountants, lawyers—I believe that there are some in the Chamber—and doctors have three, four, five or six years' training, and they occasionally make mistakes. It is nonsense to say that a soldier is so professional that he cannot make a mistake. I heard that mentioned recently. The difference between a soldier and an accountant is that, generally, accountants do not kill people when they make mistakes, although of course doctors might.

Our soldiers are public servants, and they are trying to do their best. They are not perfect—they get bored and they sometimes indulge in appalling practices, as was mentioned in respect of the montage of the car in the barracks. Occasionally, they have been involved in criminal activity in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. Certainly, in Northern Ireland, there have been well-documented cases of appalling activity and murder, for which people deserve to be found guilty of murder. Such cases are very exceptional.

The case of Private Clegg also involved some disgraceful behaviour, as my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury and others have mentioned. It involved one man being convicted of conspiring to pervert the course of justice. It involved a terrible lack of discipline. As a former officer, I think that an officer on that patrol was very lucky to get away without being punished. As I understand the facts, I would have wished him to be punished.

Obviously, wrong was done, but, in the Clegg case, there were two car thieves—that is a better term than "joyriders"—who refused to stop. Yes, there were joyriders there the whole time, but there were also patrols with red torches there the whole time who tried to stop people. They hardly deserved to die. I agree that it was not a fitting punishment for being in a stolen car. It transpires, according to the *Daily Mail*, that Karen Reilly's father was the same man, McGrillen, who was killed in January 1976. That is a double tragedy to be visited on that family, and they should have nothing but sympathy. It is yet more pain and more tragedy.

In that case, the yellow card was not followed. The Law Lords' judgment has great sense in it—I do not criticise it—but it was dark and there was confusion. Who can say that Clegg did not believe in good faith that he was following rule 5a(3), which states that one may fire if someone is

"deliberately driving a vehicle at a person and there is no other way of stopping him."

That rule may now be dropped from the yellow card because of the Clegg case.

Is young Clegg a murderer? Wrong was done, but is he in the same league as sectarian murderers? Is he in the same league as Mr. Kelly, who blew up the chip shop on the Shankill road? Is he in the same league as those who steal cars to kill? I suggest not. I very much hope that he will be freed as soon as possible.

Even Sinn Fein, even many members of the nationalist community in west Belfast, and even the hon. Member for Belfast, West will not say, even in moral outrage, that Clegg is in the same league. They will not seriously compare him with those terrorists. Our soldiers are servants of the public. They deserve our support, sympathy and understanding when errors are made, but that does not mean that they need excuses.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury, I believe that the Select Committee should examine the matter. Members of that Committee may interview lawyers and, as legislators, decide on the best way to safeguard public servants who, in good faith, go about their duties. Private Clegg has been punished enough for any errors that he and others may have made on that night.

10.52 am

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I raised my point of order to clarify the situation with regard to the yellow card. It is classified. The reason for its being classified is not to let the enemy know when our soldiers are going to open fire. From now on, thanks to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), all they have to do is to read *Hansard*. I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman would take the hint when I mentioned that the yellow card was classified.

I recently returned from a visit to my county regiment at Derry. I came back with nothing but admiration, not only for my own regiment but for our forces throughout Northern Ireland, especially those who have served for the past 25 years, patrolling the trouble spots of the Province and carrying out their duties with tremendous professionalism and dedication under enormous strain.

One must remember that, until the recent ceasefire, every member of the security forces was considered by IRA terrorists a target for assassination, whether on duty or not. That is the pressure that our soldiers lived with 24 hours a day, year after year. In many ways, it has been a forgotten war. As long as we managed to keep the lid on it and to contain it, we were quite happy for them to bear the brunt of the problem.

I have recently read and heard criticism that 300 people have been killed by the security forces, and that only two of the latter have been convicted of murder. That is a

[Mr. Eric Martlew]

sign that people think that there has been a cover-up. It is nonsense. The reality is that 648 members of the security forces have been killed by terrorists. I am convinced that no other security force anywhere in the world would have been as tolerant as the British forces in dealing with such problems in Northern Ireland. Overall, the British security forces in Northern Ireland have a record of which they and we can be proud.

I now refer to the recent debate and controversy following the Law Lords' decision to turn down Private Clegg's appeal against his conviction for murder. We almost seem to have lost sight of the tragic loss of two young lives and the grief that must be felt by their families and their communities. Our condolences and sympathy should be expressed to the bereaved. We should have heard more about that from Conservative Members.

I am concerned also that the media and Parliament have not been objective. The hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) made that point. Five early-day motions refer to the case. I have sympathy with some, but the others are totally unacceptable.

I take this opportunity to compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) on the way in which he has represented his constituent Private Clegg and his parents. He has pursued the case vigorously, but he has not exaggerated the injustice that has been caused. As we have heard, he has acted most responsibly.

Early-day motion 422, which is about Private Clegg and the rules of engagement, is totally unacceptable. It appears to say that there are no occasions when, on killing someone, security forces can be brought before the courts, and that there should be no public accountability for the security forces. The Army does not want that, and I am sure that the people of this country do not want that.

That early-day motion also states that the rules of engagement should be enshrined in the criminal law. As I have already pointed out, that information is classified, and for good reason. It is nonsense that the rules should be enshrined within the criminal law.

Mr. Brazier: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Martlew: The hon. Gentleman spoke for 20 minutes. I have been told to keep my speech short.

As for further action in Private Clegg's case, there are three possibilities. First, if there is new evidence that has not been before the court, it should be brought before the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to decide whether there is sufficient ground to resubmit his case to the Court of Appeal. Secondly, in future, the Secretary of State, who has jurisdiction, could release Private Clegg on licence. I am sure that that option will be considered. Thirdly, there could be a change in the law.

We support the Home Secretary's decision to review the existing law. Of course, a change in the law would not have a direct bearing on Private Clegg's case, but it would obviously be a major factor in a ministerial decision on early release. There is a strong case for a review, as, in the heat of the moment, it is impossible to determine the amount of force to be used.

It would be sensible to allow judges to be able to bring in lesser verdicts—for example, manslaughter—rather than the verdict of murder. Senior officers in Northern Ireland have always resisted that possibility, but their intransigence has contributed to the verdict of murder, which carries a mandatory life sentence, being passed on Private Clegg. There is no flexibility. If there had been flexibility, I am sure that there would have been a fairer sentence in the case.

I am unhappy that senior Ministers—I refer to the Secretary of State for Defence—appear to have been allowing people to issue briefs on their behalf saying that they are in favour of the immediate release of Private Clegg. While politicians have the right to reflect public opinion, it is dangerous for Ministers to appear to be interfering with the responsibilities of judges.

The Opposition totally support the Home Secretary's decision to review the law regarding sentences. I hope that the high-profile campaign of the case is not counter-productive, although I have a feeling that it may be. The campaign may delay the decision of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to exercise leniency. I hope that it will not have any affect.

I remind the House of something that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South mentioned. If it had not been for Opposition Members—plus some Conservative Members—when we discussed the return of capital punishment in 1990, Private Clegg could have been sentenced to death. I make an exception of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who has a very good record of opposing the death sentence. The same cannot be said of the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), who is a strong believer in the death penalty. He should reflect that his actions in 1990 could well have had a serious bearing on the case of Private Clegg.

11.1 am

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I congratulate the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) on obtaining this debate. I echo the praise which has been given to the Army and its record in Northern Ireland. I believe that its record as a whole is without reproach, and it is deeply appreciated by my right hon. and hon. Friends who represent constituencies in Northern Ireland, and by most people in Northern Ireland.

I also sympathise with Private Clegg in the dilemma he was in, and also in the situation in which he now finds himself. I quite understand that there are feelings that an injustice has been done in this case. It is not, I regret to say, the only injustice. Hon. Members will appreciate that I am keenly aware of what I regard as a much greater injustice done to a man who has now spent nearly 10 years in prison for a murder that he did not commit. The man is a serving member of the British Army and the Ulster Defence Regiment—I refer, of course, to Neil Latimer. I shall not discuss that subject, in view of the time available today.

I agree with one point which the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) made. It was admitted in, and agreed by, the court that the initial shots fired by the soldier were lawful. The soldier, with his instincts and reactions, fired three shots which were lawful and then, a split second later—we do not know the exact time—fired a fourth shot which, in a cold courtroom, was dissected and was said to be unlawful. As the hon. Member said, that is an unrealistic approach.

I appreciate that there are great difficulties in saying that a series of events which have been entered into lawfully should continue to be lawful even when the last

elements of that series have been separated and, when regarded in isolation, appear to be unlawful. Obviously, there could be considerable difficulty in drawing lines in this area, but perhaps too fine a judgment of the facts was exercised by the court.

I am not sure that the other factors mentioned by the hon. Member for Bradford, South on the ballistic evidence were right. I would ask the hon. Member, and other hon. Members, to please read the judgment. This was not a jury case, but a Diplock case in which the judge had to issue a considered judgment. The judgment of Mr. Justice Campbell is in the Library, as is the decision of the Court of Appeal. Hon. Members who read the judgment may begin to appreciate some of the difficulties not only of the patrol but of the court in dealing with the situation.

I shall now deal with more general issues. Hon. Members have referred to the yellow card, or the rules of engagement. We are in danger of getting ourselves into an extremely difficult and untenable situation if we go down the line suggested by the hon. Member for Canterbury. The yellow card, which is probably getting too precise and detailed, is an attempt to state the law. In so far as it states the law, it is more restrictive than the law.

The law enshrined in the yellow card is the same here as it is in Northern Ireland. Hon. Members will remember that we are dealing with a matter in which the law in Northern Ireland is exactly the same as the law in England and Wales. The use of firearms by policemen and soldiers can occur in England and Wales, as it does in Northern Ireland. If changes are made to the law in Northern Ireland, there would be an irresistible case for making the same changes in England and Wales, and that should be borne in mind.

The law enshrined in section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1977 is identical in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland, and it goes wider than the yellow card. There are circumstances in which a soldier can open fire in breach of the yellow card and be within the law as stated in section 3 of the Criminal Law Act. The hon. Member for Canterbury said that a soldier acting in the reasonable belief that he was within the terms of the yellow card could use that as a defence. However, a soldier acting with an honest belief that he was in circumstances outlined within section 3 of the Act could also use that as a defence. That is the law as it is at the moment, and there is no need to make a change in that respect.

The problem facing Private Clegg is that—on the facts presented to the court—he was within the terms of neither the yellow card nor section 3. The hon. Member for Bradford, South said that Private Clegg believed that the car contained a terrorist. I do not know whether he believed that or not, but, had that been his defence, it is possible that he could have been acting within the terms of section 3 if he had an honest belief, and there were reasonable grounds to support that belief. That is a different view of the matter.

Remedies to the situation have been suggested, including the introduction of a new offence of manslaughter. I think that that is entirely wrong, and it would bring about a worse situation. That cure would be worse than the disease. At present, if a person has committed murder, murder is the appropriate charge. To introduce a lesser offence would have the effect only of saying that persons who, at present, are entitled to be acquitted of murder could be convicted of the lesser offence. The sole consequence of introducing a lesser offence would be that more soldiers would be in prison, and those soldiers—under the law at present—would be innocent.

The measure would simply be a means by which certain members of the community would pursue a desire for revenge, rather than justice. That is an important aspect of the case. If the actions of a soldier or a policeman fall within the law of murder as it is presently defined, murder is the right charge. If a court finds such people guilty, that is the just result. If their actions are not within the law of murder as it is presently defined, they are entitled to be acquitted. That should continue to be the case.

There is a dilemma in the present situation. A person who is not a terrorist has been convicted of murder, but he did not go out intending to commit murder. That person made a mistake in circumstances where fine judgments were called for and in which it was extremely difficult for an individual to make a snap decision. Consequently, there were extenuating circumstances. In the normal course of events, those facts ought to be taken into account in sentencing, but there is no discretion in sentencing. The Secretary of State and the Home Secretary have discretion, as was exercised properly in the case of Private Thain; but when that discretion has been exercised by the Secretary of State, politically motivated people make accusations that the laws have been bent.

A solution may be to return to the discussions of the House of Lords Select Committee on murder several years ago, where the Committee suggested that we drop the mandatory sentence for murder and replace it with a discretion for the judge to make determinate sentences where appropriate. If that had occurred in the case of Private Clegg, it is likely that the judge would have reflected the extenuating circumstances and the difficulties of the case in his sentence. The normal procedures for remission and early release could then follow their course without accusations of political interference in the course of justice. That is the option at which we should look again.

I hope that the Home Secretary's review of the law of murder will not go down the foolish road of introducing a new offence simply to have more soldiers and policemen behind bars.

11.9 am

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): I am aware that I have limited time, and I want my hon. Friend the Minister to have as much time as possible to respond to the debate, so I shall skim quickly through my notes. I am grateful to see my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on the Front Bench, because I have a great regard for him in this matter and hope that he can respond fully to what has been said.

If we make a special charge of manslaughter, soldiers serving in Northern Ireland may be increasingly drawn into spates of prosecutions where they are brought before the courts for many marginal issues with regard to the use of their personal weapons. We would then be placed in a position where we were seriously questioning the purpose of their existence on the streets. They are not police, but soldiers. They are not as highly trained as police in police responsibilities. They are armed and trained for combat, and no matter how much secondary training takes place, they will never be police. There is, therefore, always that

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compromise. They are there because the situation is imperfect—people have chosen to use violence against civilians and police—and it would be far better if we had thousands of police able to act as our soldiers do now; but we do not, so we compromise.

The key point arises from the Law Lords' report, which said:

"He did not kill Karen Reilly from an evil motive but because his duties as a soldier had placed him on the Glen road armed with a high velocity rifle".

We must be careful not to proceed down a road whereby we deny the very purpose of soldiers being there, for there can be no purpose if they hesitate every time they need to use their personal weapon.

I shall not go through the changes to the rules of engagement discussed by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier). I agree with what he said. I disagree with what the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), said about that business being confidential and restricted. It is not. The key fact is that yellow cards are meant to reflect the criminal law and the confidentiality of those items is not really at stake. Somehow, soldiers must feel confident that they are acting under the law and that what they are doing is justiciable.

In the case of Private Clegg, the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) said that those were joyriders like joyriders anywhere in the United Kingdom. He said that, particularly in Northern Ireland, joyriders steal cars night after night, act recklessly and endanger other people's lives, but they are not terrorists and are not shot dead elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman missed one major factor. In Northern Ireland on the night of that incident, going through the mind of every soldier was the fact that he was there because terrorists were on the street. It was likely and possible that terrorists could have been in that car. It is no defence to say that the joyriders were not terrorists, because the soldiers were not to know that. That is an important fact and the Law Lords said that the soldiers were not even told at the time that they were specifically out stopping joyriders.

Dr. Hendron: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Duncan Smith: No, I do not have time to give way.

The point is simply that they were special circumstances, and we must not lose sight of that fact. We cannot simply say that justice has been done, for justice, as always, must be seen to be done. But justice can be the day in court, and the decision is not necessarily justice. Private Clegg's release is simply about right being done. The public and anybody who cares about the matter will see that his case is about right being done.

We need to reassure soldiers because we ask much, and much is given. We have the finest trained soldiers and, as the hon. Member for Carlisle said, they behave with the greatest restraint on the streets of Northern Ireland. I know of no other armed force that would act as they have, yet they do make mistakes and we need to show tolerance and lenience and make them understand that we shall support them.

We need to reassure soldiers as they so often feel that they have been misunderstood and will not be protected by the very powers that put them there. Some lines from Kipling are apposite in those circumstances:

"For it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' 'Chuck him out, the brute!';
But it's 'Saviour of 'is country' when the guns begin to shoot;
An' it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' anything you please;
An' Tommy ain't a bloomin' fool—you bet that Tommy sees!"

11.14 am

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): That was a powerful speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith), who spoke with a good deal of highly relevant experience, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) and others who have taken part in this important debate, particularly the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe). I note what he said about his constituent and I know that he is pursuing the case vigorously.

For good reasons, I do not have as much time as I should like to reply to all the points that have been made. This matter deserves careful analysis. The role of the armed forces in Northern Ireland is well known to everyone here this morning and was well set out by my hon. Friends the Members for Blaby and for Canterbury. I speak on behalf of the whole House, and of informed and decent opinion throughout the nation, when I express my profound admiration and gratitude for the exceptional professionalism, dedication and courage of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the armed forces in the conduct of their duties over the past 25 years.

Over that period, apart from horrific civilian casualties, more than 640 soldiers have been killed and more than 5,500 have been wounded. As my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford rightly said, our soldiers have combated the terrorists in a way that no other army anywhere in the world could have done. They have combated them within the rule of law of a democratic society, with huge and almost unbelievable restraint, great discipline and enormous courage. We should be, and are, extremely proud of them.

It is right that, whenever the security forces cause death or serious injury by the use of armed force in Northern Ireland, knowing that they must comply with the law, they be investigated fully and impartially—none of us disagrees on that—and it is right that, where there appears to be a case to answer under the law, it is reported to the independent Director of Public Prosecutions to determine whether the matter should be put before the courts and the courts should deal with the legal issues before them.

It is also important to keep constantly in mind the fact that it has been a cardinal principle of successive Administrations of all political persuasions that the security forces should act within the criminal law and within such additional anti-terrorist powers as are enacted by Parliament after the most careful and detailed consideration.

This Government—and all previous Administrations in the past 25 years—have recognised the need to ensure that our soldiers are given the best training and guidance on the conduct of operations in Northern Ireland in these

difficult circumstances, and I shall say a few words about how the Ministry of Defence prepares soldiers for tours of duty there.

Soldiers receive extensive training before they are deployed to prepare them for the unique circumstances in which they will find themselves. I note the point mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury about his visit to the Princess of Wales Regiment. In those difficult circumstances, we shall always find people who find that they are not adequately prepared, but we are satisfied that the degree of training, guidance, advice and leadership—

Mr. Brazier: I apologise to my hon. Friend, but I must intervene for a moment on that matter. The battalion made no complaint about preparation. It was excellently prepared and had done an excellent job with no complaints from the public. The point that was made to me by people in the battalion and in many other regiments was that there is still uncertainty about whether the yellow card covers the law. The Clegg case has accentuated that uncertainty. I am sorry to have had to intervene in my hon. Friend's speech.

Mr. Soames: I am glad that my hon. Friend is sorry.

Training includes, for example, testing the soldiers' understanding of the law in a range of realistic scenarios. All possible measures are therefore taken to ensure that soldiers are fully aware of their role in Northern Ireland and of the rule of law. My hon. Friends the Members for Chingford and for Blaby will acknowledge that that is the case. The matter is dealt with extremely thoroughly. The rules governing the conduct of operations, including the use of lethal force—the rules of engagement—are summarised in the yellow card, which is issued to soldiers in Northern Ireland and gives guidance on the rules of opening fire.

It is important to understand and to put into context the nature of the guidance in the yellow card. It is impressed upon all service men deploying to Northern Ireland that in all situations which they may face there they are to use the minimum of force, and that firearms must be used only as a last resort. On those points, there is no uncertainty.

The purpose of the yellow card is to provide soldiers with an easily carried document which summarises the detailed guidance on the law of the United Kingdom with which they have been provided in training. The purpose of the guidance is to enable a soldier to understand the law and to minimise the risk that a soldier might open fire unlawfully. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby explained in graphic detail the huge real difficulties which soldiers face every day in that regard. We keep a constant eye on the scope for improving the guidance which is provided. However, as a form of guidance the yellow card has no legal status and, of course, cannot create independent legal rights.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury described the Army as being in a state of uncertainty about the law which has been exacerbated by the Clegg case. I am afraid that I cannot agree with that description. The Army as a whole is quite clear about the nature of criminal law that applies in Northern Ireland, but it is right to acknowledge the difficult split-second judgments which are required of all those—whether members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary or of the Army—who have to operate within the law in countering terrorism in Northern Ireland.

I know that it is not an easy or a pleasant task to be on the streets or in the deceptively beautiful countryside of Northern Ireland knowing that at any moment one—or others whom it is one's duty to protect—may be the subject of a premeditated, murderous and cowardly attack and knowing also that one may use only reasonable force if one is to stay within the law.

As my hon. Friends know, the reality is that there is no simple solution to those difficulties. For that reason, members of the security forces are given the most detailed and profound training and guidance based on 25 years of hard-won, bitter and painful experience of countering terrorism. For 25 years, the House and all decent public opinion have maintained as a matter of principle the need for the security forces in Northern Ireland to act within the law and to suffer the relevant legal consequences if they digress. That guidance and training incorporate the lessons learned over 25 years; but, given the circumstances in which the security forces in Northern Ireland are required to operate, those factors can never resolve all the dilemmas to which I have referred.

I now turn to the concerns about the wording of the yellow card expressed by the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland when he gave his judgment last year on Private Clegg's appeal against conviction for murder. He recommended that the card be amended

"to make it clear that the mere fact that actual injury has been caused by a car does not justify a soldier in opening fire".

In giving its judgment on appeal, the House of Lords made it plain that

"a minor injury caused by a car"

does not in itself justify a soldier opening fire.

When the current yellow card was drafted, it was not intended or judged likely that it would be open to the interpretation that use of lethal force could be justified simply because an injury, particularly a minor injury, had been caused. The guidance and training which I described earlier have always sought to ensure that there is no doubt about the detailed application of the law.

As I have said, an injury has never been considered to be sufficient justification on its own for opening fire. Nevertheless, we reacted immediately to the Lord Chief Justice's comments by issuing further written guidance to make that even more explicit.

The House may find it helpful also to note that, in giving evidence at his trial, Private Clegg claimed that he had opened fire because he believed that a colleague's life was endangered. The yellow card makes it clear that opening fire may be justified in those circumstances if there is no other way to prevent the danger; but the court did not accept that the fourth shot fired by Private Clegg was justified.

A number of hon. Members and others have suggested that—my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury has been very good at keeping me in touch with his evolving views on the matter—the Clegg case demonstrates that the present law is inappropriate to circumstances such as those that resulted in Private Clegg's trial and conviction for murder. It has also been suggested, as my hon. Friend did today, that the yellow card should be given legal status so that compliance with its terms would provide immunity against criminal charges.

While recognising the very genuine concerns behind those requests, we believe that it is important to the credibility of the actions of the security forces in Northern

[Mr. Soames]

Ireland that, except where there is a clear need to give them additional powers, they are seen to be operating within exactly the same laws as those applying to any other citizen. Of course, there is a respectable opinion that the situation which they face in carrying out their specific duty to maintain law and order should be recognised in the construction and application of the criminal law; equally, there are many who would think it wrong in principle to accord them exceptional status of that kind.

Of course, those issues require the most difficult judgments. In response to the renewed debate on the issues which Private Clegg's conviction has generated, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced that he has initiated a review that will examine the law governing the use of lethal force in the maintenance of law and order. I am happy to reassure my hon. Friend, who has raised the question of service and Ministry of Defence involvement, that we shall be involved very closely in the review.

The review will consider the position of both policemen and soldiers. It would be quite wrong to decide in advance of the review that there can be no case for considering whether the creation of a lesser offence than murder might apply to those who use lethal force in the course of carrying out their duty to maintain law and order. The concept that the yellow card should be given legal status will also be addressed during the review which my right hon. and learned Friend has set in train.

I am quite sure that the correct course is to proceed with that review and I cannot agree with the suggestion that it be postponed to permit the Defence Committee to carry out its own inquiries first, although views will be expressed to the Committee in the usual manner.

I ask hon. Members on both sides of the House to await the review's conclusions, which my right hon. and learned Friend has undertaken to announce in due course. I know that he will take note of the strong views expressed in today's debate about the need for a reform of the law and the form which such changes might take.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury also raised the difficult question of expediting court hearings and I sympathise with his motivation in raising that point. No one would wish there to be extensive delay—with all the attendant anxiety that that can cause—before such difficult cases come to court.

I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be taking note of the views that have been expressed today. He is aware of the concerns and is keen to keep to a minimum the time before cases—whoever the accused—come to trial.

I believe that it is of the utmost importance that the Government do all they can to protect the lives of those decent and courageous men and women who serve their country so well in Northern Ireland.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury for the courtesy with which he has dealt with the matter and kept us informed of his thinking. I listened carefully to what the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) said, although I am unable to agree with many of his comments. However, he presents his views with clarity and precision. The hon. Member for Bradford, South presented his constituent's interests clearly and boldly.

My hon. Friends the Members for Chingford and for Blaby bring to the House very real experience of the split-second decision making that is required while soldiering in Northern Ireland. Their experience is highly relevant and I am thankful that people who have served in difficult circumstances in our armed forces can bring a measure of authority to our debates. The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), in his excellent and admirable speech, outlined and dealt with many of the real difficulties that we face in this area.

All hon. Members agree that keeping the peace is a crucial and critical task in which British soldiers have played a glorious and an heroic part. That is why we will always be prepared to examine any evidence that is brought before us by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury and by others to see how we can continue to refine the training and experience that we give to our soldiers before and upon deployment.

As my hon. Friend knows, we ask very young men who are armed with high-velocity weapons to make difficult decisions in a split second in the dark when it is raining, when their adrenalin is pumping and when they may be very frightened. Their discipline and training over the years have proved successful. They have given the British Army and services a record of which they can be proud in Northern Ireland—a fact for which our nation and the House are grateful.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) on the tribute that he paid to his regiment. I am glad that he found its members in good heart. I am grateful to all who have taken part in this debate for the measured, clear way in which they expressed their views. The Government will take note of all of them. I assure the hon. Member for Bradford, South that his points about Private Clegg will be considered and referred to the proper quarters. Again, I thank all who have taken part—especially my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury—for giving me the opportunity to respond to this important debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): It may be convenient for the House to know that there is a fault in the Division Bell system. It is not a fire alarm.

We now move to—

Mr. Brazier: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If it is for the Chair, yes.

Mr. Brazier: There was a reference in the debate that has just closed to an early-day motion on the Order Paper. May I put on record the fact that it includes the words "recognising that soldiers must obey the law"?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is an abuse of the Chair.

Care in the Community

11.30 am

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am grateful for this opportunity to discuss community care and mental health, on which there has been quite a lot of activity in the House recently. Adjournment debates have been held, and several private Members' Bills of significance have been introduced—by the hon. Members for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) and for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks), for instance—all dealing with various aspects of care in the community.

It is therefore right, in the relatively calm atmosphere of this Adjournment debate on a Wednesday morning, that the House should have the chance to discuss these matters under the new Jopling procedures—

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I believe he is in America, and we were here late Monday night and Tuesday night.

Mr. Kirkwood: Possibly so; that might not be far enough away for some of us, but it is a matter for him.

This is a good chance to see how the community care changes are being implemented 18 months on. Community care is the right policy, and the Government have been right to implement it, although the way in which they have done so has caused some difficulties. I suspect, however, that those difficulties were inevitable given the radical nature of the changes. Any political Administration would have had problems getting from where we were to where we want to be.

I think that hon. Members agree that community care is right in principle and that the Government are right to adopt and promote it. It has a great deal of potential; we must be careful not to throw out the baby with the bathwater when dealing with some of the criticisms that have rightly been levelled at the implementation of the policy. Moving from what was always a service-based policy to a much more flexibly managed, needs-led approach certainly is a radical change, which has had profound effects for users of the service and for their carers. The effects have also been profound for health care professionals and social work and social services professionals, and there have been consequences for the way in which voluntary groups operate too. All these people have had to respond dramatically to the changes implemented in the past 18 months.

I acknowledge the value of the work done by counsellors in social work and social services committees throughout the country, although I suspect that the Minister may not quite share my enthusiasm. They have done a great deal to make the policies work in the face of considerable troubles and difficulties. Immense challenges have faced them and many demands have been put on them. The House owes them a debt for the work that they have done and for the diligence with which they have discharged their duties.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that some Labour-run authorities, of which Lancashire is perhaps the worst example, have badly mishandled the implementation of community care, and that it is not right to give blanket approval to the work done by social security committees on county councils—

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): Social services committees.

Mr. Hawkins: Social services committees in some counties have done a good job, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, but some county councils have misused the resources.

Mr. Kirkwood: I was desperately trying to avoid that kind of tone. Lancashire has lost £14 million. I do not know how it has husbanded its resources, but it would have been a clever trick for anyone to make a fist of the situation after losing £14 million. I am trying to stay above that sort of party political argument. Of course the hon. Gentleman's point was quite legitimate and I do not criticise him for making it, but I am trying to take a more philosophical approach to some of these problems. We owe that to the counsellors and to those who use the services—after all, it is the latter who suffer.

I was pleased to note that the Audit Commission's report, "Taking Stock"—I am sure that all hon. Members have read it—acknowledged that counsellors have shown themselves capable of responsible stewardship and of managing the process as well as might be expected. It is always easy to see things clearly with hindsight, but when Sir Roy Griffiths initiated the process he made it clear that he thought he was setting the agenda for a decade ahead. I think that the Government have been trying to travel too far too fast. The evidence in "Taking Stock", published in December, strongly suggests to me that some of the local authorities being asked to administer the new system do not possess the management information systems to enable them to cope with the uneven demand that they are facing in the first five or six years of the transition.

Local authorities are having to deal with existing protected clients under the old social security system—residential care—and with new clients who are coming on stream now. It is impossible to anticipate demand without sophisticated new techniques. The Audit Commission report makes it clear to my satisfaction that we expected local authorities to do too much without adequate tools. I should like the Minister to bear that thought in mind for the rest of the debate. Perhaps we should be thinking in terms of reaching our goals after 10 years instead of rushing in a manner that makes it difficult for people to cope.

Given all the evidence that we have it seems to me that there is an unanswerable case for setting up a standing working group that would involve local authority representatives, academics, departmental representatives and so on to oversee funding and many of the other issues which I expect to be covered in the next hour and a half. I hope to persuade the Minister of this idea. If he cannot respond to it today, perhaps he will respond to my suggestion later in writing. I am prepared to wait for the right answer. It is vital to get people to sit around a table in good faith to look at some of the problems of funding that are emerging and to deal with them as best they can.

The first issue that such a group would want to examine is the almost irresistible pressure that the 1990 legislation will place on health service professionals to cease providing long-term health care. The Department of

[Mr. Kirkwood]

Social Security transferred resources to local authorities to deal with residential care, and I understand the rationale behind that. As a consequence, the Government were able to control the budget, which was previously demand led.

Health care authorities are discharging long-term patients, including geriatric patients, into the community. I understand that care packages must be in place before such patients are allowed to be discharged, but when they are they become the responsibility of the local authority. At that stage, their needs are considered from a medical point of view, and their means are considered.

If the Government do not take a firm grip in the next few years, and if the process that I have described is allowed to develop unfettered, irresistible pressure will be placed on trusts, community health units and acute hospitals to divest themselves of long-term national health service patients, who hitherto have expected cradle-to-grave treatment. They have expected, rightly, because they have paid national insurance contributions, free long-term health care. That care will not be available to them in five or six years' time. I note that the Minister shakes his head in dissent. I shall be interested to hear him on this point. It will be a crucial part of and an influence on the funding that is available for community care in the hands of local authorities.

It is believed that funding is spiralling out of control, and the evidence suggests that the authorities are right. I spoke to the British Medical Association about the matter. I am sure that the Minister knows the figures. In 1990, 73,000 people were registered as national health service long-term care patients. In 1993, the total had fallen to 59,600. There must be a minimum level of national provision for long-term health care patients, but I see no evidence that the Government understand that. We cannot allow the number of long-term health care beds to fall indefinitely. I sense that the Minister wishes to intervene, and I am happy to give way to him.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): Has the hon. Gentleman seen the Government's continuing care guidance, which was drawn up as a result of the Leeds case? Has he submitted his views? Is he aware that there are NHS beds not only in hospitals but in nursing homes, which are not included in the figures that he has presented to the House?

Mr. Kirkwood: I understand the Minister's second point. I have been wrestling with some of the Government's guidance and positions on long-term health care. I am not alone in continuing to be slightly confused. Indeed, the BMA is slightly confused about exactly what the Government are saying about long-term health care.

The draft guidance that is supposed to be the subject of consultation states that

"the hospital will need to take account of the needs of other patients in determining how long the person can continue to occupy an NHS bed."

That is to be contrasted with the guidance in 1989, accompanying circular HC(89)5, which stated:

"No NHS patient should be placed in a private nursing or residential care home against his/her wishes if it means that he/she or a relative will be personally responsible for the home's charges."

Over the past few years, various positions have been taken in guidance that has been issued by the Department of Health. The confusion continues to obtain. If the BMA is confused, I suspect that others are too. The Government have a duty to clarify exactly what is happening.

Some weasel words have been introduced into some of the guidance circulars on which consultation is now taking place. I refer to the NHS executive guidance, which for the first time says that the NHS remains responsible for care "within available resources". It says that every effort should be made to meet the preferences of the patient

"within the practical options and resources available."

These words are incapable of precise meaning. When the Minister and I have to throw ourselves at the mercy of the NHS in 20 or 30 years' time, in our twilight years, will we be entitled to know the exact circumstances in which the NHS will provide and those in which it will not?

The shunting—a terrible piece of jargon—of health care resources into the local authority area for community care is a matter of singular and continuing concern. The same can be said of the circular and consultation process. The Minister and his Department should urgently try to resolve and clarify the issue. Similarly, it should be considered urgently within the review process that I have proposed.

Mr. Hawkins: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the problems about the interface between health services and social services is that in many counties, including Lancashire, social workers have insisted on contradicting the advice of general practitioners and allowing elderly people who have not been in very good health to stay at home? When those people have had suddenly to be admitted to hospitals as emergency cases, an intolerable burden has been placed on hospitals and health services generally. That is one of the difficulties that the new system has thrown up in areas where social workers have insisted on countermanding GPs' advice on the best places for their patients.

Mr. Kirkwood: If that is true, it would cause me some concern. I have never heard of such circumstances, but I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. If that has happened, we should examine it carefully.

Funding is the crucial and core issue. I do not want to demand unlimited amounts of money. It is too easy for Opposition politicians to say that we need blank cheques. We know that blank cheques are not available and it is stupid to try to operate on that basis.

The 1994-95 local government settlement meant a difficult year for local authorities—I think that everyone would accept that in his or her quiet moments. It would seem that 1995-96 will be an even more difficult year. It is unfortunate that we are entering a crucial phase of the transition in community care at a time when local authority budgets are severely constrained.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is very important, in these days of public spending constraints, that local authorities spend the money allocated to them specifically for community care through the standard spending assessment? There are numerous examples of Liberal Democrat-controlled

councils, or where the Liberal Democrats have a major hand in controlling policy within those local authorities, that show that they are not spending—

Mr. Hinchliffe: It is ring-fenced.

Mr. Banks: I will deal with that point. Indeed, it is not, and the hon. Gentleman should know that.

The fact is that if one looks at Liberal Democrat-controlled authorities—those in which the hon. Gentleman's party has a hand, and perhaps he will comment on this, in Cornwall—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman did not have the Floor for a speech. A brief intervention was appropriate.

Mr. Kirkwood: I invite the hon. Gentleman to make an intervention in another debate. It is not a worthwhile use of the time of the House to debate individual councils. I stand by the statement that I made: the Audit Commission found that, by and large, councils were doing a good job in difficult circumstances. If the hon. Gentleman wants to hire a hall in Cornwall, I would be happy, on a day and place of his choosing, to appear on a public platform and argue with him long and hard about the individual circumstances of Cornwall. But I do not want to do that this morning. I am trying to keep the debate slightly above the tone of our usual debates, but I do not think that I am succeeding.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): The hon. Gentleman is succeeding, because I am not going to attack him on a party political basis, as he is making a thoughtful and helpful speech. These are serious issues.

To what extent, none the less, does the hon. Gentleman place the responsibility on local authorities to use their money wisely? I give him one example—I shall not mention the political party, although he is a member of it. In Devon, the Liberal Democrats took control in 1993, reversed a decision to close local authority homes and is now placing residents in local authority homes at a cost of £400 a week, when in the private sector they can get better care at £200 a week. Is that not something for which local councils have a responsibility? It is not all the Government's fault.

Mr. Kirkwood: Again, if the hon. Gentleman wants to hire a hall in Devon, I will happily debate individual circumstances with him. From memory, I recall that Devon lost about £16 million. The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. Of course I confirm that local authorities must act responsibly and spend money wisely. I have no evidence that the council in Devon has acted in anything other than the best interests of its users. The hon. Gentleman must understand that it is sustaining a loss. The rules changed, as he knows, unilaterally and unexpectedly. Losing £16 million is a pretty difficult row to hoe in terms of the provision of crucial services for people who are in a very vulnerable position.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): Is my hon. Friend aware that Devon was the hardest hit of all the counties in the transfer of funds that resulted from the revision of the formula? Despite the attention that is rightly being given to Gloucester and the Isle of Wight, under the old arrangements Devon received 4.6 per cent. of national spend in this area, but under the new formula will receive only about 2 per cent. Whatever the merits of the argument of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter)—it is legitimate—he must appreciate that the total sum that he proposes is the merest skim of the sums about which we are talking. It is a blue herring.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am obviously failing miserably in my attempt to try to keep us out of a party political dog fight. There will, of course, be legitimate exchanges, but I am trying to concentrate on and accentuate the positive, because I am determined to try to get something out of the Government this morning, even if it is only a promise that they will reconsider my suggestion that a body should be created to consider these issues and that its advice should be made available to the Government.

The Government underestimate the impact on some counties of the unexpected change in the distribution of resources at the beginning of this financial year, and I hope that that will not be forgotten. It should be constantly kept under review, because of the impact—we have heard exchanges that reinforce the point—that it has had on the finances available to some local authorities.

More than anything else—the evidence appeared in the Audit Commission report, "Taking Stock", which was published in December—nobody correctly estimated the high demand that would be evident from the start of the new regime. Expectations, quite properly, have been raised. The Government cannot be held to account for every new demand or expectation encountered, but carers, users, voluntary groups and domiciliary services are experiencing quite unexpected interest and demand. The House and the Government must recognise that and take it into account, otherwise we will face severe examples of retrenchment, harsher eligibility criteria and withdrawal of services. In Gloucestershire, even the legal process is involved. We are heading rapidly towards a tangle of legal challenges in the courts. I do not believe that that is in anybody's interest.

As I understand it, there is no spare money in local authority budgets. No other funds are available from charging or from efficiency savings. The bottom line is that front-line services are now at risk.

Mr. Hawkins *rose*—

Mr. Kirkwood: I shall not give way. I have been speaking for far too long already.

The Government must look at that. I suggest strongly that they should set up some review machinery, involving local authorities, to oversee the process for at least the next few years.

The ten-minute Bill of the hon. Member for Dulwich, Community Care (Rights to Mental Health Services) Bill, is a very important measure, which I hope the Government are considering seriously. Evidence produced by the National Association for Mental Health—MIND—shows the need for a crisis service and that extra resources are cost-effective in terms of moving away from acute units to a decent crisis and emergency service.

As I said earlier, the private Member's Bill of the hon. Member for Croydon North-West, the Carers (Recognition and Services) Bill, is an important measure. I hope that the Government are considering that as well. I hope, too, that they will look at some of the constraints that local authorities are under, in terms of the 85 per cent. restriction—the limit on the amount that can be spent from what previously was paid to the private sector. The lack of privately provided domiciliary services in many

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areas is making it difficult to ensure that that money is most flexibly used. The Audit Commission said that flexibility, responsiveness and sensitivity were the three key issues in the successful promotion of community care in the future. I am sure that that is right, but I do not think that the Government have got the process right. The funding will create immense problems for the rest of this year and from next year.

One of the best ways in which the Government could cope with the situation today is to say that they understand that some factors need to be considered on an on-going basis, and that they will agree to enter into some arrangement, by way of a working group or some other body, with local authorities and other interested parties, to work these things out for the remainder of the transitional period. If they did that, local authorities throughout the length and breadth of the land would have more confidence that the Government were aware of the difficulties that they face.

11.58 am

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I am delighted that we are debating the important subject of community care, whose funding we should monitor to ensure that the objectives are adequately met. I must compliment the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on the restrained character of most of his remarks, and especially on his recognition of the value of this radical innovation.

Not only is community care delivering a better service, as it will continue to do; it represents an important devolution of power to local government. I particularly welcome that, and I am keen for it to work successfully. I pay tribute to people in my local authority of Bromley whom I know well: for instance, the director of social services, Mrs. Clare Marchant—I hasten to add that she is no relation—and other health professionals and administrators who have co-operated effectively in both setting up the system and making it work.

That is not to say that there have not been some transitional difficulties. Such difficulties were inevitable; indeed, I consider it miraculous that such a major change—such a huge innovation—has not involved more problems. In the borough of Bromley, certainly, most of those difficulties were overcome owing to the good will, flexibility and effort contributed by all who were keen for the system to work. I congratulate them on overcoming the problems at an early stage.

It is the easiest thing in the world to make a case for increasing spending on community care, as on any other programme. Again I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, who made a point of saying that he was trying not to make such a case—although his attempts were not entirely successful towards the end of his speech. My wife is very good at suggesting that spending should be increased in various areas, but she is outdone by Opposition Front Benchers, who daily call for more expenditure.

The one thing that those Opposition Members are never prepared to do, however, is announce the grand total of the extra spending for which they are calling and explain to the House, and the outside world, where they will find the money. It is incumbent on anyone who wishes to behave responsibly to explain how the more generous funds required are to be secured, either through revenue raising or through reductions in certain services. The Labour party, however, becomes very coy when the question is put.

Although wonderful things can be done in community care, are already being done and, no doubt, will be done increasingly in future years, demand is open-ended. Eventually, no doubt, anyone who needed the slightest support could be given 24-hour backing, but the cost would be disproportionate. Balance is needed: we must ensure that adequate provision is made for community care, and that it is recognised as an important step forward, but the budget must not be open-ended.

I do not criticise social workers, who do a tremendous amount of good work, but I feel that they sometimes lose sight of reality and fail to appreciate that budgets must be controlled. All services, by their nature, must be cash limited; otherwise it is impossible to plan, make commitments or make room for other priorities.

Mr. Hawkins: My hon. Friend has mentioned the important role played by social workers. I agree that some social workers do an excellent job, but in my part of Lancashire—and perhaps in my hon. Friend's constituency as well—certain of them are so ideologically opposed to the idea of placing anyone in a private sector home that they refuse even to contemplate it. That is a vast waste of taxpayers' and charge payers' money.

Mr. Merchant: I must say that that is not a problem in my area—I have never encountered such a case—but I know that it has happened elsewhere. In certain parts of the country, care in the community has been impeded by those with tunnel vision who have not been prepared to exercise the flexibility that is required if the system is to work.

We should not overlook the generous funds provided by the Government, which stem from a belief in the system and a conviction that enhanced flexibility and better standards of care are necessary. It is so important to free those who have been trapped in grey institutions, and give them the care that they need, that the Government have rightly set aside large extra sums. In 1995-96, £1.8 billion has been provided in specific additional funds for care in the community—44 per cent. more than in the previous year—while £2.5 billion has been provided for 1997-98. No one could describe that as anything other than generous.

That is not the whole picture, however. The amount available for social services spending generally—the biggest growth area in local government—has doubled since 1990-91, rising from £3.6 billion in that year to £6.4 billion in 1994-95. In 1995-96 it amounts to £7 billion: that is an increase of 9 per cent. in a single year.

Local authorities are free to decide their exact social services budgets. It would be absurd if they were not, given that powers have been devolved to them, and I believe that that is what they want. But to make community care a success in the first years of its introduction they were given a special transitional grant, which was ring-fenced and separate from the revenue support grant settlement.

That grant, however, is not the only source of community care funding, although some people appear to have made the mistake of thinking that it is. It is additional to what authorities can take out of their social

services budgets. Some local authorities, including some that have recently complained about underfunding, have not spent up to their standard spending assessment, which makes their claim that they are not given enough by central Government look rather hypocritical.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the transitional grant was intended to finance new functions and increased responsibilities? He talks of the Government's generosity; will he tell us what they would have spent if the old system had remained? In 1979, £9 million was spent on social service departments' funding of private care; by 1993 the figure was £2.5 billion. What would the figure for the next two or three years have been?

Mr. Merchant: The hon. Gentleman is not comparing like with like. I assume that he is not suggesting that the old system should have been retained. Care in the community is a better system, and should not be compared with the old one. There is no doubt, however, that Government funding is excessively generous. It is more than adequate to cope with the extra demands placed on local government.

Mr. Bowis: The straight and simple answer to the question posed by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) is that under the old system £160 million less would have been spent.

Mr. Merchant: The fact remains that some local authorities have complained about being insufficiently funded. We should, I think, examine their position more closely.

In the Audit Commission's recent second report on care in the community implementation, David Browning pointed to four areas of difficulty for local authorities. I shall refer to all four. He said that there were examples of poor local financial control and that there was increasing demand. That is undoubtedly true. He pointed to local decisions to allocate fewer funds to social services and, of course, he referred to changes in the Government formula.

I have mentioned all four lest someone suggests that I am selecting two that are particularly favourable to my case. However, I shall deal first with those two, the first of which is poor local control. There are undoubtedly examples of local authorities taking on the burden of care in the community, not managing it as efficiently as they should and slipping up on financial control. It is notable that it is those authorities which have screamed and complained most in the past few months. The complaints should be directed at their own internal systems rather than at their lack of grant. Of course, they attempt to find scapegoats for their own problems.

The second area causing difficulty is the decision to allocate fewer funds. As I said earlier, local authorities are free to choose how much they spend in different areas and there is no doubt that some local authorities—the one on the Isle of Wight is an example—have chosen not to spend up to their full SSA on personal social services. There again they have themselves to blame if they suddenly find that they are short of funds.

One of the two other areas is the growth in demand. That presents difficulties because no one can clearly predict demand. Pilot studies and predictions can be undertaken, but until people start knocking at the door requiring the support that local authorities are now duty bound to provide, one cannot know for sure what the pattern of demand will be. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be flexible and will continue to monitor demand as it arises.

The fourth issue relates to changes in the Government formula. Those changes have benefited many authorities, but they have also resulted in some authorities not getting as much as they might have expected from the previous year's formula. But as, in the first year at least, the formula was biased in their favour and there has merely been rectification to a fairer overall system, they should be thankful for the extra support that they received, perhaps unexpectedly, in the first year of operation.

I do not want to go into specific examples in great detail, but I am sure that some of my hon. Friends intend to do that. However, I will mention that there is a clear contrast between local authorities which have managed the system well, are working within their budgets and delivering an excellent service—my local authority in Bromley is an example—and some others. Hon. Members will know whether a system in their area is working effectively because we are often the first people to receive complaints if it is not.

I have had so few complaints about care in the community that there is clearly no severe underlying problem in my area. That is clear even if I did not believe the evidence that has been provided to me by those who are administering the system. The few complaints that I have received have related to individuals; the system is bound to slip up occasionally in such cases. As soon as those problems have been drawn to the attention of those responsible the difficulties have been put right.

We can contrast that with the experience in counties such as Gloucestershire because despite large increases in funding—for example, Gloucestershire had a 10 per cent. increase in 1994-95 over the previous year—some counties have managed to get themselves into the most extraordinary mess. According to *The Independent* Gloucestershire council appears to be spending about £1,000 a day on computer consultants who scrapped a community care computer system at a cost of £250,000 and promptly spent £200,000 on replacing it.

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): The hon. Gentleman talks about increases. Does not he realise that there has been a cut of £3 million in the community care grant in Gloucestershire? That was totally unexpected and occurred after it had arranged all the contracts. The article in *Computer Weekly* last week entitled "Careless in the Community" bears absolutely no relation to the truth. If the hon. Gentleman would like to speak to Deryk Mead, the social services director in Gloucestershire, I can arrange it.

Mr. Merchant: As I have said, there was a 10 per cent. increase between 1993-94 and 1994-95 in Gloucestershire's social services budget. That is a particularly large percentage in view of the restraints in other areas of local government expenditure. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's defence of poor financial control in that authority.

There are many other examples, but it will suffice to say that authorities that have managed the system well have not only coped but have produced a far better system than before. They have demonstrated that care in the community as a practice and not just as a theory is most

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effective. Authorities which have not managed the policy well need to look closely at their systems with a view to improving the standard of care for their people.

At the end of the day this is a major test for local government. As I said at the start of my speech, it represents a major devolution of power to local government, which I welcome. I should like to see local government having more responsibility and to see other functions that are currently carried out by central Government devolved to local government. That can be done only if we are confident that local government will be able to deliver those services at an adequate standard across the country.

This is a test for local government. If it is able—and I sincerely hope that it is—to ensure that the system works smoothly and effectively in the years to come, its case for handling other services will be greatly enhanced. However, if authorities drag their feet and are not able to deliver the efficiency that is expected of them in handling such a major area of policy, it will be difficult to support their understandable arguments that they should also handle other public services.

12.17 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I welcome this opportunity to speak on community care, albeit in a brief debate. I shall stick to the issue of available funding, because care in the community is so wide ranging. I shall address in particular the difficulties that we recognise in many parts of the country. Some local authorities face serious problems in meeting their statutory responsibilities on community care changes. The Opposition are especially concerned about the impact of that on some of our most vulnerable citizens—the users and carers and people who depend on vital services.

I shall start by briefly recalling the warnings that were flagged up by local authorities when the changes were introduced in April 1993. Although the Minister was not in post at the time, he will recall that the Association of Metropolitan Authorities warned that the changes were underfunded. I remind him that the Association of County Councils, which was then Conservative controlled, also warned the Government about that. At that time, it was concerned with cuts in the counties. The situation has markedly worsened—to be fair, that has been conceded by Conservative Members who have contributed to the debate—as a result of the change in the formula which was introduced with effect from this financial year.

Many metropolitan authorities are finding their base budgets under pressure and cutting services. At least a dozen county authorities—there may be more, but 12 have told me this—have run out of special transitional grant. The Association of County Councils predicts a funding shortfall for the next financial year of at least £200 million. The Minister will know that because he has met the association at least once, and possibly twice, recently. In every way, demand for care services has been beyond all expectations.

One of our concerns is with the way in which the Government have not been willing to consider the issue of unmet need, and to make some sort of measurement of that need. They have discouraged local authorities from doing that. The most sensible way of planning for future care provision is to look at where the gaps are and how we can plug those gaps. I appreciate that resources are not infinite and that we must consider how funding is used. My concern is that the Government have not planned properly on a national basis to deal with serious unmet need in various parts of the country.

Mr. Hawkins: I know of the hon. Gentleman's expertise in this matter, which he gained before coming to the House. Does he agree that immense responsibility is placed on all local authorities to manage their funding sensibly? Is not one of the most serious criticisms made of local authorities that so badly mishandle funding—Lancashire is a classic example—that they have allowed unlimited, incredibly expensive domiciliary care packages? They have not limited those packages to exceptional cases, as the guidelines from 1992-93 onwards clearly state they should. Purely for ideological reasons, they have not used much less expensive, much better residential care in the private sector.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I hope that people will note the hon. Gentleman's comments carefully. He said that people who have basic human rights should have the opportunity to be placed in institutional care when, as an alternative, his council is clearly and rightly attempting to ensure that they are given the right to remain in the community, which is the aim of the community care changes. He cannot honestly say that authorities have allowed unlimited packages. I have met his colleagues in Lancashire and many local authorities.

I worry about the message that the hon. Gentleman has got across. If he found himself in those circumstances and had certain needs, would he prefer to have services and support supplied to him in his home, and carers in the community to visit him at home, where he has lived all his life? Or would he prefer to be shunted into a private institutional care home, miles from where he lived, as is happening in many instances? It is a human rights issue. The hon. Gentleman said on the record that he would deny human rights. I hope that his constituents will note that.

Mr. Hawkins *rose—*

Mr. Hinchliffe: I must continue because my time is limited. I shall cover a number of points that the hon. Gentleman has made, if he will listen.

I recognise that, in many parts of Britain, a serious problem exists in relation to community care and it needs an urgent response. I listened carefully to the suggestions of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), who opened the debate. I want to make some constructive suggestions. I hope that the Minister will listen to them in a non-partisan and constructive way and that he will respond in some detail to my points.

It is important to remember that the difficulties arise directly from the implementation of the care elements of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. Those elements were clearly Treasury driven. I want to go back a bit further than the Liberal spokesman and to consider why we are in this position with these changes. The 1990 legislation attempted to unravel the mess that the Government had got into during the 1980s and 1990s in relation to the wholesale privatisation of the care of old people. That is why we have the problems.

Earlier in an intervention, I mentioned that private care in residential and nursing homes cost £9 million per annum when the Government came to power, but when

the changes were introduced, it cost the Department of Health and Social Security some £2.5 billion, an enormous increase, which was caused by a deliberate policy of privatisation.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hinchliffe: No. I am sorry. I must continue with my speech. I shall probably give way later if we get to an appropriate point.

The problems arise because of the deliberate policy of the privatisation of the care of elderly people. The hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) said that we should push people into institutional care in the private sector, but they should have the opportunity to remain in their own homes in the community where they have lived all their lives. In 1979, there were 24,000 private care home places. That had grown to 135,000 by 1993. The comparable increase in the population of elderly, very elderly and vulnerable people is nowhere near that increase.

We are talking about choice. I was interested in the attack on local authority accommodation. That accommodation is part of an individual's choice. He can choose to go to whatever accommodation is appropriate to his particular needs. Many people positively want to choose local authority accommodation. During that period of massive increase in the private sector, the number of local authority home places fell from 102,000 to 63,000. To my knowledge, that figure has decreased even more.

The private institutional sector was deliberately expanded, with massive subsidies from the taxpayer, but national health service provision was deliberately reduced. The figures are on record. Following the implementation of the 1990 Act's care changes, the Government's formula for allocating the special transitional grant to individual local authorities caused immense difficulties, as everyone knows, whatever his or her politics. In the first year of the changes, it pushed money into regions with the most private care home places, despite the fact that, after the changes, residents in those homes had preserved entitlements to Department of Social Security benefits. The Government must have known that many people in homes came from different local authority areas, which were penalised by the formula.

The formula reflected the Government's care priorities: it propped up the business interests of the providers of private nursing and care homes. That is at the heart of many of the problems with which we are dealing this morning.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman does not recognise that, in areas like mine, the shunting is being done by ideologically driven social workers, who are denying choice and who are not even telling the elderly and vulnerable that they have the choice to go into a private nursing home, which is often located just around the corner from where they live and which has high standards. They are told to enter, at double the cost, local authority homes, which are further away. That is a vast waste of taxpayers' money. That is the shunting that is going on and that is the cost.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I think that the Industry and Parliament Trust should extend its scheme to include the placement of Tory Members of Parliament in social services departments, so that they will come to the Chamber knowing what they are talking about. I did more than 20 years in front-line social work before I came to this place. I know that what the hon. Gentleman has just said is nonsense. He does not deserve an intelligent response to some of the points that he has raised. Frankly, he is speaking through ignorance and I suspect that some of his briefing material is based on *The Daily Telegraph* rather than on any reasoned analysis of what is happening in social services. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I would be most grateful if the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) would contain himself.

Mr. Harvey: Is the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) aware that social services authorities have shunted people out of local authority homes, where they have lived happily for many years, and into other provision, which is often further away from their home and less satisfactory? People at an advanced age who feel frail are very much at home in places where they have lived for many years. At that stage of their lives, they find the shift into private care, which is made for ideological reasons, traumatic.

Mr. Hinchliffe: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. I have come across examples of that in various parts of the country. People have died by being moved in that way. It is a denial of choice and the Government insist that choice is at the root of the care changes. The choice, unfortunately, does not include that positive choice that many people make to enter local authority accommodation and to receive local authority services. There is a denial of choice, which is at the root of many elements of the Government's care policies.

I want a response on those points from the Minister in his winding-up speech. The changed formula that was introduced in the current financial year was geared more closely, as the Minister will tell us, to standard spending assessment calculations, but its introduction, without any form of phasing, has completely undermined the planning and assumptions of local authorities that were better off under the original formula—mainly the county areas, many of which changed political control last year. That is the reason why one or two Tory Members, who would not normally be in the Chamber to discuss something as important as community care, are showing an interest in the subject. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) is waving at the Benches behind me. He may not be aware that a meeting of the parliamentary Labour party is taking place. This is one of the unfortunate problems with meeting on a Wednesday morning. As he knows, my colleagues would be here in force but for that meeting upstairs, which is packed to the rafters.

We have talked about people spending money wrongly, and I hope that Tory Members will listen to this point. The continued preoccupation with the so-called independent sector has forced the councils to spend more money than should have been necessary in many instances. The requirement to spend the bulk of the special transitional grant in this sector is resulting in people being placed in expensive permanent care because, often, councils cannot use the special transitional grant on their own home care services and there is frequently none available in the local independent sector. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire made that point.

[Mr. Hinchliffe]

Last year, I undertook a survey of directors of social services in England. The responses showed that a third of local authorities found that what was then the 85 per cent. requirement was preventing them from developing alternatives to residential care. Half of them had not spent as much as they wanted on domiciliary care because of the 85 per cent. rule and a fifth stated that they had placed people unnecessarily in residential care because of a shortage of home care services.

Mr. Hawkins: What does the hon. Gentleman have to say about the authorities—Lancashire is an example—that have never made any attempt to get anywhere near the 85 per cent. requirement and are continuing to ensure that all their local authority homes are full, at the expense of all the good private sector homes, many of which are going bankrupt? That will cause even more social problems of the kind that the hon. Gentleman claims to be trying to avoid.

Mr. Hinchliffe: The private sector would concede that in some areas there is an overprovision of private care places. I have met people in the private sector who have said that. There are reservations about the use of the independent sector. One of the problems that we should address is the lack of regulation in certain parts of that sector. The Minister will tell us in a moment how the Government are attempting to increase the provision of domiciliary care in the independent sector, but he will not tell me why the Government are not prepared to regulate and register people in that sector. We see people from private cleaning companies going into those homes to care for some vulnerable old people without any sort of check or inspection. That is one of the reasons why caring councils such as Lancashire are worried about using the independent sector.

Mr. Hawkins *rose—*

Mr. Hinchliffe: I shall not give way again. I have been reasonable with the hon. Gentleman.

The Government's dogmatic approach to the implementation of the care changes is actively preventing innovation within the community and the development of community alternatives to institutional care. It is also wasting scarce public resources. The Government should respond on that point. It is a valid point which has been made by directors of social services and by local authorities of various political persuasions.

Alongside those constraints, local authorities have had to face up to the impact of the introduction of the health market. The Labour party's most recent survey, "Passing the Buck", was published in December and found clear evidence that in 54 per cent. of the 80 councils that responded, shunting from health to local authorities was a major factor in the current financial difficulties. A third of the councils described the way in which the cost of palliative care was pushed on to them. There were examples of nursing cases being passed on to local authorities. Shorter hospital stays for acute treatment mean early discharges. How far are we going?

Last night, my local evening paper, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, told the story of an 86-year-old man who, last week, was shunted home from Leeds general infirmary in a taxi in a snowstorm dressed in only his pyjamas and slippers and wrapped in a towel. His family are, rightly, angry. That is happening not just in Leeds but all over the country. People want to know what is going on. It means that cases such as that have to be wrongly picked up by local authority social services departments. They are having to deal with an increased number of requests for support packages for dependent people who used to recuperate within the NHS.

Anyone here who does not believe that the NHS is being privatised should try to obtain recuperative or respite nursing care for an elderly relative. In my constituency of Wakefield and elsewhere, after a local authority means test, people now have to buy that care from the private sector. I have piles of letters from pensioners in Wakefield and other parts of the country asking why they now have to pay again for the care for which they have paid all their lives, through national insurance and taxation, since the inception of the NHS and, in some instances, even before that. The generation who are responsible for the introduction of the welfare state—people such as Cyril Turner, the 86-year-old I have mentioned—have found that it has deserted them when they are most in need. The privatisation of the health service and community care and the Government's obsession with the market are leaving thousands of people without access to the basic welfare services that they expected to be freely available when they needed them.

The answer to the present problems requires a marked change in direction by the Government. They must recognise that their health changes have led to enormous new demands on local authorities which were never anticipated when the funding arrangements for the care changes were considered. Funding must take account of the effect of the NHS changes on local authority budgets. It is crucial that when the new guidance on continuing care is completed by the Government, it should be made to stick. We should no longer hear of health authorities passing on their funding responsibilities to councils.

The Government must recognise the real difficulties arising in the current year in areas such as Lancashire and Essex—county areas in particular—which have arisen as a result of the sudden switch from one allocation formula to another. Spending plans have had to be scrapped and, in many areas, service cuts made. The Government must abandon the blanket requirement to spend set sums in the so-called independent sector and ensure that local authorities make the most cost-effective use of resources in a way that encourages the development of new services in all sectors.

I began my involvement in social work in the 1960s. I continued to be involved in social work in the 1970s and I placed people in private care homes although I was a member of the Labour party. There is nothing unusual about placing people in private care homes. Sadly, the Government seem to believe that the only care available is private institutional care. That is why many social workers are damned angry about remarks such as those made by the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins). Those remarks are inaccurate and do not reflect what has taken place in local social services arrangements for many years.

The Government's handling of community care suffers from the same constraints as their handling of the health service. They are obsessed with a private market model and, as a direct consequence, we are prevented from realising the enormous potential of community care. That

type of care has immense potential for many people with a variety of needs. Community care could enhance the basic human rights of millions of people.

12.37 pm

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): I will not detain the House for long, because I am interested to hear what the Minister has to say.

Care in the community was introduced with all-party support and with the support of professionals and voluntary and private sector providers. In the county of Devon, it has been a success story in its first year. It was embraced with enthusiasm by the county council, whose efforts have been given plaudits and whose work has been commended by the district auditor. In that first year, I believed that it would be a success story.

However, the revision of the funding formula for the second year has been an absolute disaster for Devon. It has taken no less than 20 per cent. of the overall transfer brought about by the change in formula. It is impossible to meet the demands in that county when all the plans, all the contracts and all the work being undertaken can be interrupted by such an extraordinarily huge loss of budget.

Many of those involved outside the county council have been hit. Some carers started up new operations, in some cases putting their life savings on the line to get a new facility up and running. They are finding that they are having to cut the level of client service that they had expected to be able to provide and, in some instances, the enterprise upon which they have embarked has been put in peril.

The county of Devon has a very large elderly population which is not only indigenous but comprises many people who choose to retire there. Since the introduction of care in the community, the demand for new residential places has risen by no less than 85 per cent. It is impossible for the social services department to meet its obligations under the care in the community legislation while suffering such a cut in its resources.

To put matters into perspective, I shall cite a few figures. Under the previous arrangements, 4.65 per cent. of the Department of Social Security's spending on residential care was spent in Devon. Under the new arrangements, Devon county council is being provided with only 2 per cent. of the national spend, which means that its share of the national spend has been more than halved.

I implore the Minister to review the situation. If the quotas are not to be reversed, could the Government at least reconsider the capping limits so that the elected authority can take its case to the people of the county so that they can decide whether they want such appalling cuts in the provision of care?

12.40 pm

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Essex did rather well in terms of Government funding, which was increased this year by 22 per cent., or £32 million, for which we are grateful. In 1991, the amount spent on social services in Essex was £82.54 million; this year it is £174.89 million; and next year, it will be £192.35 million. Those represent generous real terms and cash increases.

I entirely accept that the social services department has had to take on new functions. By and large, it is doing its best to carry them out, although there have recently been some hiccups, with which I shall deal in a moment. Essex's proportion of the total national resource has been very generous, and I thank the Minister for that.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) made a thoughtful and helpful contribution, and its tone was excellent. I do not think that he accused the Government directly of underfunding the system, but he said that they had gone too far, too fast. He suggested that the changes could be slowed down and introduced over a 10-year period. If that is Liberal policy, what would he do about the current generation of elderly people who would be betrayed by such a time scale? They require help now, and might not be here to benefit from Liberal policy in 10 years' time.

Essex did very well under the new arrangements, but what did the Liberal and Labour parties in Essex do with all the extra money? They lost it though inadequate and incompetent budgeting, by following profligate socialist policies, by bad management and having too many managers, and by taking disastrous decisions. I hope to raise one instance in particular in an Adjournment debate very soon.

Budgeting in Essex gave rise to particular problems. Those involved in social services management there did not realise that there are 12 months in a year. The Audit Commission warned in its report of the lack of proper and sensible financial controls and budgeting in a few county councils, including Essex. It called for better budgeting to manage fluctuations in demand and to ensure that the financial consequences of past commitments were properly anticipated and allowed for.

The Audit Commission also called for county councils to make better use of independent sector provision, which is often more cost-effective, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) pointed out. Independent sector provision is often of a higher quality, but not necessarily so; there is some excellent state provision in my constituency, which I welcome.

The commission called for increasing flexibility and more prudent policies. Its report, entitled "Paying the Piper", identified potential savings of £500 million which could be made through better management control of local government pay bills, and would involve no cuts in front-line services.

Essex got its budgeting wrong, but that is not the whole story. Liberal and Labour control in the county meant a procession of eccentric, politically correct, madcap and profligate policies, which were followed not by mistake but on purpose, out of socialist dogma. I reviewed some of these incompetent and dogmatic socialist schemes in my Adjournment debate of 11 January. I do not have time to repeat them, but they are on the record.

Essex social services lost a total of £8.5 million. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that the money was thrown away on mad ideas. To its great and permanent shame, the county council took some cruel and insensitive action to cover its loony left incompetence. It cut care in the community provision and front-line service delivery to the old, the frail, the disabled and even children—the most vulnerable people in society whom the council should be protecting.

Those whose need was greatest had their services cruelly cut, while incompetent social services managers, who cannot even count the number of months in a year, have increased their already very high salaries this year.

[Dr. Robert Spink]

Socialist and Liberal Democrat councillors are reinforcing their wasteful, profligate and dogmatic policies unchecked, and are not in the least humbled by their disasters.

To solve the problem, the council should use its £28 million reserves this year to reinstate the services that it so cruelly cut. It must also drop its madcap, profligate policies, and reduce management levels. It should also reduce management salaries by 6 per cent. in order to save money to protect vulnerable people in future, as I pointed out in my Adjournment debate. There should be no cuts in staff levels or staff wages in the front-line services in Essex, because those people are the deliverers of care such as home helps. They are good people.

One consequence of socialist dogma and incompetence in community care in Essex has been hospital bed blocking. Again, I alluded to it in my Adjournment debate on 11 January, as did my hon. Friends the Members for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale), for Rochford (Dr. Clark) and for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and many others.

I conclude at this point, because I know that the Minister is anxious to deal with the points that have been raised. However, I call on Essex county council to change its madcap policies, and to use its reserves of £28 million to make good the cruel cuts that it has imposed.

12.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) for providing the opportunity for this debate, not least because, on this morning of Back Benchers' debates, he has abandoned his constituents and come south, referring to the constituents of hon. Members in the English counties and metropolitan areas. The hon. Gentleman entitled the debate "Care in the Community", a phrase that applies specifically to mental health. However, he dealt also with community care, and I shall respond on both counts.

The hon. Gentleman asked specifically about the financing of mental health care, which is the domain of the health service and social services. This year, we have invested £2.5 billion in mental health care. Since 1979, there has been a 40 per cent. real terms increase in national health spending and a 171 per cent. real terms increase in social service spending.

I agree that we need to do more and ensure that mental health is moved up the list of priorities. Indeed, the White Paper "The Health of the Nation" made it one of five key areas of activity. That is why we introduced the mental illness specific grant, which is widely recognised as having initiated good practice locally.

There are more than a thousand new projects, and more than 100,000 people being helped by this scheme already. This year, £36 million of Government money is supporting spending of £50 million. Next year, we shall announce Government spending of £47.3 million supporting £66 million. That is a 30 per cent. increase, which is good news for spending on mental health. In addition, this year the Government are spending some £2.4 million through section 64 grants to voluntary organisations.

We are putting the money into medium secure beds, which are perceived to be the gap in provision. The Glancy report, which was mentioned last night, reported that there were no such beds by 1979. There are now 1,300 secure and interim secure beds available, and we are building on that achievement this year and next year. In addition, we are putting an extra £10 million into London services, as a result of our task forces and London Implementation Group surveys of the health service, which will be helpful.

It is a question of joint commissioning between health and social services, and working with the independent sector. No one in the House would disagree with the need to involve the independent sector as well. MIND has been mentioned, which is a provider as well as a lobbyist. Many others help us in this area, and it is an important area for those who are severely mentally ill and, of course, for those who suffer from dementia. As the population ages, more people will be frail of mind as well as of body, and will need social care as well as medical care. We need to ensure that there is provision in the community as well as provision in hospitals.

Getting clinical discharge right is important. That is why we issued the new guidance on that. The care programme approach is central to management in the community. We are putting a lot of emphasis on key work and key worker training. We shall be bringing forward the supervised discharge proposal, which has now been endorsed by the report of Sir Louis Blom-Cooper, to the House in the very near future, together with other measures in that area.

I shall move on to the bulk of the debate, which in many ways has summed up the reality of community care. I acknowledge the opening words of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. Tributes have been paid to the start of community care, and that is right. The hon. Gentleman welcomed the policy, and that is right. I know of nobody who disagrees with the policy. There is perhaps some disagreement on emphasis in the practice and implementation of it, but the policy is right, and progress has been made.

Of course, some concerns about that progress have been rightly identified across the House, and we shall look at them. Hon. Members from all parties have also mentioned some poor performances. My hon. Friends who have raised those matters are fair in raising some of the motives behind some of the problems. There has been an element of dogma in some of the decision making in community care, which my hon. Friends have raised in speeches and interventions. It would be absurd to suggest that that problem does not exist. We must try to nail the dogma when it emerges and ensure that decisions are taken through good financial and care management throughout the country.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire also paid tribute to counsellors, and I echo that tribute. I would start by paying tribute to the directors of social services around the country and their teams, who have put care in the community into practice. Many councillors around the country of all parties are sincerely trying to make it work.

Again, my hon. Friends were right to point out those councillors who are trying to put obstacles in the way and use community care as an excuse to blame the

Government for all the ills of the nation and all the funding ills, which those councillors choose to highlight for any local newspaper headline of the day.

Mr. Kirkwood *indicated assent.*

Mr. Bowis: I welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman clearly recognises that.

I shall pin down one or two funding issues that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. He said that Lancashire and Devon had lost £14 million and £16 million respectively, the latter of which was also mentioned by his hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey). I do not know where those figures come from. Those counties have not lost any money at all. They have gained money. What the hon. Gentlemen are trying to say is that the counties have not gained as much as they would have liked, or, indeed, gained as much, in some cases, as they perhaps led themselves to expect.

Far from Lancashire losing £14 million, wherever that came from, it in fact, with the special transitional grant changes, received a reduction of £8 million. But, in the standard spending assessment change, implemented in the same year, it got £7 million more than it could have expected. We need to take that into account. Overall, from having £62 million to spend in 1991, it had £108 million in 1993-94 and that figure has risen to £126 million this year, which is a 15.4 per cent. increase on the previous year. It is due to have £142 million in the coming year. That represents a 66 per cent. increase compared with the national increase in England as a whole, and that is good news.

Mr. Hinchliffe *rose—*

Mr. Bowis: I am sorry, but I want to answer the points that have been made.

The same goes for Devon, although it involves bigger figures. Essentially, it lost £9 million in the STG and gained £6 million in the SSA. That needs to be put into context. I know that there are one or two problems in Devon, not least because of the pressures of the elderly and mentally ill coming into the county. But in Devon, the figures have risen from £63 million to £108 million—the same pattern as in Lancashire—to £122 million, which is a 13.5 per cent. increase this year, and up to £136 million next year, representing a 77 per cent. increase over those five years.

I suggest that the hon. Member for North Devon goes back to Devon and says to the council that it receives generous funding, and asks it why it is planning to underspend. If it is under such pressure, why is it planning to spend 5 per cent. less than the SSA indicates it needs to spend, which is provided for in central and local funding? That does not make sense.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire requested something that I can easily fulfil, because it has already been announced. He rightly asked for careful consideration of community care, and he wanted everybody to take part in those discussions. I agree with that. As hon. Members from all parties have said, we are talking about a policy which was originally intended to be implemented over a decade. Of course, through all our monitoring, we have identified areas which need strengthening, such as housing, information, the involvement of users and carers, and better involvement of the independent sector.

We need to plan ahead. That is why, at the social services conference, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that we would be taking that issue forward and arranging a forum to look at how we should proceed. Indeed, when I met the local associations, the Association of County Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, including Councillor Ann Peniket, who is one of the hon. Gentleman's party colleagues in local government, I said that the local authority associations would be involved with our officials in that forum. They were made that offer, and I know that they will take part, because they accepted it on the spot. We will be able to plan future development together.

Mr. Kirkwood: I want to push the Minister on that point. Is the forum a standing mechanism, which, over a period, will address common problems raised by Government, local authorities and other interested parties?

Mr. Bowis: It is to see how we develop, where the pressures are and how we should plan for the future.

Mr. Kirkwood: Is it a standing mechanism?

Mr. Bowis: It is a forum that we have set up. It does not matter whether it is standing or sitting. It will enable co-operation and co-ordination.

It is right to draw attention to long-term health care, as we are doing, not least with the Leeds case. We have issued the draft discharge guidance. The Department has listened very carefully to the points made by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, my hon. Friends and many others. We shall be refining that guidance, with which I think that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased.

Let me make it very clear that cradle-to-grave health care will remain. Most people's health care is carried out by GPs and primary health care. When that is necessary, it applies wherever one lives, in one's own home or in residential care. That will stay, and the same goes for the need for health care which involves hospitalisation or national health service cover in the residential sector. We must get the area between health and social services right, and we are working on it through the guidance and good practice of the work of the NHS executive.

I cannot answer all the points made by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. He made many good points and one or two contentious points, which were answered by my hon. Friends.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) also raised a number of important points. He exemplified Bromley as showing a good record of implementation, overcoming problems and managing with the funds available. Funding is generous. Funding for community care is not only special transitional grants. That element represented what had previously gone from the Department of Social Security through income support to residents in the independent sector. It was important to give stability to that sector and to the residents in it. That is why there was an 85 per cent. requirement for the opening years, and why we have the same requirement for next year alongside the hospital discharge agreement between health and social services.

The Audit Commission has produced two reports, one of which emphasises the £500 million to be saved through better staff cost management. The other report considers

[Mr. Bowis]

better financial control to improve community care, better use of the independent sector and ensuring that the available money is spent on social services.

The policy is popular, and it is well resourced. It is not Treasury driven; it is user driven. It is run by local authorities, because they asked to run it. They must show that they can deliver and most of them are doing just that. A few are having difficulties—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Time is up.

Police Budget (Suffolk)

1 pm

Mr. Jamie Cann (Ipswich): Disquiet was expressed by several hon. Members in a debate in this place yesterday about the impact of police grants on the police services in various counties. My next door neighbour, the hon. Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord), intervened in that debate. It is therefore useful today to examine a fairly representative shire county to consider the difficulties which have arisen as a result of the settlement that has been achieved.

Before I go any further, I must state that the debate is not about the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. I shall not go on about independent people being members of the police authorities. The issue is not about the principle of cash limits or the desirability, or otherwise, of using the formula. It is not about whether it is appropriate to devolve such matters to the chief constable.

The debate is not about politics in a party political sense. I represent the view of many Suffolk people of all political persuasions. The police authority in Suffolk is unanimous in its view, and that involves the magistrates, Conservatives, Liberals, Labour members and independents appointed by the Hone Secretary. They believe that there is a case to be answered.

In the Home Office press release 241/94, the Home Secretary stated:

"Provision for the police service in England and Wales will increase by approximately 3 per cent. over 1994-95. This is fully sufficient to enable the present number of police officers to be maintained across the country, if chief officers, in consultation with police authorities, choose to do so."

I contend that that statement is incorrect when the figures are worked out.

Much of the problem relates to the formula. Everyone recognises that no formula could conceivably treat everyone fairly across the nation, because of the immense differences that exist. What is more, the formula is new and new formulae are even worse than older ones in that they have not been tried and there are bound to be teething problems.

Concern was expressed when the formula was first introduced. The Association of Chief Police Officers had 15 meetings about the formula. ACPO states:

"the outcome of the current formula cannot be construed, in any terms, as a sound basis for the equitable distribution of resources to police forces in the future. The anomalies are clearly apparent even to the lay observer".

The representatives of police officers had no faith in the formula even when it was first introduced.

Suffolk has suffered particularly badly as a result of the formula. Suffolk is the second lowest spender per head of population on its police services in the whole of Britain. Some 23p per head per day is all that is spent on the police services in Suffolk. However, Suffolk finds itself with a cash increase of only £2,086,000, when it has extra costs which have been calculated as follows: between £2 million and £2.5 million extra is required for lump sum pensions; in respect of pay, from September 1994 full year consequences require an extra £0.4 million; in September 1995, the probable half-yearly pay increase will be between £300,000 and £500,000.

In addition, Suffolk has had to establish a contingency fund because it has been separated from the county council on which it used to rely. That will cost between

£500,000 and £700,000. If we include other factors, such as price increases, pay increases for civilian employees and the capital programme, it is estimated that Suffolk has a £3 million shortfall.

It is probably appropriate at this stage to quote the chief constable of Suffolk. He stated:

"The major difficulty for the Constabulary arises from the considerable increase in funding requirements to deal with police pensions, particularly the payment of lump sums to which all ranks are entitled following their completion of appropriate pensionable service. The increase in Suffolk to make adequate provision for 1995-96 is in the region of £3 million and this is not atypical of other constabularies.

When this increase is matched to the requirement to absorb the impact of a pay award of 3 per cent. and the requirement to maintain adequate reserves following the creation of autonomous police authorities . . . the position is further aggravated. If this is then placed alongside a formula which has redistributed resources such that a small number are showing considerable gains while others are facing heavy losses, one can readily see the extent of our difficulties. Recent research has indicated that when comparing the costs of policing per person of population only one other force, West Mercia, shows a lower figure than that for Suffolk, with some forces (particularly the Metropolitan forces) spending over twice as much per person."

That is the problem that the police authority and the chief constable face in Suffolk because of the settlement announced yesterday.

How is the police authority going to cope? The chairman is not a politician but a magistrate. He was elected by the independent members of the authority who were appointed by the Home Secretary. I think that the Minister should listen carefully to what the police authority chairman has to say. He said:

"The existing authority has made substantial savings during 1994-95—about £1 million. These have been achieved through a range of efficiency and value for money measures. But they have also meant holding vacant 43 police officer posts out of an establishment of 1,234.

Last week, the new authority reached the conclusion that another £3 million of savings would be needed if the maximum budget requirement for 1995-96 permitted under the capping regime is around £58 million.

About £1 million of these savings will come from the leaner structure being introduced by the Chief Constable and from some savings on overtime.

A further £1 million will come from reducing expenditure on a wide range of operational and administrative items. These include reducing overtime for police officers and civilians, reducing police officer training, reducing building maintenance"—

to emergency repairs only—

"reducing transport costs and increasing charges.

These reductions will of course have an effect on the policing of Suffolk.

The third £1 million can only come from reducing the number of police officers (by a further 60) and civilian employees (by 20), by closing two police stations and deferring construction of a new station. The total number of police officer vacancies would rise to just over 100.

HM Inspector of Constabulary has regularly commended the efficiency and effectiveness of Suffolk Constabulary. Both would be severely affected by the scale of reductions in police officers now facing the Authority and which are totally at odds with the Home Secretary's statement."

It is projected that, in 1996-97, a further 40 jobs will be lost in the police force. That would make a total of 143 job losses in three years out of an establishment, agreed only two years ago with the Home Office, of 1,234. It does not take an Einstein to calculate that that is an 11 per cent. reduction in the operational police force.

The word "decimate" is about 2,500 years old. Nowadays, it is misused. People think that it means to destroy something. Originally, when a Roman legion did not perform correctly in battle, one man out of every 10 was chosen by lot to be executed. They were decimated. The Home Secretary would not wish to go down in history as the man who decimated the Suffolk police force, but he is in danger of so doing.

1.9 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): Judging by the way in which the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) presented his case, the House could be forgiven for thinking that the police have had a poor deal in this year's settlement, but this year's settlement is very fair and very generous. It represents an increase on last year's settlement for the police throughout the whole of England and Wales of an average of more than 3 per cent., or nearly £200 million. It is a clear demonstration of the Government's continuing commitment to the police service in England and Wales. That is the national average across the country—a settlement of more than 3 per cent., when inflation is about 2.5 per cent., and police pay is increased by about 2.5 per cent.

Suffolk, however, has not had an increase of 3 per cent. Suffolk has had its fair share of resources, and the result is that the Suffolk police force will have available to it 4.7 per cent. more than last year. By any standards, can anyone seriously suggest that that is a cut in funding?

I agree with the hon. Gentleman on one point: the word "decimate" is wildly overused. When Suffolk can spend 4.7 per cent. more on its police this year than it did last year, and bearing in mind the two crucial points that the general rate of inflation is 2.5 per cent. and that the bulk of police expenditure, which is on pay and salaries, is increasing by 2.5 per cent., there is no way in which that could be called a cut in funding or a decimation of the force.

Mr. Cann: Perhaps the Minister would like to check *Hansard* tomorrow, but I do not think that he will find that I used the word "cut" in any circumstances. I have tried to put it to the Minister that the Government, through the formula, have not taken account of expenditure which will be necessary.

Mr. Maclean: If the hon. Gentleman has not used the word "cut", of course I accept that, but he floated the word "decimate". Let us not argue about which word sounds worse. It will scare the people of Suffolk more to hear that a Suffolk Member of Parliament has talked about the possibility of the force being decimated when it has had a 4.7 per cent. increase in funding. I accept that the hon. Gentleman said that he might not have used the word "cut". There were certainly some colleagues last night who, when looking at the increase that their force had and comparing it with the increase that they would have liked it to have if money were no object, called the difference a cut.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): Obviously, as my hon. Friend knows, I represent Suffolk, and I share the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) that Suffolk should be properly policed. I have been struggling with the conundrum of how a 4.7 per cent. increase can be described as a cut. Although the hon.

[Mr. Michael Lord]

Gentleman has not described it as such, newspapers in Suffolk have carried banner headlines stating that there will be severe cuts. Our chief constable and the committee are talking about removing the police launch and closing police stations. The general public are extremely worried about the situation, including the hon. Gentleman's points about fewer police on the beat.

I do not know whether I am posing an impossible question in the time available, but, as a Back-Bench Member with a Suffolk constituency, I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to explain how the problem has arisen. Is it pensions? Is it the sparsity part of the formula? Why is the chief constable saying that things are so drastic, when the county has received a 4.7 per cent. increase?

Mr. Maclean: I cannot answer my hon. Friend's valid point, because that would require my going into the detailed budgeting of his police force and the calculations that his excellent chief constable has made. I do not have those figures, and it would not be appropriate for me to seek to challenge them even if I had them. All I can say is that my hon. Friend and our colleagues from Suffolk must put those same points to their own police authority. They should ask, "At a time of inflation of 2.5 per cent. and when the biggest item of police expenditure, police pay, is going up by 2.5 per cent., what is the difficulty of a force living within an increase of 4.7 per cent?"

I accept that, throughout the country, the police pensions element is a big contributor, but I do not think that it is any worse in Suffolk than in other areas. Difficulties are caused by the huge amount of money that must go on police pensions. In some forces which have had increases of 2 per cent. to 5 per cent. and which are not quite as generously funded as Suffolk, chief constables are juggling priorities and coming up with an à la carte menu of things that they might do to live within their increase. That is why newspapers can print banner headlines saying that 20 rural police stations may close or that 50 bobbies may be lost, as chief constables understandably and rightly float their ideas on how to keep their expenditure within that increase. I am sorry that I cannot be absolutely specific with my hon. Friend or with the hon. Member for Ipswich, but it would be wrong to go into the detail of the local police authority's budget and say, "Aha, that's what is wrong; that's what you must change." I cannot and would not do that.

Mr. Lord: I ask my hon. Friend a further question which perhaps falls within his responsibility. Is there a peculiar reason why the position this year is so different from that of former years? The situation in Suffolk is unusual.

Mr. Maclean: There is no peculiar reason why it is different this year. We have introduced a new formula to try to distribute all the extra money more fairly, and we have tried to base it on need. I should love our being able to justify a rural sparsity element—not that I am biased, of course, but colleagues have pressed me on that matter—but I should not do that out of political judgment. I must have proof that there is a statistically valid reason for a force receiving more money because its policing needs are greater because of its rural area. If that could be proved, I would happily do that. Nevertheless, the net result of the new formula is that Suffolk receives 4.7 per cent.

Let us suppose that we do not have the new formula, that the Home Secretary has acquired the extra 3 per cent. this year, and that we decide to have a flat-rate increase—no fancy formulae for trying to distribute according to need. Suffolk would receive 3 per cent. this year—everywhere would receive 3 per cent. Although that might remove colleagues' arguments such as, "Why did your lot get more than my lot?", Suffolk would not be as well off as it is now.

Without criticising or questioning any of our excellent chief constables, if, over the past 12 months, considering the financial climate, the general level of inflation and the police pay settlement of 2.5 per cent., any police force expected that the Government were going to find 5, 6 or even 8 per cent. as a standstill budget, that would be cloud cuckoo land economics.

Mr. Cann: It might be my fault, but the Minister does not seem to understand what I said. It is not so much the formula that is the problem. The chief constable and the police authority have said that they could probably cope if the problem were just the formula. The essential problem, and the answer to the query of the hon. Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord), is that there are different things this year for Suffolk, just as there are throughout the land.

This is the first time that we have had an autonomous police authority. It does not have the contingency cover from the county council that it used to have. Therefore, it has to build its own general reserve for such purposes. It has problems with the payment of the lump sum element of pensions, which it did not have previously. That is the contention of the police authority, and that is why it is having to put up its estimate of expenditure to a figure way above what the Minister is talking about.

Mr. Maclean: Let us come straight to the point. First, let us deal with the question of reserves, which some people are misunderstanding. There is no statutory requirement on any authority to put money into reserves. I know that some people say that they have to take 2 per cent. to put into reserves, but there is no requirement to do so. It may be wise for an authority to do so if it can afford it—the Audit Commission recommends that that should take place—but if some forces are not capable of doing that, there is no compulsion on them.

Admittedly, every force and organisation would want reserves. My bank manager would like me to have some reserves, rather than an overdraft. All authorities want to have money in reserves in case they are faced with a police or education contingency. It is not right for an authority to say that a 4 or 5 per cent. increase is, in fact, a cut, because it has to put 2 per cent. in reserves.

Mr. Cann: Is the Minister really saying that he does not think that the Suffolk police authority needs to establish a reserve in case an event such as occurred at Brightlingsea happens in the area? Can I tell the authority that the Minister says not to worry, as the Government will bail it out at the end of year if it goes over budget because of unforeseen circumstances? I think not. Is it not the case that the Government have a contingency reserve of 4 per cent., or £7 billion out of £286 billion, in this financial year?

Mr. Maclean: I stand by what I said. It is sensible, prudent and desirable to set money into reserves, but if an authority has to decide between its priorities—some chiefs

may be floating threats to close some rural police stations or to reduce the number of officers—it cannot say that the Government have told it to put money into reserves. That is not the case. It is up to the authority to decide what it wants to do in the circumstances.

We recognise the difficulty caused for police budgets by the large and rapid growth in the police pensions bill, which is increasing exponentially each year. That is not unique to Suffolk.

The way in which we have dealt with pensions in this year's formula is the way the police service wanted it done. Nine per cent. of funding is allocated in relation to pension payments. That figure comes from police budget statistics produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. It is the proportion of national police funding which is spent on pensions. The decision to use this figure was taken following discussions with the Association of Chief Police Officers, and local authority representatives.

As the police themselves were keen to ensure, however, this funding is not hypothecated. Those forces which need to spend more than 9 per cent. of their funding on pensions can do so, while those forces in the fortunate position of having lower than average pension commitments can spend the remainder of their pensions allocation on other policing services.

Having decided that 9 per cent. of the global pot—all the available funding—should be allocated to cover, nominally, pensions expenditure, a model was developed for the projection of pensions expenditure in each force area so that the 9 per cent. of funding could be allocated according to the relative need in each area.

The Government Actuary's department developed a pensions model which uses data on the age, gender, rank and length of service distribution of each force which were collected in August 1992 to make these forward projections of pensions expenditure. During the consultation period on the police funding settlement—we have similar consultation periods on local government finance—several points came to light in the pensions model which required revision.

The model had not fully taken into account the costs of pensions which were borne by a force other than the force actually making the payment. It had also inadvertently taken the higher costs of some London pensions into account twice. Suffolk benefited from the change we made there. These points were revised before the police grant report was laid before Parliament on 30 January. I am pleased to say that Suffolk gained a further £270,000 from the first change and another £240,000 from the second, making a total increase in the funding of more than £500,000.

We recognise the difficulty caused for police budgets by the large and rapid growth in the police pensions bill throughout the whole of England and Wales. The way in which we have dealt with it in this year's formula is the way the police service itself wanted it done. I have already promised that we will look very carefully at this for 1996-97 in conjunction with ACPO.

The hon. Member for Ipswich said that ACPO had 15 meetings before criticising the formula. It is interesting that, after 15 meetings, its ultimate conclusion was that it did not like the end product. That shows the difficulty of constructing a formula that pleases everyone. Nevertheless, the police service generally does not want the former allocated system, which I intended to describe last week as negotiation by megaphone. Those forces which shouted the loudest for bobbies got them, while those which did not shout—irrespective of need—did not. Derbyshire is a classic example. In the early 1980s, Derbyshire did not ask for bobbies. It did not get them and it is now suffering terrible consequences. That method could not continue.

The Government and the police service wanted a formula. The formula is not for my benefit of for the Government's benefit; it is for the benefit of the police service. This year, there is extra money for the police service above the level of inflation—Suffolk receives 4.7 per cent.—so the formula will not save the Treasury money. It is intended to try to allocate the extra resources fairly. I shall be delighted to take representations from all colleagues and from the police service on how to refine and improve the formula. It may be able to take into account factors which, some people allege, are not taken into account at present.

Rural sparsity is one of those factors. I recognise—coming, as I do, from Cumbria, a county that is even more rural than Suffolk—the particular difficulties faced by forces with sparse populations. We have to look again at whether the formula can more adequately reflect these difficulties. It is a matter not of independent or political will but of thorough work on the facts and figures to establish the true picture.

I know that the hon. Member for Ipswich did not raise this matter, and I did not have a chance to respond to it last night, but some Opposition Members have alleged that we made a £30 million error in the budget. That is absolute nonsense. The figure came in a report in *The Guardian*, and people who believe what they read in *The Guardian* should not be surprised if it gets things absolutely wrong. There is no truth in that at all. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will draw that fact to the attention of the shadow Home Secretary, as I did not manage to respond to that point last night.

I shall conclude by referring to the successes of Suffolk. While we are talking about police funding—I well understand that the force would like more money, although it has, in the circumstances, come out well in comparison with the rest of the country with 4.7 per cent.—we must not forget that Suffolk has been tremendously successful as far as the police are concerned. The police in Suffolk are doing a good job.

To set the funding in context, we must look at the successes of last year. Our statistics show that there was a 6 per cent. drop in recorded offences in Suffolk for the 12 months ending in June 1994. Within that figure, robbery offences dropped by 23 per cent., and there was a 15 per cent. drop in vehicle offences. Burglaries—which worry many of the constituents of the hon. Member for Ipswich and my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord)—dropped by 12 per cent.

The report by Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary on the Suffolk force for 1994 described it as maintaining one of the highest detection rates for recorded crime in the country. I believe that the settlement that Suffolk is getting under the formula will ensure that there will be no change in that tremendous success rate and that its efficiency will not be affected at all.

Mr. Cann: Is not the point that everybody concerned with that great success story is saying that the

[Mr. Cann]

Government are putting that in jeopardy in the coming year because of the settlement? It is not a success story that the number of police officers on the beat in Suffolk was reduced by 43 last year.

Mr. Maclean: Since the Government came into office, Suffolk has had an extra 132 police officers approved in its establishment.

I shall not be responsible on 1 April for deciding the number of police officers that Suffolk can have or recruit. We shall no longer play a role in fixing the establishment. However, despite the excellent success of Suffolk—I understand that it is now structuring—it could do a little more to release more bobbies for the beat. It could continue the civilianisation programme because Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary reports that, at the end of 1993, some 50 police officers were doing jobs that could have been done by civilians.

Throughout England and Wales, we have seen the restructuring and thinning out of senior and middle management ranks. Hundreds of chief superintendents and inspectors have gone, and we have more constables instead. In the first 10 months of 1994, England and Wales had 600 more bobbies on the beat—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The Minister's time is up.

Wyre Piddle Bypass

1.30 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Do you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, know the first two verses of one of my favourite poems?

"Yes. I remember Adlestrop—
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop—only the name."

Edward Thomas drew up at Adlestrop on the line from Oxford to Worcester, on a journey on the "Old Worse and Worse", or Oxford Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway to give it its more accurate name. Had he continued his journey just a few more miles, one of his most evocative contributions to poetry could have been very different:

"Yes. I remember Wyre Piddle—the name . . . "

Well, actually, it could not. The Great Western Railway, which in 1917 owned the "Old Worse and Worse", could not come to terms with the village's name, preferring the more anodyne "Wyre Halt". Sadly, little sign of Adlestrop now remains, and of Wyre Halt no trace is visible. But Wyre Piddle is as famous as Adlestrop, although probably for the wrong reasons. It is a case of once heard, never forgotten.

Sometimes, embarrassing or unfortunate names are shed by those to whom they belong. One thinks of Marion Morrison, better known as John Wayne. Whoever heard of a cowboy called Marion? Would Big Daddy, the all-in wrestler, have been taken quite as seriously had he been loyal to his given name—Shirley Crabtree? Would Elton John have been the phenomenon that he was and remains as just plain old Reg Dwight?

Wyre Piddle is proud of its name. Indeed, it has given the village a real advantage here in the House and at the Department of Transport as successive hon. Members representing the village, including my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer), have lobbied for its long-overdue bypass.

Its name is celebrated in one local poem, attributed by some to one of my illustrious predecessors, Sir Gerald Nabarro:

"Upton Snodsbury, Tibberton and Crowle
Wyre Piddle, North Piddle and Piddle-in-the-hole".

The name of Piddle-in-the-hole is no more, although I believe that land there was once farmed by the grandfather of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education.

North Piddle lies on no main road and need not detain us today, but a little further south, on the same Piddle Brook, lies Wyre Piddle itself. Prehistoric men buried their dead here. It features in the Domesday book as the rather more discreet Wyre Pidele. It is not a large village, but neither is it small, with 386 electors. Its perfect church, with its early Norman chancel arch, is situated on a bank above the Avon, flowing from Stratford to its junction with the Severn.

It is little wonder that the situation has inspired artists because the view across to Bredon hill, itself the subject of poetry by A.E. Housman, is captivating. Writing in 1949, L.T.C. Rolt, in his book "Worcestershire", said:

"Just below the village of Wyre Piddle is Wyre Lock with its curious diamond-shaped chamber, and here again the natural scene and human handiwork conspire together to reward the river traveller with a sight that no lover of England can easily forget. Over the outspread lock-beams a silver reach curves away between level water meadows, bordered by ranks of willow, which lead the eye towards the middle distance where, in perfect contrast to this level landscape, the glorious fourteenth century tower of Pershore soars upward, a benediction in stone. The scene is reminiscent of the view of Salisbury from another Avon".

Although the village still has several black and white houses, typical of Worcestershire, many are crumbling from vibrations generated by heavy traffic in the narrow main road. Structural problems are only one of the many reasons for the urgent construction of a road that will bring only benefit to my constituents and motorists alike.

The construction of a bypass will affect few businesses. We have an excellent pub in the village, the Anchor, situated between the main road and the Avon. It is a real local, but those coming from further afield to sample its charms—and its fine beer—will still be able to gain access from both directions, thanks to the design and route of the proposed new road. I know that one garage will lose passing trade, but I understand that the owner accepts that, and local authorities are attempting to minimise the impact.

The bypass will affect not just Wyre Piddle. We must not forget the plucky villagers of Upper Moor. That hamlet, with just 36 electors, is situated on the Evesham side of Wyre Piddle. Original plans for the bypass did not include Upper Moor. I am delighted that the lobbying skills of the villagers, who count among their number a literary agent and a BBC radio presenter, have led the county council to the wise conclusion that the bypass should relieve them, too. That was a wise decision by the county council, not just for the sake of my constituents but for the sake of all road users. The road at that point is particularly hazardous because a long bend conceals the houses of Upper Moor. A fatal accident occurred there recently and there would be many more if the bypass terminated between there and Wyre Piddle. Upper Moor residents feel that they are often overlooked. It is a pleasure to ensure that they are not overlooked in today's debate.

The road through Wyre Piddle is the old B4084, recently reclassified as the A4538. It forms part of the so-called Pershore corridor, and is a crucial link between the M5 at junction 6, north Worcester and Evesham. There it connects with the A435, currently the subject of a major improvement—the Norton Lenchwick bypass—by the Department of Transport, linking up to Redditch and junction 3 of the M42, and the A46 to Stratford, Warwick, the M40, Coventry and the M6.

Small additional works will be needed in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South just outside Evesham, at the so-called "Squires Link" to the A435 and the Evesham bypass when the Wyre Piddle bypass is built.

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): Does my hon. Friend recall that when

"Doctor Foster went to Gloucester
He stepped in a piddle right up to his middle"?

The word that he has cleverly played on has now become "puddle".

My hon. Friend is right to say that we need a bypass around Wyre Piddle. As he said, I first raised this subject 20 years ago. Does he accept that it is particularly necessary for my constituency because of the pressure that it will take off traffic going through Pershore? Will he, at some point in his speech, refer to the fact that there is a pecking order for bypasses in our county and that Broadway has now reached the top of the pecking order? That should not be prejudiced and although the need for a Wyre Piddle bypass must be accepted, we must first go ahead with the Broadway bypass.

Mr. Luff: I am delighted to endorse what my hon. Friend said. I hope to return to precisely those points later in my speech.

The county council said in its July 1994 bid for transport supplementary grant:

"The present road network includes two broadly parallel routes between Worcester and Evesham, namely A44 and A4538 (formerly B4084). For particular journeys one route is more attractive than the other, but overall traffic volumes are similar on the two routes."

In a public consultation exercise in early 1992, which examined the traffic problems and strategy for the Pershore corridor as a whole, various options for relieving traffic congestion in that part of Worcestershire were floated. It is fair to say that some of those options aroused considerable public anger. For example, concern focused on a proposal to build viaducts and bridges across the meadows and the Avon to relieve traffic problems in Pershore and Wyre Piddle.

That consultation produced a clear consensus that the best strategy was to stick with the long-established plans to bypass Wyre Piddle to the north and build a short western bypass, which would enable Pershore's problems to be addressed, at least in part. This debate is about the northern, and more substantial, road but I will return to the western route.

In March 1994, a further public consultation was held on possible routes for the northern road. Again, it produced a clear consensus, subsequently endorsed by Hereford and Worcester county council.

Not surprisingly, local people have had their suspicions about the county council's real intentions. The road has been discussed for a long time and need for it is growing daily. The earliest date on which construction can realistically begin is early 1997, but the approach adopted by the county has commanded my complete confidence, and I pay tribute to the work done by Dr. Martin Heyes, whom I still think of as the county engineer but who now rejoices in the title, "Director of Environmental Services". I pay tribute to his staff—of course, it is easy for me to do so when they have come out in support of the route that my constituents and I favour. In its document produced to support the March 1994 consultation, the county summed up the situation. It said:

"The existing route is of sub-standard width and poor alignment and falls short of standards required to carry the future predicted traffic on the A4538.

The centre of Wyre Piddle is a conservation area and there is a worsening environmental situation in an otherwise very pleasant village, caused particularly by heavy vehicles and growing congestion. To the east, the hamlet of Upper Moor suffers similarly with houses which front the road enduring noise and vibration. Direct access on to the A4538 is at times difficult and dangerous for those houses which abut the carriageway."

[Mr. Luff]

That is a slightly dry way of putting it, to say the least. The existing main road through Wyre Piddle carries on average 12,850 vehicles a day. The predicted flows in the bypass design year of 2013 are between 17,250 and 14,750 vehicles on the bypass, with another 5,000 vehicles using the village itself. Such traffic is simply unsustainable without the bypass.

At the village war memorial the road narrows and turns towards the village hall. The bypass committee says that the road is already carrying up to 30 large refuse lorries per hour to the major landfill site to the north. It will not be long before two trucks meet head on or a car finds that there is not enough room to pass without mounting the pavement and killing a pedestrian. There is a serious accident just waiting to happen.

If an accident does not occur in the village itself, it will occur at one of the two railway bridges at either end of the village or in Upper Moor as a resident's car seeks to join the main road and is hit by a speeding driver, or a driver, despairing of ever getting on to the main road at the war memorial, takes a risk that does not pay off.

The county council has kindly provided me with the 10-year accident record for Wyre Piddle and Upper Moor. The words "failed to negotiate bend" feature more than once. In this 10-year period there have been 33 accidents, 12 of them serious, 61 vehicles have been involved and there have been 49 casualties. Mercifully, there has been only one fatality—at Upper Moor when a 16-year-old pedestrian was knocked down by a car in December 1993.

Every month that the bypass is delayed we are putting at risk the lives of more pedestrians, residents and other drivers. Leaving to one side the environmental issues, the benefits to Pershore and the need to cope with traffic to and from the newly widened M5, there is an overwhelming case for the road on safety grounds alone.

The road is increasingly dangerous not just because of volume but because of speed of traffic. The 30 mph limit through Wyre Piddle is widely flouted. The county council is in dialogue with the parish council and its chairman, Mr. Gary Robinson. The parish council has enthusiastically pushed the case for the road for more years than any of us care to remember. It knows that traffic calming and management measures are not a solution, but just a temporary palliative.

I am grateful to the Minster's officials for the help that I have received from them in explaining to the parish council the possibilities for traffic calming and speed limit enforcement. I hope that in the years until the new road is built some new measures can be introduced, but they will never be a substitute for the northern Wyre Piddle bypass.

The Minister will have heard me mention the railway through Wyre Piddle on a number of occasions. Engineered by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, it still offers a fine service to Oxford and London from the Worcester and Pershore stations in my constituency, which also serve the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South, and from Evesham, which is just along the line. Early morning InterCity 125s act as alarm clocks for residents of Wyre Piddle whose homes are close to the line. Wyre Halt may have closed, but the Pershore and Evesham stations are close by—at least if one has access to a car.

Investment in new rolling stock has recently transformed the line. The better, more frequent services have resulted in a large increase in passenger traffic, sufficient to ensure that, for the first time in living memory, the railway covers its operating costs. I should like to see still more investment in the line, even though it would probably mean the end of the fine semaphore signals at Worcester Shrub Hill. New signalling and a few passing loops, well short of full redualling of that now single-track line, could increase volumes substantially.

Is that an alternative to the northern Wyre Piddle bypass? I think not. Traffic is being generated from the M5, from Evesham and the Cotswolds, from the landfill site and from the proposed new chicken farm on Throckmorton airfield—a disgraceful decision, but that is another story; perhaps for another Adjournment debate. More money is needed for the railway and it would bring real benefits. It would bring more mobility to my constituents who do not have cars—and there are many of them—but I fear that investing in the railway would have only a very slight effect on traffic volumes in Wyre Piddle.

We must also set the Wyre Piddle bypass in the context of the county's wider transport priorities—as my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South has asked me to do—and that will also give me a chance to thank the Minister for a wise decision by his Department.

The Worcester western bypass was, until the announcement before Christmas by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the county's top priority. The confirmation that the road will begin to be built around the turn of the year, subject to the outcome of a public inquiry, has brought enormous relief to my constituents in Worcester. The attractive shopping centre of St. Johns will be able to breathe again as all the M5 to Hereford traffic moves to the new road. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for the way in which he listened to the bipartisan pleas about that road.

The Broadway bypass on the A44 was the other major scheme for which the county bid unsuccessfully last year. It now moves to the top of the priority list, closely followed by the Bordesley bypass on the A441 and Wyre Piddle.

However, we must not lose sight of the Wyre Piddle western bypass. Although the northern road will help enormously, I cannot let this opportunity pass without reminding the Minister that we regard the western road, which I have discussed with him in the past, as being of strategic significance too. The county's transport supplementary grant bid last year stated:

"the benefits to the village will not be maximised until the Wyre Piddle Western by-pass is also constructed."

That road would form a link between the B4083 from Pershore to the A4538 itself. It would maximise the benefit of the Wyre Piddle northern road to Pershore and bring local benefits. Those local benefits have led the Department to reject even supplementary credit approvals for the road, and that in turn has led to the loss of a generous private sector contribution to the cost of the road. I hope that I can persuade the Minister to reflect again on the western road, and sanction its construction before too long.

The Wyre Piddle bypass has never been closer to completion. Compulsory purchase orders could be made this autumn. Assuming a public inquiry is necessary—I believe it may not be—there is no reason why a decision

could not be made by the Secretary of State on the planning issues next October, with tenders requested at about Christmas 1996. Construction could then begin in January or February 1997.

It would be the culmination of a campaign, probably spanning decades, begun by Sir Gerald Nabarro, conducted by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South and continued energetically by my predecessor, Lord Walker.

Wyre Piddle is moving up everyone's priority list, as today's debate shows, but just at our moment of victory, is the cup to be dashed from our lips? The tide seems to be turning against new road building. Will that tide sweep away the Wyre Piddle bypass and hundreds of equally important schemes up and down the country?

The first enemy of such schemes seems to be the Royal Commission on environmental pollution and its report on transport and the environment which was published on 26 October last year. Its radical proposals were seen as one of the most comprehensive attacks on road building ever made by any establishment body. Its press release made the point time and again:

"the report identifies as major adverse effects of the present transport system . . . the impact of road building."

"a road building programme which, although spending more money that ever before, would not stop congestion getting worse."

"Resources should be switched from road-building to public transport."

"A continuing spiral of further road building leading to further traffic growth would not be sustainable."

So it goes on. Alarm bells began to ring in Wyre Piddle and in similar villages and communities around the country, but worse was to come.

Shortly before Christmas, a new acronym struck further fear into the residents of Wyre Piddle. This time it was SACTRA—the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment. Published with the apparent endorsement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, its central conclusion was probably

"that it is possible for the provision of extra road capacity to induce extra traffic".

At that point I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State seeking reassurances that the Government's guarded welcome for the report did not spell trouble for Wyre Piddle. It is important to record another of SACTRA's conclusions:

"there is still need to consider additions to road capacity where they are environmentally and economically justified."

The essence of the case that I have made today is that the Wyre Piddle bypass will not generate new traffic and that it is environmentally and economically justified.

I recognise that the concerns about the rising tide of opposition to new road building will be echoed up and down the country. That is one of the reasons why I have sought this debate today and why I am so grateful that it has been granted.

Wyre Piddle may bring a smile to the lips, but its problems are very real. They stand as examples of the problems of many rural communities that are apprehensive that they may have missed the opportunity of the bypass for which they, like Wyre Piddle and Upper Moor, have been working and campaigning for so long. This debate gives the Minister an opportunity to reassure not just Wyre Piddle, but many other communities too.

My hon. Friend the Minster has to say two things today to reassure my constituents—and I hope those of many other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South in relation to the Broadway bypass. First, he should confirm that recent apparent changes in the Government's policy on road building have not changed the case for the Wyre Piddle bypass in any respect, and that the Wyre Piddle bypass and others like it will not generate new traffic, but rather relieve intolerable situations for the communities through which the traffic currently passes.

Secondly, I hope that my hon. Friend will confirm that the Wyre Piddle northern bypass remains eligible for transport supplementary grant. Its £4 million cost is not large compared with the cost of major motorway schemes, but the benefits that it will bring will be enormous. I hope that the Minister will recognise that county councils have quite a backlog of such schemes, which are widely supported by the public.

As massive spending on motorways seems set to be scaled down, perhaps the Minister can tell me that not all the money saved will go back to the Chief Secretary but that some of it will go to small schemes such as the Wyre Piddle bypass. In other words, far from threatening Wyre Piddle, perhaps SACTRA and the rest will advance such schemes.

This debate has provided an opportunity for the Government to reassure many thousands of our fellow citizens who are crying out for bypasses that they need not despair: that the Government are still on their side. I hope that my hon. Friend will seize it when he replies.

1.49 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) will understand that, by the very nature of these debates, the more he talks, the less I am able to answer. If I cannot cover all his points in the time available, I shall write to him about them.

My hon. Friend spoke of Wyre Piddle moving up the national agenda. That, like the phrase about the Minister being a part-time dentist, struck me as the sort of remark that will go down in history as one of the least apt ever.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester has pursued this bypass assiduously. He came to see me last October to discuss chiefly the Worcester western bypass but he also mentioned the virtues of this scheme. I took careful note of what he had to say, as I have on this occasion.

I welcome my hon. Friend's explanation of the value of the scheme. He ably demonstrated that it is one of those bypass projects that it is universally accepted we should undertake.

My hon. Friend asked whether the recent royal commission or SACTRA reports would impinge on the scheme. There are of course many ways of dealing with the problems of congestion and pollution on our roads. There is much to be said for integrating transport solutions, centred on the provision of good public transport as well as the use of the private car. There may be alternatives to transporting goods by road—rail and water, where appropriate. But there will always remain traffic problems of this sort, which can be dealt with only by means of a bypass.

A cursory look at the map will show why the Wyre Piddle proposition is perfectly robust. I should like to say a word about the transport supplementary grant system

[Mr. Steve Norris]

first, however. It is the Department's main grant towards the cost of capital expenditure on local authority roads. Every July, local highway authorities make their bids for this capital expenditure for the following year. The Secretary of State then considers those plans and makes his announcement in December.

In determining how much of an authority's proposed expenditure to accept, the Secretary of State has to consider the extent to which the roads that would benefit are of more than local importance, and the extent to which people living or working in an authority's area would be relieved of the effects of heavy through traffic.

There is no upper financial limit for TSG, but the scope for funding more than a few very large schemes is restricted by the availability of resources and the need for a balanced national distribution. Grant is not paid for schemes that cost less, individually, than £2 million. These will be included in programmes of work funded with block allocations of credit approvals, covering all forms of transport infrastructure.

Schemes are not usually accepted for TSG until the settlement for the year in which their main works contract is due to start. Neither is TSG usually intended to be paid in support of expenditure on design costs, land acquisition or advanced works. For large schemes of great strategic importance with particularly high expenditure in advance of their main works, however, the Department has the option of providing support by means of credit approval.

It is obviously not possible to pay all the TSG for which local authorities bid. Whether a scheme is accepted in a particular year depends on the extent to which it would help to meet the Secretary of State's objectives, on its economic and environmental benefits, and on its merits compared with those of all the other schemes proposed for acceptance by the 108 highway authorities in the same settlement.

Authorities do not receive a fixed share of TSG each year and there is no such thing as a minimum amount that can be guaranteed. However, contractual commitments on previously accepted schemes have a first call—provided any cost increases have been justified and satisfactory progress has been maintained.

I am happy to reassure my hon. Friend that the Wyre Piddle scheme is eligible for TSG. As he amply demonstrated, it would bring much needed relief to a community suffering from the unwelcome impact of traffic that is not, in the main, locally generated. I shall not, however, be able to take a fully informed view before the county council submits a detailed bid for TSG. Despite the now familiar anti-road hysteria, often stoked up by people who appear to have little else to contribute, I am well aware that many communities are only too glad to have a bypass to make their lives safer and more peaceful.

I should give my hon. Friend some idea of the difficulties that we face. This year, we received bids from highway authorities for TSG for about 80 eligible major schemes—seven times more than we could afford. As ever, many good candidates have had to be left out, and it was impossible to avoid disappointing several highway authorities.

In each of the past three years, we have made it clear in the annual guidance that we issue to local authorities that in view of the scarcity of public resources it would be exceptional for any authority to have more than one new major scheme accepted for TSG in a single settlement. That is why, in a year when only 25 new schemes succeeded in getting TSG, I was pleased that we could give approval for the Worcester western bypass scheme, the county's top priority.

I come next to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer). It is correct that one of the important considerations that we shall have to take into account will be the county council's priorities in respect of TSG approvals. I note what my hon. Friend said about Broadway. I was grateful to him for acknowledging, in that context, that Wyre Piddle may not be top of the county's list. That is, however, a matter for the county itself.

Mr. Luff: May I urge my hon. Friend to negotiate robustly with the Treasury this time around? If there is to be a reduction in motorway building, perhaps a few more bids from county councils will succeed instead.

Mr. Norris: I have promised my hon. Friend that, in my negotiations with the Treasury, Wyre Piddle will never be far from my mind. No doubt he will be able to make his own representations to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor in due course.

Another factor that my hon. Friend should bear in mind is the forecast date for the start of construction. I am advised that planning permission has not yet been secured for the scheme, and the necessary draft orders under the Highways Act have not yet been published. To consider the scheme for TSG in 1996-97 we would have to be confident that a start to construction in that year was likely. The county council will need to make good progress on the statutory procedures if that goal is to be achieved.

As my hon. Friend knows, we carefully considered the case for grant for the western bypass, but we concluded that it was not a road of more than local importance and hence did not qualify. The Department does not support expenditure on local roads generally; they are the responsibility of local highway authorities, which receive funding from the Department of the Environment for the upkeep of such roads. Hereford and Worcester county council may, if it wants to, use some of the resources that we allocate for minor works under the local transport capital settlement for the western bypass, but the money is unlikely to be sufficient for the purpose.

I quite understand the concern that my hon. Friend has expressed. I hope that he will appreciate that his representations have been listened to sympathetically and have borne fruit. We are prepared to consider the scheme for transport supplementary grant. It meets our criteria, and nothing in recent reports has rendered it less likely to be eligible. There are real questions about the extent to which bids for grant exceed the grants that are available. Indeed, it was ever thus. Financing is, therefore, by no means automatic. Approvals are generally granted only in the year in which the scheme is likely to start. There is some further work to be done in that regard in relation to the scheme.

I hope that my reply has been helpful to my hon. Friend. Given the crucial role of the county council in determining what should be its priorities for expenditure, it might be useful if my hon. Friends the Members for

Worcester and for Worcestershire, South and their constituents direct their principal concerns to the county council. It is the council which—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. We must move on to the next debate.

Lockerbie

2 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My concerns about Lockerbie have been set out in Adjournment debates, foreign affairs debates and endless parliamentary questions over six years, most recently on 13 December in the Scottish Grand Committee at column 40, so I invite the Foreign Secretary to address the following questions, of which the Foreign Office has had 26 hours' notice.

Did the Scottish police request interviews with Ghadanfar and Dalkoumani? If not, why not? If so, were they denied access to the two men? Will the British Government object if Dalkoumani is released later this year? Did the British authorities ever interview Marwan Khreesat, briefly detained and then released in Neuss, Germany?

Considering two Libyans have been indicted on the basis of circumstantial evidence, would the Foreign Secretary acknowledge contrary circumstantial evidence set out in recent days by Alan Francovitch, Con Coughlin and John Arlidge, and in their seminal, if derided, book "Trail of the Octopus" by Don Goddard and Lester Coleman? In particular, is the Foreign Secretary at ease, in the light of the "File on Four" programme, in respect of the pivotal witness, Toni Gauci, clothing shopkeeper from Malta?

If the Foreign Secretary is so sure about the Malta connection, how does he explain that Air Malta won an out-of-court settlement against Granada and *The Independent*, neither of which could substantiate its story of Maltese involvement?

Is the Foreign Secretary any more at ease in respect of another crucial witness, Edwin Bollier? Did he not sign a statement to the effect that his timing device had been sold only to the Libyans? But does not interrogation of Bollier's Stasi control reveal that that was a lie, as he had sold the same device to the Stasi?

What is the Foreign Secretary's assessment of the report of the air intelligence unit of the United States air force that Ali Akbar Motashemi paid the Al Abas and Abu Nidal groups $10 million in cash and gold to bomb Pan Am flight 103, in retaliation for the US "shoot-down" of the Iranian airbus?

Is the Foreign Secretary aware that the Crown Office received crucial American intelligence implicating Libya from Mr. Vincent Cannistraro of the CIA, who, by his own admission in the mid-1980s, ran a programme at the US National Security Council designed to destabilise and topple the regime of Colonel Gaddafi, and that one of the methods used in the campaign was the spreading of disinformation about Libya?

How can seemingly eternal United Nations sanctions against Libya be justified? Is the Foreign Secretary sure that the Crown Office "certainties" are not constructed on the quicksand of CIA disinformation?

How much reliance does the Crown Office put on the so-called testimony of Abdu Maged Jiacha, who worked at Luqa airport, who has received a $4 million reward and a new identity, and the benefits of the US federal witness protection programme? Apart from anything else, he seems to have quarrelled with the one of the two accused Libyans over a girl. That is about the level of it.

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

Is the Foreign Secretary aware that after Lockerbie all the Drug Enforcement Agency chiefs in Europe were ordered to Washington, and told that there were DEA agents and a drug courier on flight 103, and that all DEA officers received a cable informing all agents that they were in no circumstances to talk to anyone about the DEA people on that plane, including Khalid Jaafar?

Were drugs found among the debris near Lockerbie, and were Americans involved in concealing the discovery of drugs?

Hansard records in column 522 on 21 December 1988 that at 8.30 pm I intervened on the suject of the crash. My concerns about Lockerbie became acute when a West Lothian police officer—a friend of mine and a constituent—observed to me on new year's eve, 1988 that he did not know how so many Americans could be on such a gruesome scene messing around with the evidence.

Why has the Crown Office not talked properly to Dr. David Fieldhouse, the distinguished Bradford police surgeon, especially to correlate his body count with its count?

Will the Foreign Secretary explain why the German authorities did not join their US and UK colleagues in indicting the two Libyans for a crime committed on German soil, at the Rhein-Main airport, where by any account the bomb went on board?

Is it not the case that, shortly after the Anglo-American indictment, the German public prosecutor, Volke Rath, was quoted as stating that the Federal Republic of Germany had declined to join the US and UK indictment on the ground, as he put it, "of lack of evidence"?

In the investigation of a crime, the police in Scotland act, and must act, on the directions and instructions of the procurator fiscal and the Crown Office. Have the Crown Office and the procurator fiscal given the police directions or instructions to investigate recent allegations of Iranian and Syrian involvement in the bombing of Pan Am flight 103? Again, if not, why not?

In deciding whether charges should be brought and in preparing a case for trial, it is the duty of the prosecuting authorities in Scotland to consider and investigate evidence which tends to exculpate a suspect or an accused as well as evidence which tends to incriminate the suspect. Have the prosecuting authorities complied with that duty in the case of the two Libyan suspects, and are they currently complying?

A petition charging named individuals with the Lockerbie bombing having been presented to the sheriff of Dumfries, presumably on evidence regarded by the Lord Advocate as sufficient at the time to justify that step, and arrest warrants having been granted, do the prosecuting authorities in Scotland regard their investigating functions as being at an end?

Should they not, for example, seek to interview officials of the US embassy in Nicosia who were there in 1988 to determine what they knew of the events leading up to the Lockerbie disaster? In particular, should they not seek to interview the 1988 CIA station chief and the DEA country attaché, both now retired from Government service?

Have the Crown Office and the Scottish police investigated the possibility that the terrorists responsible took advantage of an American law enforcement operation to smuggle the bomb aboard flight 103?

Do the prosecuting authorities regard themselves as being free now to close their eyes to any new leads and decline to investigate any potential evidence which go counter to the allegations narrated in the petition or which appear to cast doubt thereon?

Do the prosecuting authorities really assert that the sole responsibility for investigating any such evidence rests on those entrusted with the task of representing the relatives if and when a trial takes place?

Ending with the relatives, six long years later, they want to know exactly why US personnel were withdrawn from flight 103, and exactly what US Government officials knew which was not made available to the youngsters going to their death.

2.7 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) because, as he said, he gave notice to my office of his line of questioning. He gave me plenty of time, but he has asked many detailed questions. If there are gaps between his questions and the fullness of my answers, I shall write to him to fill the gaps. I shall certainly deal with the main points that he raised.

I thought that it was right to reply to the debate myself for three reasons: first, because of my respect for the hon. Gentleman and for his integrity in this and other matters; secondly, because of the enormity of the crime at Lockerbie and the suffering which it caused and is causing; thirdly, because I wish to deal plainly and lay to rest certain suspicions and accusations which have arisen not so much from the hon. Gentleman's speech as from what he has copiously written in newspapers.

The Lockerbie investigation has been the most extensive ever carried out into one crime in Britain. On the basis of that criminal investigation and the vast amount of evidence uncovered, my noble and learned Friend the then Lord Advocate sought and was granted warrants for the arrest of two Libyan nationals accused of having carried out the bombing.

I must stress the total independence from Government of the investigation of the Lord Advocate in his responsibility for criminal prosecutions. Neither he nor his predecessor would have brooked any attempt to influence them in exercising their independent judgment. It is not the job of Ministers or the Foreign Office to decide who should be prosecuted for a crime. It is not the job of Ministers or the Foreign Office to pronounce opinions as to who is guilty. There is no place in the matter for diplomatic or political considerations, and we have not at any time allowed such considerations any place in our actions.

Neither the Foreign Office nor any agency for which I am responsible has attempted to steer the Lockerbie investigation or to shield any individual or state who may have been responsible. There is no hidden political influence behind the investigation, and there has been no censorship by the Foreign Office. All significant information relevant to Lockerbie obtained by the intelligence agencies—or anyone else, to my

knowledge—is invariably and as a matter of course provided to those who are responsible for the investigation. It is for the prosecuting authorities and, ultimately, we hope, for the courts, not the Government, to weigh the evidence; so when the hon. Gentleman asks whether I am at ease with that, or whether I am satisfied with that, those are not questions for me. It is not for me to weigh or ponder the evidence or to allow those under my control to do so.

There have been many debates on this matter, and the hon. Gentleman has asked many questions. Most recently, there was a discussion in the Scottish Grand Committee on 13 December last year. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland explained why no Minister could discuss the detail of evidence into the Lockerbie bombing or, indeed, any other criminal case, because once we began to do that, it would jeopardise the prospect of a fair criminal trial and render worthless the painstaking work of the investigators.

Of course—this is one of the hon. Gentleman's main concerns—the books can never be closed. The Dumfries and Galloway constabulary must remain, and does remain, ready to consider any new evidence that might be relevant to the case. The investigation remains open. If anyone has any new information that he or she considers relevant to the case, he or she should give it to the police without delay. Minds cannot be closed to fresh evidence, even if it were to open up new ideas on who carried out the bombing or backed the bombers.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Can my right hon. Friend say, therefore, who has been responsible for denying Mr. Bollier the right to see the evidence about the timing devices? It is a very important part of the evidence. He has been denied the right to see it, because he believes that he could decide whether it was sold to the Libyans or others. Who makes that kind of decision? Is it political, judicial or made by the police?

Mr. Hurd: It is certainly not political. It is certainly not made by me or any other Minister. Let me inquire into that aspect of the case. I shall write to my hon. Friend. It is certainly not me who would have taken any such decision, or could have done so.

The Lord Advocate—this is on a point that the hon. Member for Linlithgow raised—has always been at pains to make it clear that he is not in a position to exonerate other nations or their nationals. He simply has not seen, in his judgment, credible evidence to implicate them.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Foreign Secretary has seen the replies to me in *Hansard* today from the Secretary of State for Scotland, which, briefly, say that the Crown authorities were not aware of the existence of the US air intelligence report until 23 January this year. The replies discount the report and say that it has no relevance to the inquiry. I ask a simple question: given that the Crown authorities were co-operating so closely with the American authorities, why were they not aware of the existence of that report? Can the Foreign Secretary offer an explanation?

Mr. Hurd: I shall come to that report in a minute.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow asked a number of detailed questions. I can reply to some of them. He spoke of the Palestinian terrorists who were arrested in Germany in October 1988. It is the firm policy of the Lord Advocate not to give details of what inquiries have or have not been carried out, but it is necessary to make an exception in this case. In the case of Dalkoumani and Ghadanfar, I can confirm that requests were made for both men to be interviewed, that those requests were granted and that Scottish police officers were present at the interviews.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me to acknowledge what he described as contrary circumstantial evidence put forward by various individuals. We all know that there are a host of alternative theories on the subject. It is not for me, I repeat, to assess those theories. That is and must be a matter for the prosecuting authorities and the Lord Advocate. It is clear that such theories can be based only on an incomplete knowledge and understanding of the mass of evidence that is available to the Lord Advocate, who remains in no doubt that the charges against the two Libyan accused are justified.

That covers the reliability and significance of any particular piece of evidence put before a criminal court by the prosecution, including such matters, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, as the sale of clothing in Malta, the testimony of Edwin Bollier and evidence obtained from staff at Luqa airport. Those are matters which, eventually, we hope, a jury will consider once it has heard all the evidence.

I now deal with the American document, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Linlithgow and the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). It was released by the US Government under the Freedom of Information Act. It contains, as both hon. Members have said, the allegation that former Iranian Interior Minister, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, paid the sum of $10 million to have the Lockerbie bombing carried out. I make two points on the report. The document, as the hon. Member for Banfford Buchan said and as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told him, was available to the Crown Office on 24 January, but the allegation in it circulated well before that as a well-publicised rumour during the early stages of the investigation. It appeared in *The Sunday Times* in the second half of 1989. It appeared later in a book by David Leppard, "On The Trail of Terror", published in 1991.

As anyone who follows the case knows—certainly the two hon. Members do—during the early stages of the investigation, the possibility that Palestinian extremist groups might be responsible was extensively investigated, as were reports of Iranian involvement. No credible evidence—the assessment of the prosecuting authorities—has been found to substantiate either theory.

The document is not, as is sometimes made out, a statement of the views of the American authorities. It is a report of the views of an American intelligence agency source—in fact, an Iranian defector. He or she was reporting second or third-hand information. The source was untried and its reliability could not have been assessed. During the investigation, literally thousands of pieces of raw intelligence, often contradictory, were seen. When the document in question was assessed, as a US Government spokesman made clear last week, it was discarded as a "dud".

The hon. Member for Linlithgow asked a number of questions about the US Drug Enforcement Agency. I am assured that no DEA chiefs in Europe were recalled to Washington in the wake of the Lockerbie disaster. As regards the allegation that it was running an anti-narcotics

[Mr. Hurd]

operation, which went wrong, a copy of the film by Mr. Alan Francovitch, which contains those allegations, has been sent—I think by the hon. Gentleman—to the Crown Office. The matter was considered by the US House of Representatives Committee on Government Operations, Government Information Justice and Agriculture Sub-Committee in December 1990. I am arranging for a copy of the statement to that sub-committee by the assistant administrator of the DEA to be placed in the Library of the House.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the discovery of drugs. I think that the Lord Advocate wrote to him on 3 July 1992, saying that the only discovery of drugs at the Lockerbie site was a small quantity of cannabis.

The hon. Gentleman asked about Mr. David Fieldhouse. My understanding is that he has been interviewed several times by the Scottish police and that he gave evidence at the fatal accident inquiry.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to explain why the German authorities have not indicted the two Libyan accused. That clearly is a matter for the German prosecuting judicial authorities. It is not something that I can comment on, except to make the obvious point. Given that the bulk of the evidence is in the hands of the Scottish and American authorities, it seems clear to us that the trial should take place in one of those two countries. The German Government agree, as does the Security Council.

Incidentally, I understand that the comments that the hon. Member for Linlithgow attributed to the German state prosecutor were misquoted. The state prosecutor was referring not to the case brought by the Lord Advocate and the American authorities, but to the question of proceedings in Germany based on the evidence held there. The German state prosecutor is not familiar with the full details of the prosecution case.

Let me deal with a point of principle that I consider to be at the heart of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. I can confirm to him that the prosecuting authorities would take any evidence that tended to exculpate the accused just as seriously as any further evidence that tended to incriminate them. The hon. Gentleman said that that was the authorities' duty, and they see it as their duty.

The hon. Gentleman talked about American personnel being withdrawn from flight 103. I understand that one American Government employee who was booked on the flight missed it because of traffic congestion at Frankfurt, but it is true that a further 23, sadly, were victims of the disaster.

Let me return to the central question of where we stand now. The hon. Gentleman asked how the United Nations sanctions against Libya could be justified. We have asked ourselves repeatedly how best to proceed. The painstaking work of the Scottish police and the Crown Office has led to charges being brought against two Libyan individuals; the case against them stands. It is not a case constructed by me, or by the Foreign Office, and it owes nothing to diplomatic or political considerations. It was put together after the most massive investigation ever to take place in respect of any crime in Britain, and sustained by the Lord Advocate in the warrants that he issued. In his judgment, the case stands.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Is it the Government's view that one day the perpetrators of this terrible mass murder will stand trial in the High Court in Edinburgh—or a similar court elsewhere—or does the Foreign Secretary genuinely believe that they will never be brought to trial?

Mr. Hurd: I do not know the answer to that question, but I believe that it is our job to do our utmost to ensure that they do come to trial. They are outside our reach at present; we are making every effort to bring them within the reach of the court, but matters are not entirely under our control.

We and the American and French Governments—the French are currently concerned with another terrorist crime—have gone to unprecedented lengths to put diplomatic pressure on Libya to surrender the two Libyan citizens who are alleged to have carried out the bombing, and to satisfy the requirements of French justice over the bombing of flight UTA772 in September 1989.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Why do the British and French Governments set their faces so determinedly against the idea of trying the two individuals in some other place, such as The Hague, in the absence of an international criminal court?

Mr. Hurd: There are several answers to that. Primary legislation would be required in this country. I am not sure of the grounds on which a Minister would tell the House, "The instruments of justice in Scotland are inadequate for this purpose," but that would have to be the case. Nor, after all that has occurred, could we conceivably feel confident—whatever assurances were given in advance—that the Libyans would hand over those concerned to a court. We would go to the infinite trouble of constructing such a court, in the face of difficulty and controversy, when there could be no guarantee that those concerned would appear before it. We have considered the question, because—as the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) is aware—people have urged us in good faith to take such a course; but I do not think that it is a tenable answer.

Sanctions were imposed on Libya by the Security Council because of Libya's refusal to comply with resolution 731. We do not believe that they should or could be lifted until Libya has complied in full with Security Council resolutions. Let me explain the broader picture, to clear away any misunderstanding of what is involved on the part of the Libyan Government. In pursuing the sanctions and taking the view that I have just expressed, we have no hidden agenda; we are not involved in any vindictive campaign against either the Libyan people or their Government. Provided that Libya shows by concrete means that she has renounced all support for terrorism, we have no desire for sanctions to remain in force any longer than is necessary. On the contrary—I am not sure whether the House knows this—in an attempt to establish that the renunciation of terrorism is real, we have engaged in a number of meetings, at official level, with Libyan representatives to discuss their past links with the Provisional IRA. Although those discussions have not led to a fully satisfactory conclusion, they are evidence of our efforts to show that Libyan assurances in this matter are real.

Once the Libyan Government have arranged for the two Lockerbie suspects to appear for trial in Scotland or the United States and have satisfied French justice over the UTA bombing, we stand ready to see the sanctions suspended immediately. Once Libya has complied with the other requirements of the Security Council resolutions, we expect the sanctions to be lifted without delay. Those who argue that sanctions should be lifted now would do better to help us to persuade the Libyan Government to comply with the Security Council resolutions without further delay.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow asked whether I entertained any serious hope about the outcome. There have been times over the past two years when, on the basis of the information that I had, I thought that we were quite close to the possibility that the Libyans would comply with the resolution and that the two accused would come forward. I have taken great trouble to explain to various intermediaries how Scottish law functions: I have been fully briefed on that—on the safeguards, the legal precautions, the rights of representation and the nature of evidence required. We have repeatedly given those assurances to the Libyans. Although I have sometimes felt that we are close to the possibility that I have described, we have never actually reached that point; instead, there have been numerous side proposals which I fear were designed simply to prolong delay and throw dust in the eyes of all concerned.

Nevertheless, I do not think that we should despair. I should be reluctant—as, I am sure, the Lord Advocate would be—ever to say, "We give up." I repeat, however, that this is not a political or diplomatic exercise on our part: the crime committed was unique in the history of crime in this country, and our concern is that justice should be done. We shall continue to pursue that objective, and the fewer ramifications or complications are introduced into that simple story, the better will be our chances of success. There may be some points of detail that I have not picked up from the hon. Gentleman, but I hope that I have managed to deal with the gravamen of his case.

Some people are worried that there has been political interference in this case. The hon. Gentleman has been worried that the Crown Office may not be taking account of all the evidence and all the information that is available. I hope that I have dealt from my own knowledge with the first point and, from the knowledge that has been made available to me, I hope that I have dealt with the second. I thank the House.

Mr. Dalyell: The Foreign Secretary refers to points of detail. The trouble is that it is not a detail that Toni Gauci, the owner of this clothing shop in Malta, on whom the whole case rests, is an exceedingly unreliable witness. Since Scots Members of Parliament cannot get at the Lord Advocate, I do not know what more we can do. The fact remains that what the Foreign Secretary says are details brought up by Mr. Francovitch and others are absolutely crucial to any kind of respectable case, and respectable case there is none. *[Interruption.]*

The professor of Scots law at the university of Edinburgh has publicly said not only does he think that a jury would not convict but that a judge in Scotland might well throw the case out on the ground that there is no case to answer. That is the situation that we have reached. I do not think that senior Cabinet Ministers can pass everything to the Lord Advocate in such a case.

Dr. Godman: Or worse, pass it to Washington.

Mr. Dalyell: Nor, as my hon. Friend says, can they pass it to Washington.

I thank the Foreign Secretary for his courtesy, but in a sense the gravamen of the case has not been responded to. I beg the Government to go to the Lord Advocate and ask him whether he is at ease—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, pursuant to Order [19 December].

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Union

1. **Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent representations he has received on the European Union.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I receive from different sources quite regularly representations on the European Union.

Mr. Milburn: Is not it clear from recent interventions by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) and Lord Howe that Ministers are simply caving in to the anti-European agenda of some Conservative Back Benchers and people in the Cabinet? Is it not obvious that Britain's interests in Europe are secondary in the Foreign Secretary's mind to the appeasement of competing factions inside the Conservative party? Why does not the Foreign Secretary stand up for what we all know he believes in rather than play footsie with those who clearly want him out of his current job?

Madam Speaker: Order. We have just finished Adjournment debates and we are now in Question Time.

Mr. Hurd: I am grateful, Madam Speaker. I thought it was becoming rather stale stuff. On the basis of the general principles which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister established in his speech at Leiden and which he has since elaborated, we are constructing specific and positive proposals which Britain will be able to put forward at the intergovernmental conference next year. That is the immediate task before us and I am sure that that is the right way to set about it.

Mr. Dykes: Will my right hon. Friend endorse and follow the wise advice of Alain Lamassoure, the French European Affairs Minister, who yesterday suggested that central bank governors should keep quiet on EMU, or at least say less, and leave the decisions to the politicians in the member states, particularly as the enthusiasm for EMU is growing everywhere, with the constitutional exception of Denmark?

Mr. Hurd: I do not agree. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister obtained freedom for this country to choose, yes or no, if and when the choice of a single bank and a single currency comes before us, which in our view will not be before 1999. For the moment, we have had enough purely political discussion of these points. What is now needed is a slightly more substantial account, perhaps not led by politicians, of the effect of the change—yes or no—on the freedom and prosperity of our constituents. The Governor's speech yesterday, which was analysed by some newspapers as being for and by others as being against the proposition, set out the pros and cons with admirable clarity.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Which does the Foreign Secretary regard as the more accurate commentary on the Government's policy on Europe: that of the former Foreign Secretary, Lord Howe, who said that the policy is being dragged into a ghetto of sentimentality and self-delusion, or that of the former Minister of State at the Foreign Office, the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton), who said that certain Cabinet Ministers are behaving as if they were members of the Flat Earth Society?

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that either comment fills the bill.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that there is no question of any policies relating to Northern Ireland being constructed under the aegis or framework of a constitutional arrangement that gives effect to the proposals for an all-Ireland policy which would be consistent with any regional policy developed by the European Union?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is an hour in advance of his moment. That question could be properly addressed to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Robin Cook: Will the Foreign Secretary take this opportunity to repeat his description of the manifesto of the nine rebel Members of Parliament as containing ideas that were unreal? Did he read yesterday's statement by the rebels that the concessions by the Cabinet to those unreal ideas were encouraging, but that it must make more? How many more unreal ideas is he prepared to accept, or is it time for the British Government to base their policy towards Europe on the interests of the 60 million people of Britain, not on the careers of the nine Tory Members of Parliament?

Mr. Hurd: I am delighted if any of my hon. Friends, or former hon. Friends, are delighted with Government policy, which is not constructed on the basis of any document that they have issued. It is constructed on what the Prime Minister said at Leiden last November. In his basic statement on what the intergovernmental conference should be about, he said:

"The IGC must be the anvil on which we forge a stronger union."

That is our view.

Mr. John D. Taylor: I pose this question specifically to the Foreign Secretary. Does he agree that the European Union is a club of sovereign states? If so, is it possible for one all-Ireland body to represent the views of two sovereign states?

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that that is envisaged even in the thoughts that are being discussed by the British and Irish Governments, but I advise the right hon. Member, as I advised my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), to put that specific point to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Yeo: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the vision that he and the Prime Minister have set out of a Europe of nation states, freely co-operating to mutual advantage on a wide range of issues, not only commands the support of the vast majority of the British people, but is entirely consistent with everything that the Conservative party has said on the subject for the past 30 years? Does he further agree that that consistency contrasts starkly with the chopping and changing of the Labour party, whose leader and present Front-Bench

spokesman are espousing positions on Europe which are totally the reverse of those that they adopted just a few years ago?

Mr. Hurd: I may send my hon. Friend a wearisome sheaf of my speeches on the subject—he may have had a hand in some of them, for all I know. They bear out what he said. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have, for several years, been emphasising the point that my hon. Friend summarised about the working together of nation states.

I share my hon. Friend's worries about the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition has been billing and cooing all over Brussels. The other day, yesterday perhaps, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) made a speech that he could have borrowed from one of my archives. It is a bit worrying to Conservative Members that the main Opposition party should be so sadly divided on the subject.

Macedonia

2. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current situation in Macedonia.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): Promoting the political and economic stability of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia remains a key element in our preventive diplomacy in the southern Balkans. It is important that she should enjoy full international recognition and gain full access to the benefits of co-operation with international institutions.

Ms Eagle: Does the Minister agree that destabilisation in Macedonia would cause a major problem and pose a major threat to peace and stability in Europe, especially as the threat could then spread to Greece and possibly further? Does he think the position there is getting better or worse?

Mr. Hogg: I agree with the main thrust of the hon. Lady's intervention. Clearly, destabilisation in Macedonia could have serious repercussions in the southern Balkans. I am reasonably optimistic as to the stability of the country. That stability depends on the ability and willingness of the Albanians and Macedonians in Macedonia to work together. We shall do all that we can to impress on both communities the importance of co-operation, and to impress on President Gligorov, in particular, the importance of addressing seriously the concerns of the Albanian minority in the country. He is doing so, but he needs continual encouragement.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my right hon. and learned Friend have any plans for action within the European Union to bridge the stalemate over the blockade of Macedonia by the Greeks, bearing in mind the fact that it is bringing severe economic hardship?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes a serious point. The European Court of Justice is today considering the case which has been brought before it by the Commission with the strong support of the British Government. The other way forward is through the mediation of Cyrus Vance. We hope that the Governments of both Macedonia and Greece will respond positively to the suggestions made by Cyrus Vance.

Mr. O'Hara: Will the Minister recognise that, just as President Gligorov should be urged to resolve his differences with the Albanians, he should also be urged to address positively the serious concerns of the Greeks? He must recognise that the Greeks could be the key to the future security and prosperity of Macedonia.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is right to stress the importance of good relations between Greece and Macedonia. He is right to imply that the blockade by Greece of Macedonia is having a serious impact on the economy of Macedonia. The hon. Gentleman's point reinforces the answer that I gave previously about the need for both Governments to address positively the proposals of Cyrus Vance.

Middle East

3. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the progress being made towards achieving peace in the middle east.

Mr. Hurd: We welcome the substantial progress that is being made, but we are concerned at the strains on the peace process in the wake of the dreadful bombing near Tel Aviv. The forthcoming visit of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to Israel, the occupied territories and Jordan on 12 and 13 March will underline our continuing support for the peace process.

Mr. Carrington: Although the responsibility for the problems in the peace process is complex, does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the principal reasons for that is the new proposed settlements on the west bank? Will my right hon. Friend put maximum pressure on the Israeli Government to stop those proposed settlements and will he put maximum pressure on the American Government to exert what influence they have in Tel Aviv to ensure that the settlements do not carry on?

Mr. Hurd: I agree with my hon. Friend about that. We persuaded our European partners on 5 January to set this out again. We expressed our concern and called for a total cessation of new settlements. We believe that all settlements in occupied territories—that includes east Jerusalem—are illegal and an obstacle to peace. We point that out consistently. I hope that my hon. Friend will not ignore the sense of shock over the terrorist bombing in Israel which makes Prime Minister Rabin's task much more difficult.

Mr. Norman Hogg: Will the Foreign Secretary review his decision to lift the arms embargo on the state of Syria in view of its reluctance to join in the peace process? Will he ensure that that Government are aware of the British Government's condemnation of the murderous activities of Islamic Jihad—it is based in Damascus—in Netayna on 22 January?

Mr. Hurd: We would not be justified in urging our European partners—it was a European decision—to reimpose that arms embargo. I have already made clear my views about the terrorist act in Israel which killed 21 people.

On the Syrian track of the peace process, movement is needed from both sides. They will both have to show flexibility. I believe that they will achieve a settlement down that track, but the process of getting there is proving very slow.

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the peace process is to continue to advance, as I know we all hope that it will, it is necessary not only for Syria and all Israel's neighbours to join in, but for states that participate in the process to not only condemn terrorism but take active steps to remove international terrorism from their territory?

Mr. Hurd: Yes, I agree. I do not think that one should underestimate the difficulties that Mr. Arafat has in Jericho and Gaza; we all know that they are real and formidable. We hope that the meeting in Cairo tomorrow between the leaders of the countries of the region and the PLO will serve to give fresh impetus to the peace process and in particular to the Palestinian track.

Mr. Morgan: On the position of Iraq in the middle eastern peace process, what further action can the Government take against the Iraqi Government following the attempted assassination in Iraq of the defector from the Iraqi army, Major Safa al Battat, who is currently being treated for his attempted poisoning at Llandough hospital in Cardiff which serves my constituency? What is the Government's policy on defectors from the Iraqi army who are helping Shi'ite rebels against the Iraqi Government? Is there any Government assistance to the hospital to help it provide 24-hour security for Major al Battat?

Mr. Hurd: That does not arise from the question and I do not think that it is within my responsibilities. However, it is clearly a serious matter so I shall look into it and ensure that the hon. Gentleman gets a letter.

Mr. Batiste: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Dr. Shaqaqi, the leader of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, claimed responsibility for the bombing from Damascus on 22 January and that no action has been taken against him by the Syrian authorities? How does that square with Syria's profession that it is no longer a terrorist state and wishes to participate in the peace process?

Mr. Hurd: That is a fair question. I cannot confirm the facts as stated by my hon. Friend, but, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Sir T. Sainsbury) said, it is clearly the responsibility of all the states that border Israel or which have any concern in the matter to ensure that terrorist activities are not planned from their territory.

Mr. Cousins: The whole House supports the Foreign Secretary's condemnation of terrorist incidents and will welcome the Prime Minister's visit to Israel, Palestine and, especially, Gaza. But can the Foreign Secretary throw any light on what the Prime Minister will be taking with him by way of definite programmes of economic help which will assist the Palestinian authorities and the brave and beleaguered Israeli Government and bring hope in the immediate future to all the unemployed young men of Gaza whose lives and opportunities are a central element in resolving the crisis?

Mr. Hurd: Certainly. We are providing £75 million in support of the peace process and the Palestinians over the next three financial years—that it is in bilateral British and multilateral assistance. As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, we have concentrated especially on what Mr. Arafat asked me to do, which was to provide help for the police force—£3 million for salaries, training courses for senior officers and 200 sets of equipment—and we are now seeking to finalise a further package of technical assistance worth £250,000.

Far East

4. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of relationships with countries in the far east.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Alastair Goodlad): Our relations with the great majority of countries in the far east are excellent and we are working to enhance them further across a wide range of fields including trade, investment, education and culture. The strength of these relations is reflected in British exports to the Asia Pacific region, which rose by nearly 20 per cent. in the first 11 months of 1994 compared with the same period in 1993.

Mr. Shaw: Will my right hon. Friend give an undertaking that the Foreign Office will next year give a high priority to improving our relationship where possible with the countries known as the tiger nations in the far east? Those countries are economically very successful; they offer a great many opportunities to this country and believe in the free market and the enterprise philosophy. Will he therefore give every possible support to those countries and our relationship with them?

Mr. Goodlad: Yes. The Government have already reallocated resources to strengthen the commercial sections in the 11 posts in the region. New trade offices have been opened in Nagoya and Pusan and others are under consideration. Seventy-three trade-related ministerial visits to the Asian Pacific countries have been undertaken or are planned in the current financial year, many accompanied by business delegations. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the immense importance of those countries to us.

Mr. Parry: Will the Minister make a statement on the relationship between the British Government and the democratic Government of Taiwan?

Mr. Goodlad: We have no diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

Mr. Elletson: Will my right hon. Friend comment on the state of our relations with Malaysia and, in particular, the prospects for further orders of defence equipment upon which many British Aerospace jobs in Lancashire depend?

Mr. Goodlad: Our relations with Malaysia are good. The Malaysian Government made it clear that they regard last year's problems as a thing of the past. Our exports to Malaysia continue to grow strongly and in 1994 seem likely to have increased by some 40 per cent. over the previous year. I anticipate that the forthcoming year will be good as well.

Rev. Martin Smyth: May I refer to the terse response concerning Taiwan given earlier? Is it not time that we started to take the lead as a nation to bring Taiwan, as a

people and as a nation, into the democratic community and into the United Nations, in which it can at least contribute in comparison to other member countries that do not pay their way?

Mr. Goodlad: Since 1972, this country has recognised the People's Republic of China as the sole representative of China at the United Nations. The claims of Taiwan are not so recognised.

Russian Federation

5. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made of potential instability within the republics and other constituent units which currently comprise the Russian Federation.

Mr. Hurd: The conflict in Chechnya could destabilise the north Caucasus, but has not yet done so. Despite calls for a regional uprising by General Dudayev, fighting has so far been confined to Chechnya. There is no evidence that the conflict has so far stirred up secessionist tendencies elsewhere in the federation.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: In the wake of the Chechnya disaster, does my right hon. Friend believe that the Russian Federation will be able to resist the significant number of secessionist movements elsewhere in the federation? Does he believe that the international community could make available further technical assistance to provide further stability in the former Soviet Union, which must be of paramount interest to this country?

Mr. Hurd: It is not in our interests that the Russian Federation should degenerate into chaos, but my hon. Friend is right in calling what is happening in Chechnya a disaster. The Prime Minister has written to President Yeltsin on the matter and I have been in touch with Mr. Kozyrev. Some humanitarian help is getting through. The Overseas Development Administration, our organisation, has committed £1 million. Half of that will be channelled through the British Red Cross to the international appeal of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The latest tranche of European aid, amounting to a total of £8 million, was announced this morning.

Mr. Robin Cook: May I press on the Foreign Secretary the grave concern across the nation at the scale of military violence in Chechnya? Does he agree that bombing hospitals and village markets serves no legitimate military role and that the west must support those in Russia who, with great personal courage, have condemned such attacks? May I specifically press the Foreign Secretary on the joint military exercise with Russia due to take place later this year? Will he assure the House that it would not be appropriate for British forces to be engaged in a joint exercise with the Russian army, unless the war in Chechnya is first brought to an end and the people of Chechnya are able to live in peace?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman has the accent of this right. The point that he made about the disproportionate brutal use of force has already been made by the Prime Minister to President Yeltsin. It is also reflected in the declaration that my European colleagues and I issued at the Foreign Affairs Council on 23 January. There are a number of points coming up, on which we would have been very glad to co-operate with the Russians on specific matters over the coming year. We will still be glad if the Chechen situation can be quickly resolved along the lines set out by the Prime Minister.

The hon. Gentleman has mentioned one area. There is also the signature of the interim agreement, which may be ready by March. At the Foreign Affairs Council we said that we would need to watch what is happening very carefully and judge what further steps might be needed.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend agree that while no individual country or international organisation has the right to encourage rebellion, it is very important that there is unequivocal condemnation of the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians and the destruction of their homes? Will he confirm that that violates the spirit and probably the letter of the Helsinki agreements? Will my right hon. Friend be a little more forthright in his condemnation of what has happened?

Mr. Hurd: We have been very firm, as I was personally in a speech that I made last week. What the Europeans have said, and what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told President Yeltsin, has left Russia in no doubt about the cloud that Chechnya casts over the reform process and, therefore, over our support for the reform process. We are not supporting personalities in Russia; we are supporting the process of reform.

Human Rights

6. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what issues the United Kingdom has raised at this week's United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The UN Commission on Human Rights runs from 30 January to 10 March. The commission will pass over 100 resolutions on a wide range of human rights themes and the human rights situation in various countries. The United Kingdom will participate in the drafting of some and in the negotiating of all of them. I will deliver the United Kingdom national statement on 8 February.

Mr. Mullin: What position will we take over the illegal occupation of East Timor by Indonesia? Does the Minister think that our desire to sell Indonesia large quantities of weapons will in any way confuse the Indonesians about the seriousness with which we take the issue?

Mr. Hogg: I do not think that the Indonesians are the least bit confused. We have made it very plain that we do not recognise Indonesian annexation of East Timor. Furthermore, we strongly support the intervention of the United Nations Secretary-General to resolve that point. We urge the parties to play an active and positive role in coming to terms under his auspices.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: While recognising local customs, traditions and values, may I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to agree that the cause of universal human rights is set back by the selective attitude of certain countries to them? In particular, I mention the attitude of Muslim countries to those who proselytise or evangelicise

for Christianity in their countries, especially in Iran, Egypt recently, and Pakistan. Will my right hon. and learned Friend make that an issue for discussions at the talks?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is entirely right to focus on the universality of human rights. There is a worrying disposition on the part of some countries to argue that the achievement of human rights can be postponed in relation to the achievement of other objectives, for example, economic progress. I believe that that is wrong. We are right to emphasise on every possible occasion that all countries have, as a paramount duty, the obligation to ensure a proper respect for human rights within their frontiers.

Mrs. Clwyd: On the question of torture, will the Minister defend the export of electronic shock batons from the United Kingdom to overseas countries where torture is widespread? Why, when I asked the Government to list the companies to which export licences were granted for that purpose, was I told that the question could be answered only at disproportionate cost? Is not that just dodging the question once again? Does not it give the game away? Does not the Minister understand that nothing destroys the Government's credibility more than turning a blind eye to such a disgusting trade?

Mr. Hogg: We do not turn a blind eye to those issues. Our position on those matters is crystal clear. During the speech that I will give, I will draw attention to the importance that we attach to combating torture wherever it is found. For that reason, we will also be supporting the re-adoption of the mandate for the rapporteur on that subject.

European Union

7. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he is taking to prepare the United Kingdom for an expanded European Union.

Mr. Hurd: One of our most important objectives in the rest of this century is the expansion of the European Union to the east. That will require the countries of central and eastern Europe to adapt their economies to the demands of the single market, but it will also involve fundamental reform of existing European Union policies, in particular the common agricultural policy and the structural funds. We shall be pressing for that.

Mr. Colvin: Does my right hon. Friend share my view that no Conservative Member is against enlargement and that the more we enlarge the more remote becomes the possibility of a single currency? Conservative Members also share some scepticism about the European Union, although none of us wants to leave it. Is there not a united party strategy on Europe which is very much in accord with the views of the British people? Is that not in sharp contrast with the Opposition, who are not only inconsistent about Europe but split three ways?

Mr. Hurd: I have already made a puzzled comment on the position of the Opposition. My hon. Friend is perfectly right. There is much more common ground on such matters than commentators would like to believe. That will emerge as the immediately past tumult dies down and the serious policy work goes forward.

We need to remember that the European Union is greatly attractive to those who live in the centre and east of Europe, as their strong interest in joining it makes clear. As my hon. Friend has said, we have always believed that the European Union's door should be open to those who wish to join the rest of Europe and are able to do so.

Mr. Skinner: Why does the Foreign Secretary not understand that, out there in Britain, the centre of gravity in relation to attitudes to the Common Market has shifted dramatically in the past few years? From Brightlingsea to Shoreham, the Cornish fishermen and all the rest around Britain, it is significant that, after 21 years of the Common Market and 16 years of the Tory Government, people are fed up to the back teeth.

Mr. Hurd: I understand the hon. Gentleman's motives in this matter, but his rant should be directed at the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, within the expanded European Union, there will be great scope for much better co-ordination of defence policy? Is it not absurd that industries are co-ordinated but that defence industries are specifically excluded? Does that not play into the hands of the United States, where competition is intense?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend may have read the admirable speech on defence policies in Europe made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in Brussels the day before yesterday. It was a painstaking and thorough analysis with some very interesting thoughts in it, to which should certainly be added the consideration that my hon. Friend has brought forward.

Ms Quin: The 1996 conferences will, presumably, prepare the way for enlargement. In that connection, the Secretary of State for Employment is recorded as saying that there are three matters on which members of the Cabinet have already agreed to use their veto. Will the Secretary of State confirm those three matters? In particular, in respect of powers to the European Parliament, does that mean that the Government will even veto any measures to allow the Parliament greater control over the European Commission?

Mr. Hurd: No, nor has anybody said anything to that effect. On the contrary, we believe that if the new European Parliament, which was elected last year, really wants to establish a reputation with the citizens, it should concentrate precisely on dealing with those matters which national Parliaments cannot reach. In particular, it should use to the full the powers given to it to deal with fraud.

Mr. Hendry: Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that he will continue to argue for Britain to opt out of the social chapter within an enlarged European Union? In particular, will he draw attention to the report from the European chambers of commerce, which was published yesterday, on 120,000 firms in Europe? It showed that British firms expect to create more new jobs than firms in any other country in Europe, and that German firms expect to create fewer because of the horrendous social costs that they face.

Mr. Hurd: Yes, indeed. There was more evidence to that effect during Prime Minister's Question Time

yesterday. It is perfectly true that employers, particularly on the continent, have been rather slow to raise their voices against the distortions and uncompetitiveness that have been imposed on Europe by some legislation. It is important that we should be clear that the arrival of a Labour Government, with the one policy on which Opposition Members are all agreed—the imposition of the social chapter—would be pretty disastrous for jobs in this country.

Child Labour

9. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty Government's policy towards child labour.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are very concerned about the exploitation of child labour abroad. We support measures to protect the rights of children, including the right to be protected from economic exploitation.

Mrs. Jackson: Should not the Government be deeply ashamed of the UN report on this country's record on children's rights, which was published last week? That report criticised Britain on nearly every aspect included in the convention on children's rights drawn up by the UN. Will the Government make a start in complying with the UN convention by at least agreeing to change their stance on child labour within the European Union and by complying with the child labour directive in 1996, like everyone else, instead of securing an opt-out to put that decision off for four years?

Mr. Hogg: The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child examined the report last week, but we have not yet received its conclusions. If the hon. Lady has given a correct account of what is in the report, I am bound to say that it does not seem to make a great deal of sense. We shall respond in due course. What we do within the United Kingdom is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Will my right hon. and learned Friend remind the House that the declaration of the rights of the child was initiated by the United Kingdom? Would he like to mark that by paying tribute to James Grant—who has just died—who, as executive head of UNICEF, was responsible for the signing of 170 countries to the declaration of the rights of the child, and who was fully supported by the UK?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes a number of points with considerable force. Lying behind what she says is the fact that there are serious problems in the world relating to the exploitation of children. For a committee to criticise the United Kingdom in the way in which the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) states is, frankly, trivialising that issue.

West Bank

10. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Israeli Government regarding the present and possible expansion of Jewish settlements in the west bank.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We and our EU partners regularly raise with the Israeli Government our concerns about settlement building in the occupied territories, reaffirming that it is illegal and should be stopped.

Mr. Gunnell: I am glad that the Minister takes that stance. Does he agree that the so-called settlement freeze underpins the declaration of principles? If the Minister agrees with the Foreign Secretary that the settlement policy poses a great problem to Mr. Rabin, does he also agree that it poses just as great a problem to Mr. Arafat? Will he redouble his efforts to have the entire EC press for a cessation in the expansion of the settlements because, without that, the peace process will not move forward?

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made our opposition to the settlement policy plain, and we regard it as an obstacle to the middle east peace process. We have taken every opportunity to say so, and we shall continue to do so.

Mr. John Marshall: My right hon. and learned Friend will have heard my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary praise the flexibility of Mr. Rabin. Does he agree that it is most unfortunate that that flexibility is being rewarded both by the failure of the captors of Ron Arad to release him and by the fact that the Hamas-inspired guerillas continue to wage war on the people of Israel?

Mr. Hogg: The Government, and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in particular, have paid tribute to Prime Minister Rabin on many occasions. The steps which he has taken in committing the Israelis to the peace process are acts of courage of historic importance. I agree that other forces, to which my hon Friend referred, are working against that. In particular, the acts of violence—to which my hon. Friend also referred—are also serious obstacles to the peace process. It is vital that we do all that we can to persuade those responsible for those acts of violence to stop them. Furthermore, it is a serious disgrace that Ron Arad should be held—if he is still alive—and he should be released with all possible speed.

Sir David Steel: A few minutes ago the Foreign Secretary made an oblique reference to the disappointing quality of the new administration in Jericho and Gaza. Does he recognise that the delay in holding elections is partly caused by the continued settlement programme? Will he confirm that the number of settlements has increased by nearly 10 per cent. since the Oslo agreement?

Mr. Hogg: The right hon. Gentleman is echoing the point made by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. I agree that the creation of additional settlements is an obstacle to peace. It makes it more difficult for the Palestinians to move forward. The principal obstacle to holding elections, however, is not so much the settlements but the Israelis' failure to redeploy their forces away from residential areas within the occupied territories. I would focus on that point. The right hon. Gentleman's broad point, however, is entirely sound.

Middle East

11. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met his European partners to discuss the middle east peace process.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are in regular contact with our European partners about the middle east peace process, most recently at the Foreign Affairs Council on 23 January.

Mr. Ross: Has the Minister had a chance to discuss with his European partners the blocking, losing and selling of equipment donated by the European Union to the emerging embryonic Palestinian authority in Gaza and the west bank, which is causing considerable problems there? I am sure that the Minister does not need me to remind him that six sewage trucks from the Paris municipality have been blocked in the port of Ashdod since October 1994; medical material from the European Union was lost in 1993; and two ambulances and two Land Rovers donated to the Nablus chamber of commerce have been blocked for the past six months.

Much more important for this House, computers worth several hundred thousand francs, donated by the European Union but paid for by our Government, were eventually sold at auction by Israeli customs because of bills that had been run up by the deliberate failure to allow them to get out of the port of Ashdod. What will the Minister do about that? Will he get someone from the Tel Aviv embassy to go to the port of Ashdod to clear that backlog?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman has raised a number of instances. I have not discussed those matters with my European colleagues. Although I have seen a large number of representatives of the Palestinian community in London, they have not raised those points with me. That is not to say that the points are not real and do not need to be dealt with. The hon. Gentleman has raised them and I shall have them looked at. If there is substance in what he said, we shall see what we can do to assist.

Drug Trafficking

12. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last consulted his Colombian counterparts to discuss co-operation over control of drug trafficking.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last discussed co-operation to control drug trafficking with the Colombians when he met the Ministers of Finance, of Mines and Energy, and of Foreign Trade on 30 January.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: My hon. Friend will acknowledge the excellent relations that exist between this country and Colombia. Will he join me in giving his whole-hearted support to any ventures to combat the evils of drug trafficking? To that end, when he meets Colombian Ministers later this year, will he strongly support the positive British input into the new police-army units that I have seen in Colombia, in which British expertise in security and technology plays such an important part?

Mr. Baldry: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. Clearly, tackling the drugs trade concerns us all. The Government of Colombia are committed to eradicating coca and opium cultivation throughout Colombia. We should not underestimate the scale of that task. We continue to support the Colombian Government in tackling the drugs trade. We have made available almost £13 million of assistance since 1989 and at present we are supporting a three-year programme of rural anti-narcotics training for the Colombian anti-narcotics police. Customs and Excise has been providing training for drug enforcement agencies. I am pleased to have my hon. Friend's endorsement of the work that we do there.

Mr. Miller: Would it not be more helpful to the Colombians if we gave greater support to communities in this country? Should we not tell the Colombians that we shall strengthen our Customs and Excise and police activities, rather than, as is happening in my constituency, closing Customs and Excise operations, so that there is no longer a single police officer engaged in drugs traffic work?

Mr. Baldry: It is important that we tackle demand as well as production as part of any international drugs strategy. That is why we have a substantial programme of domestic action to tackle drug misuse, which costs more than £500 million each year and includes vigorous law enforcement, education and prevention measures.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Does my hon. Friend agree that drug trafficking is one of the most horrific problems facing the world today? There are growing millions of drug addicts in America, in Europe and in the Commonwealth countries alone. The gross annual turnover from drug trafficking in some countries exceeds the gross domestic product of a country like the United Kingdom and many countries are politically totally in the hands of the drug mafia. We can deal with the problem only through urgent and intensive international co-operation. Will the Minister, on behalf of the United Kingdom Government, do everything possible to ensure that such co-operation occurs?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. The drugs threat is a many-headed hydra. It is an international problem which requires an international response. All countries must encourage international co-operation to combat the threat, and that is why we take a leading role in the United Nations drug control programme.

I am pleased to inform the House that we are the second largest contributor of funds to the programme. We also provide substantial amounts of development aid to other countries to allow them to play their part, as was illustrated in an earlier answer about Colombia. I agree with everything that my hon. and learned Friend has said and he can rest assured that the United Kingdom is determined to play a leading role in tackling international drug trafficking.

Rwanda

13. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about his Department's policy on Rwanda.

Mr. Baldry: Our policy is to work with the international community and with the Rwandan and other regional Governments to encourage the return of refugees,

to promote reconciliation between the parties, to rehabilitate Rwanda and to prevent a recurrence of the events of 1994 or a destabilisation of the region.

Mrs. Roche: Does the Minister agree that it is absolutely essential that the criminals who were responsible for last April's campaign of genocide are brought to justice swiftly? Will he inform the House what his Department and the Government are doing to support the work of the international tribunal and to help the Government of Rwanda re-establish their own judicial system?

Mr. Baldry: I agree that it is imperative that everyone who is involved in war crimes is brought to trial. That is why an international criminal tribunal for Rwanda was established by a United Nations Security Council resolution last November. The United Kingdom was a co-sponsor of that resolution and we are determined that the tribunal will bring to justice as many as possible of those who were responsible for war crimes.

We shall contribute up to £200,000 to the tribunal in the form of personnel and equipment. It has established a prosecutor's office in Kigali and the question of how many suspects should be tried by the tribunal is a matter for the prosecutor.

In addition to setting up the international criminal tribunal, the UN has drawn up a plan to reconstruct the Rwandan judicial system so as to re-establish a proper judicial mechanism to try any remaining suspects. That move has our support as well.

Mr. Lester: While acknowledging that important work, will my hon. Friend also consider the principal problem of a lack of infrastructure in organising the return to Rwanda of those people who fled the country? Many non-governmental organisations are seeking to work in that country but there is little infrastructure in Kigali to assist them. Will the Minister look at that critical element in the context of our generous aid programme to Rwanda?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. Of course, to build up the infrastructure it has been necessary for the international community to commit large amounts of humanitarian aid to Rwanda. Last year, we committed more than £60 million worth of aid to the relief effort. We recently announced a further £2 million for immediate rehabilitation needs in the country—the sort of infrastructure needs to which my hon. Friend referred. I can today inform the House that Britain is contributing another £4 million to Rwanda in response to the United Nations' most recent appeal.

Mr. Worthington: The major problem at the moment is instability in the camps in Zaire. I view with foreboding the fact that the contract to police the militia who are now running the camps there has been allocated to the army of Zaire. When will it dawn on the permanent members of the Security Council, especially Britain and France, that unless they are willing to provide the logistical support necessary to back up UN operations, there will be another Rwandan tragedy in the coming year because we have neglected the situation now?

Mr. Baldry: We take seriously the matter of security in the refugee camps; clearly there is a need to find an answer to the security problems there. The way forward must lie in co-operation between the host Governments and the UN. The Secretary-General has asked the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to make appropriate arrangements to enhance security in the camps. We look forward to studying the proposed arrangements and to considering, with the UNHCR, how best we can assist in implementing them. We shall certainly give our fullest possible support to the High Commissioner and to the Secretary-General in that difficult task.

European Union

14. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet his counterparts in the European Union to discuss greater political union.

Mr. Hurd: I have regular discussions on those matters with my European Union counterparts at meetings of the General Affairs Council. The next meeting of the General Affairs Council is scheduled for 6 and 7 February.

Sir David Knox: Is my right hon. Friend aware of a speech made by Ray Seitz last year, shortly before he ceased to be the American ambassador to Britain, in which he stated that British influence in the United States depended on the degree to which we were effectively engaged in the European Union? Has the Foreign Office fully taken that advice into account, coming as it does from a very good friend of this country who has its best interests at heart?

Mr. Hurd: Yes, I remember the speech—it was a good one. We certainly believe, as the Prime Minister said at Leiden, that we need to strengthen the European Union, of which we are a part. Of particular interest to the United States are defence, on which I have already answered one question, and about which the Secretary of State for Defence has also just made a speech, and foreign policy. We believe that we are only at the beginning of effective co-operation between Europeans, under the framework of the treaty of Maastricht intergovernmental co-operation. We believe, as the Prime Minister also said at Leiden, that we should be more ambitious under this heading.

Mr. Hoon: Does the Foreign Secretary believe that the deep divisions in the Conservative party on European questions are a help or a hindrance to him in best representing Britain's interests in negotiations with our European partners?

Mr. Hurd: They are certainly a help, if they are quickly resolved on the basis of commonsense policies—as they will be.

Mr. Key: Has my right hon. Friend made representations to ensure the appointment of Sir Leon Brittan as vice-president of the Commission?

Mr. Hurd: No, I have made no representations. They would not have been right or necessary. He was elected a vice-president of the European Commission this morning—I gather with a hefty majority. I am sure that the whole House would like to congratulate him.

Lithuania

15. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new proposals he has to improve relations between the United Kingdom and Lithuania.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We already have close and friendly relations with Lithuania based on our strong support for her independence, democratic and economic development and integration into European structures. There have been several high-level visits in both directions over the last year, and trade is increasing.

Mr. Flynn: Rather than concentrate our technical aid for Lithuania on the Chernobyl-type nuclear reactors at Ignalina, would it not be better to concentrate the aid on a sustainable source of energy? Some 40 per cent. of Lithuania is covered by forests, so should we not encourage coppicing and other non-food farm production which would produce a source of energy but which is sustainable, environmentally friendly, inexhaustible, and Lithuanian?

Mr. Hogg: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman has really faced the enormity of the problem. As Ignalina supplies 90 per cent. of Lithuania's energy needs, closing the reactor, or finding different sources of energy, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, is not an easy decision. We have focused most of our assistance through the nuclear safety account. I suggest that that is the best way forward.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that we should be responding to what Lithuania wants from us rather than trying to impose upon it what the west believes is good for it? I think that Lithuania probably became fed up with the Soviet Union doing that in the past. Has Lithuania been asking for more advice on how to privatise its industries and to bring free enterprise and an open market into its economy?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes an important point. When we are trying to decide what projects we wish to support in a particular country, it is extremely important to have regard to that country's list of priorities.

The answer to the specific part of my hon. Friend's question is yes. The Government of Lithuania are extremely anxious to pursue a restructuring and privatisation policy. Lithuania, like most of the other countries of central and eastern Europe in the former Soviet Union, looks to Britain as having special expertise in this policy.

World Summit for Social Development

16. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what will be the nature of the United Kingdom representation at the world summit for social development.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A final decision on attendance at the summit will be taken nearer the date.

Mr. Denham: Is it true that the United Kingdom will not be one of the 94 countries to be represented at the summit by the Head of Government or head of state? Is it not a sad fact that a few years ago this country would have been regarded as a world leader at conferences dealing with international co-operation and development? We now appear to have no one worth sending and nothing worth saying when talking about poverty, whether at home or abroad.

Mr. Hogg: I cannot help feeling that the hon. Gentleman is trivialising the question. As I have said, it is our intention to determine the level of representation nearer the time. We shall do that against a background, first, of what it is reasonable to expect to come out of the conference and, secondly, of the level of representation that may be determined upon by other participating countries.

Zimbabwe

17. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the President of Zimbabwe to discuss bilateral relations.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met President Mugabe in May and in November last year. There are at present no plans for my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to do so.

Mr. Bellingham: Does my hon. Friend agree that the transition of Zimbabwe to independence has been a huge success and that the country's stability is encouraging investment? Does he agree also that there are great opportunities for British firms in Zimbabwe?

To sound a note of caution, however, does my hon. Friend agree that the Zimbabwean Government must adhere to the rule of law at all times, and above all not compulsorily purchase farms without proper compensation?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend is right. Since independence, Zimbabwe has set an example of what can be achieved by promoting reconciliation. Indeed, it has shown what can be achieved in Africa. President Mugabe has abandoned the policy of a one-party state for one of multi-party democracy, thereby liberalising the economy. That has led to greater investment in Zimbabwe. There are more than 400 companies with British connections and a book value of British investment of about £400 million. I am glad to say that Zimbabwe is well on the way to economic recovery and sustainable growth.

Grozny

18. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to offer his services as an intermediary in the conflict in Grozny; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe is already trying to help Russia find a solution to the tragic conflict in Chechnya. We have made clear our full support for its efforts, and encouraged the Russian authorities to offer their full co-operation. A senior British official is a member of the OSCE team which has just visited Moscow and Chechnya.

Mr. Greenway: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that the situation in Grozny and Chechnya poses serious danger to peace in Europe and

the rest of the world, not to mention the hideous suffering there? If it is possible for the United Kingdom to play a stronger role, will he seek to ensure that it does?

Mr. Hurd: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already conveyed our anxieties very clearly to President Yeltsin, as we have through the Foreign Affairs Council, but we shall certainly do our best, through the European Union and direct, and now through the OSCE, which has managed to get admission into Chechnya, on the humanitarian, human rights and the political side.

Mr. Gapes: Will the Foreign Secretary make it clear to the people behind weak President Yeltsin that, if there is any move towards an authoritarian or quasi-military regime in Russia, it will have serious political and economic consequences, and that we do not believe that we can keep good relations with a country that moves towards dictatorship?

Mr. Hurd: As I said earlier to the House, our genuine support for Russia is for a reforming Russia rather than for any group of personalities. The test is the continuance of reform.

Northern Ireland (Framework Document)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): With permission, I will make a statement concerning the lead story in *The Times* today. First, the background.

The House knows that, for a considerable time, Her Majesty's Government and the Irish Government have been engaged in discussing a joint framework document. It has long been recognised in Northern Ireland and further afield that political progress can be achieved only by dialogue and agreement among all who are properly concerned. The purpose of the two Governments has therefore been to help the main constitutional parties get into inclusive political talks again.

How? In two ways: first, by offering the British Government's own suggestions for new democratic arrangements for the internal government of Northern Ireland; and, secondly, by jointly offering the parties, as we were requested to do, the two Governments' shared ideas about a possible basis for the other parts of a comprehensive political settlement. We are seeking a basis that might have the best chance of getting the wide support that will be needed in Northern Ireland, so that further talks will be seen to be worth while.

That document, if we could agree it, would simply be offered to the Northern Ireland parties, not as some blueprint to be imposed—time and again, we have made that clear—but for the parties to examine it. They could accept it; they could reject it; they could amend it; they could adapt it. But at least we would hope that they would sit down again together and discuss the issues in it. That has been our purpose. It remains our purpose. Far from imposing it, the Prime Minister made it clear that, once agreed, it will be immediately published, so that not only the parties but all the people of Northern Ireland can consider it.

If, as we hope, the parties resume discussions and reach the wide agreement that would be necessary, the people of Northern Ireland will have their direct and decisive say on the outcome. Any agreement that the parties may come to must be put to them in a referendum—for them to show whether they agree or not.

Lastly, it goes without saying that the consent of Parliament would be required. That is the triple lock—parties, people, Parliament—the triple lock against imposition upon the people of Northern Ireland that the Prime Minister has so often spoken of.

We have not yet reached agreement on a framework document to the parties. Last Thursday, Mr. Spring and I met in London, and afterwards we both said that work on important matters remained to be done. That is still the position.

Both Governments hope, and earnestly hope, that we can reach agreement, but consent will be the key, and the Prime Minister has made it clear that, because consent would be absent, we could not, for example, propose arrangements providing for joint authority over Northern Ireland—that is to say, the British and Irish Governments jointly running the affairs of Northern Ireland over the heads of its people. Nor, for the same reason, could we agree to propose any north-south body that was autonomous. A body accountable to a Northern Ireland elected assembly, which would delegate authority to those of its members discharging its functions, is a different matter.

Such a body, empowered in that way and accountable to the assembly, making common cause north and south in areas of common interest and mutual benefit, might well secure consent. Similarly, we have always made it clear that for the same reason there would be no point in advancing proposals that left the Irish territorial claim to Northern Ireland in place.

These are matters of the greatest sensitivity and difficulty—even danger—in an area where fears and suspicions very understandably abound on all sides. An enormous amount potentially turns on them.

In today's *Times* story, I recognise a few phrases lifted, highly selectively, from a lengthy negotiating text which has been employed in the discussions with the Irish Government, but on which the Governments have not agreed. I do not, however, recognise the conclusions that the author draws from those phrases. For example, the story leads with an assertion that the British and Irish Governments have drawn up a document that brings the prospect of a united Ireland closer than it has been at any time since partition in 1920. That is simply not true.

What is true is that the future of Northern Ireland is declared by both Governments in the Downing street declaration to lie in the hands of the people who live there. That is where it rests, and that is where it will stay. The two Governments constantly reiterate that principle of democracy; it has been the foundation of our resolute opposition to 25 years of violence—now ended, we trust, for good.

I must not be drawn into premature publication of a document in the negotiations which has not been agreed by the Governments in reaction to distorting leaks calculated to destabilise and destroy an immensely sensitive process. That process is too important for the people of Northern Ireland to be further damaged in such a way. When, and only when, an entire package of proposals is published conforming to the principles by which we stand can parties, people and Parliament judge its true worth.

Ms Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): The Secretary of State will know that, throughout the peace process, we have given our full support to the Government's endeavours. That peace process may at times seem fragile, but it still represents the best hope that the people of Northern Ireland have had in a generation during which they have experienced little more than division and suffering. Any help that we can give to allow the process to continue, honourably and sensibly, we will give.

Whenever a document is selectively leaked, there is a risk that the impression given by the manner of its leaking will be far worse than its actual contents. I therefore urge all parties to wait and to study what is actually being proposed, rather than selective interpretations of it. The Secretary of State will know of the work that we have been doing, and of our proposals for jobs, industry and investment in Northern Ireland. Can there be any doubt today that much of the new-found economic hope there will falter if the peace process does not continue?

Let me ask the Secretary of State three direct questions. First, will he assure the House that the British Government will redouble their efforts, along with the Irish Government, to produce a framework document as

speedily as possible? He indicated in his statement that that would happen, but will he act in a way that will guarantee that no party, and no Conservative Back Bencher, will be allowed a veto on what is to be discussed?

Secondly, will the Secretary of State assure the House that any framework document that is published will respond fairly to both traditions in Northern Ireland, and that the consent of the majority there will be the guarantee of a balanced constitutional settlement? Thirdly, the Secretary of State said in his statement that the accountability of the north-south body would be to an elected assembly in Northern Ireland and to the Dublin Government. What mechanisms will be put in place to underpin such an arrangement?

Finally, I know that the Secretary of State will agree that, for this process to carry on succeeding, we all need to be open and honest in our dealings, and that the language he uses and the commitments he makes must be the same to all parties. The good will on all sides must be matched by good faith.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I begin by expressing my gratitude to the hon. Lady for what she said and for supporting the peace process both in the past and promised for the future. Secondly, I endorse her remarks about selective leaking, particularly of highly sensitive documents that deal with a subject and a process of this delicacy and importance.

The hon. Lady asked three questions, the first of which was, would the British Government redouble their efforts? We are working as hard as we can with the Irish Government, and have been for a long time, to reach a shared understanding of the character that I have described. But there must be adherence to the principles that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has described, of which I have just reminded the House. That is fundamental.

Secondly, the hon. Lady asked whether I could give an assurance that the joint framework document, if we agree it, will propose arrangements that will deal fairly with both traditions. Of course that is essential. I repeat what I said earlier: that it is absolutely essential that any proposals by the two Governments shall represent the basis for an agreement, an overall accommodation, that has the best prospects of getting wide consent and support right across that divided community. It would be futile if it were otherwise.

The hon. Lady asked what mechanisms there might be. I must not be drawn on that third question into discussing what may be in an ultimate document that would be agreed. It is important to bear in mind the principle, which has always been emphasised by my right hon. Friend, that Her Majesty's Government exercise responsibility for Northern Ireland and for events there. That will always continue to be the case.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Does the Secretary of State recall that, on the first day of December, I was informed that a framework document did not exist? Why were we being told by the Northern Ireland Office only last evening that the *Times* report is based on a document of 25 November, a week before that statement was made to me?

Secondly, why were the Ulster political representatives denied the opportunity to at least inject some degree of common sense and realism into the thinking of an obscure liaison group consisting of British and Irish civil servants who are not terribly interested in the fate of political parties or Governments?

Thirdly, there have been disclosures. I use the plural because there have been leaks and disclosures over a period of weeks, so it is not just last evening's operation. Over those weeks, they have made irrelevant the post-publication consultations which we were promised, and have thereby wrecked the framework concept.

Will the Secretary of State now heed the advice that I have offered on several occasions and initiate discussions with representatives of the four main constitutional parties on how, first, we clear away the debris and, secondly, start building on structures based on democratic principles?

Finally, what did the Secretary of State mean by the phrase in his statement which reads:

"we hope . . . the parties resume discussions".

All the Northern Ireland parties have been effectively excluded from discussions on the framework document.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have always said to the right hon. Gentleman that there is no agreement on a framework document. That was so on 1 December, and it is so today. I do not propose to breach the confidentiality of discussions that have taken place between his nominees and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, or, indeed, between the right hon. Gentleman and me. He has known that we have always made it clear that we have been negotiating with the Irish Government to see whether we can together agree a document of the character that I have described today. Equally, I have always said that no agreement has been reached. To that extent, there is no framework document. It is agreement on that that we have been seeking.

Secondly, I think that I have largely dealt with the right hon. Gentleman's second question. Over a long time, and particularly through my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, we have been in discussions with the right hon. Gentleman's representatives in his party, and we attach the greatest importance to what he has had to say.

Why? Because, among other reasons but predominantly, it is essential that we should find a means of providing a base for new discussions that will carry wide consent right across the communities. It is no good coming forward with things that will not provide wide consent.

I am afraid that I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman—I am glad that I do not agree with him—in the third part of his question, when he refers to wrecking the framework concept. I do not follow him when he says that. It is important that Her Majesty's Government and the Irish Government continue to seek that basis for agreement that I have described. We shall continue to do so.

It is important that I continue to listen to everything that the right hon. Gentleman says, particularly when it relates, in the last part of his question, to democratic principles because, in the joint declaration, democratic

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principles are said by both Governments to underpin the future of Northern Ireland and, in particular, its constitutional status.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): The fact that the statement has been made to the House today, and that the Prime Minister will address the nation tonight, proves that the content of the document is not to be challenged. Let us make that perfectly clear. The Secretary of State, in a broadcast and in his speech today in the House, has made it clear that it was the conclusions that people were drawing that he was challenging, not the content.

Having established the content, and having listened to the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), and to what he said in a broadcast at lunchtime—that his party, which had taken part in the Ancram talks, had been sidelined and excluded—I put it to the Secretary of State: how does he think that this particular document will be a basis for any discussion, let alone agreement?

It is all very well for the Secretary of State to talk about democracy, but the statement in the document makes it clear that the chairmen of committees in any new assembly can hold office only if they are a party to an all-Ireland body that takes power away from the House. It makes it a body that negotiates all European matters, including Commission proposals and initiatives. We know that power is going to Europe. Any power that I have as an elected representative from Northern Ireland will be completely taken away if an all-Ireland body deals with those European matters.

The document is an insult to the majority of the people of Northern Ireland. It bears out what I have been saying consistently in all this controversy. The Secretary of State cannot expect any self-respecting Unionist to sit down at a table if that is going to be on the agenda. That is the price he is paying to get a deal with Gerry Adams, the IRA and Dublin.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: At the end of his statement, the hon. Gentleman reverts to a familiar line of his—that there has been a deal with Gerry Adams and the IRA. I reiterate that there is no such deal.

The hon. Gentleman says at the outset that the content is not challenged, but he cannot have listened when I said that what I have seen in *The Times* newspaper are a few selectively lifted phrases from a very long document that has been used in the negotiations and that has not been agreed. Therefore, the first part of his assertion—if I may put it that way—is not sustained by the facts.

The hon. Gentleman effectively said that the concept of a framework document is destroyed and that there is no future life in what has been negotiated or discussed between the two Governments. I do not agree with that, for the reasons that I have already given to the House.

I do not accept that, in European matters, it is proposed that all power should be taken from the House, and that everything should be transferred to some north-south body. I reiterate to the hon. Gentleman and the House that absolutely nothing will come forward for the approval of the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum unless and until it has the broad and wide agreement of the political parties, which will include that of the hon. Gentleman. That has to be taken into account. Consent is the foundation of everything that the two Governments are seeking to put to the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): The Secretary of State will recognise that the press leak shows that a fairly cynical political game is being played. It is also a very deadly game, because what is at stake is the peace that has been painstakingly created in Northern Ireland, not least by the Prime Minister.

Could the Secretary of State give the House an assurance that the peace process will not be derailed, either through threat of force of arms in Northern Ireland or threat of electoral strength in the House? Will he also confirm that it will be underpinned by the principle of consent as enunciated in the Downing street declaration, and that that principle of consent demands responsibilities from everyone in the north of Ireland if anything is going to work?

Does the Secretary of State recognise that we all have vetoes, and that if we all use them, there will not be a solution to our problem? Does he also agree that, if we are ever to solve the problem, it will be on the basis of consensus and agreement, and that threats of whatever type, be they voting threats or threats of arms, have no place in the seeking of agreement or consent?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there must be no derailment of the peace process. It offers the people of Northern Ireland the best prospect of a permanent end to violence and a permanent end to the instability that has plagued them for generations. It must be preserved. It must be preserved on the basis of all proper principles being observed. I am aware of no party in the House or elsewhere that wishes to see that process derailed.

Selective leaking of documents in the peace process and political process is doubtless calculated to secure its derailment. It is incumbent upon each and every one of us to see that that stratagem does not succeed. When the hon. Gentleman spoke about the principle of consent, he reiterated something that I mentioned a few moments ago. It is the very foundation of everything that we are seeking to achieve, and anything else would be a foundation of sand.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): If the framework document imposes nothing and its purpose is to generate debate, and if any agreement that may be reached will be tested by a referendum, will my right hon. and learned Friend do all he can to reassure those who are understandably shaken by the scandalous irresponsibility of *The Times* in printing extracts from a leaked document?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I agree with what he said. It imposes nothing. If the document is agreed, it will be offered to the parties for them to consider. It will not be imposed upon them. How could it be, given the basis of consent? My hon. Friend is right. I recognise the damage to confidence that has been done, and doubtless was intended to be done. I take on board what my hon. Friend said.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Secretary of State agree that selective leaks are usually designed to induce a reaction, but that that reaction must not be allowed to deprive the people of Northern Ireland

of their opportunity to consider proposals that have been properly worked out and to exercise their vote on them in an atmosphere of peace?

When does the right hon. and learned Gentleman hope to add to that process by bringing forward the Government's own proposals for the elected assembly in Northern Ireland, which will come directly from the British Government? Will he bear it in mind that, whatever vagaries of arithmetic may affect the Government's consideration of matters outside Northern Ireland, he has for the continuance of the peace process and the delicate task on which he has embarked a substantial majority in the House?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful for what the right hon. Gentleman said at the conclusion of his question. Of course, a reaction is intended by those who indulge in what I regard as the malicious and irresponsible strategy that we are discussing. It is very important that we continue—as I have assured the House we will—to seek with the Irish Government a basis for an understanding of the kind that I have described. I intend to continue to do that, and so, I know, does Mr. Spring. I believe that the whole House wishes us to do that.

The right hon. Gentleman asks when the British Government will come forward, as they have promised, with their own suggestions for the internal arrangements for the restoration of democratic responsibilities within Northern Ireland. The answer is that we would publish our proposals at exactly the same time as the joint proposals of the Governments would be published once agreement was reached, so that the entire package, something scarcely referred to in the story with which we are dealing, can be seen—the old strands 1, 2 and 3 of the talks process—and so that the people of Northern Ireland and the political parties can make an informed and balanced judgment of their worth.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): My right hon. and learned Friend will agree that these are serious issues, as evidenced by the deaths of Tony Berry, Ian Gow, Robert Bradford and Airey Neave, who were among the thousands who died to stand up for democracy against use of violence. Does he also agree that some informed speculation would be welcome in *The Times* tomorrow as to who might have provided the newspaper with the partial information and why those involved would want it published? I do not mean to involve the newspaper but those who provided the information.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, if those involved had given as much attention to what he has called the triple lock, it might have been easier for people to understand their motives?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The triple lock seems to me to be the key to confidence here, and I am grateful for what my hon. Friend said. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has constantly reiterated the triple lock of people, parties and Parliament. That is what is meant by democracy. That is what we point to when we assert that we wish to impose, or seek to impose, nothing but simply to bring forward proposals—not something set in concrete when a declaration or agreement is signed between Governments, but simply proposals for people to look at.

As for speculation about who was responsible for the matter that we are discussing, that will take place without any encouragement from us.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Irish Government have come a considerable way to meet Unionist demands by virtually agreeing to the repeal or amendment of articles 2 and 3, and that any decision taken by the proposed new north-south body should be subject to the approval of both sides? Does he agree that the peace process is far too important an issue to be put at risk by threats of blackmail from any quarter or the Government's desire for Unionist votes for their own survival?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I do not think that questions or suggestions of blackmail and the like are particularly helpful when one is discussing the operation of the democratic process. That is the same as describing it as a "veto"—someone's view that happens to be the majority view is someone else's veto, or is regarded as such. That is not a helpful way of looking at an extremely important process in which we have been engaged for a long time.

We have been engaged in that process for a long time only because we have been asked to do so to help the parties find a way in which to take the risks inherent and get back round the table. Tempting though it is to follow the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) into a discussion of things that may have been on the agenda, and undoubtedly have been on the agenda, I shall not do so, for the very good reason that it would impede and hinder the resumption of this process, which has been undoubtedly damaged by what we are discussing this afternoon. I have to mitigate that damage.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): *The Times* made the irresponsible allegation that Her Majesty's Government were absolutely neutral as to whether Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom or became part of a united Ireland. Will my right hon. and learned Friend take this early opportunity to deny that accusation unambiguously?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The Government have made their position perfectly clear about that. The maintenance of the position of Northern Ireland in the union is supported by a large majority of people living there. It looks as though it will continue to be supported by a majority of people living there for a very long time. The Prime Minister and I and others have indicated our personal pleasure that that is the case.

But what matters is the will of people living there. We are persuaders for agreement. We want to persuade the people of Northern Ireland to reach agreement on their future. I find it impossible to visualise anything on which they together, freely and without impediment, agree that the British Government would wish to stymie.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Will the Secretary of State assure the House that nothing that has happened in the past 24 hours will cause the Government to resile from an approach which can assist the achievement of peace in Northern Ireland, and which almost certainly has the support of an overwhelming majority of right hon. and hon. Members of the House?

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman also assure the House that, while we must all respect, as I certainly do, the rights of all right hon. and hon. Members, whether

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from Great Britain or from Northern Ireland, to advance their views and protect their point of view, taking into account the safeguards that he has described to the House, there is no group of persons in the House who can prevent the Government from putting forward, when they publish their proposals, proposals which they believe will advance the prospect of peace in Ireland as a whole?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I certainly agree that there is no body of people in the country or in the House who can prevent the Government from doing what they consider right and prudent. I have made it clear that what is required is a solution that will carry the broad consent of the people right across Northern Ireland. I have made it clear that certain principles must be abided by—those which I have indicated today and which the Prime Minister has, from time to time, quite frequently, spelled out.

Those principles mean that we cannot propose things which will not carry the consent of the character that I have described. That is what it is about. It is no good looking for proposals which will not carry broad consent across the community. We will do our best to bring forward proposals that meet the principles that I have described and which will have a real prospect of helping the parties sit down and discuss these extremely important issues once again.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): While I join the general condemnation of *The Times* for printing bits of the document, I wonder who can produce this document, because the proposals that have been printed, self-evidently, will never be acceptable to those who represent the majority of opinion in Ulster, hon. Members on Opposition and Government Benches and, indeed, on the mainland. Who produced this document? Why was it produced in these circumstances? While I accept and welcome the view of the Secretary of State and of the Prime Minister that, in the end, the view of the majority in Ulster will prevail, why was the document ever produced in the first place?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have done my best to explain to the House why we are in that lengthy business of seeking to establish a framework document. It is because we were asked to do so to assist the parties in getting round the table again. As to the first part of my hon. Friend's question, I would with great respect invite him to wait until such time, if it arrives, as a document is agreed and is immediately published. Then, and then alone, will he be able to see its true meaning, balance and intention.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Secretary of State will be aware that the constitutional nationalist parties from elsewhere in the United Kingdom have supported, and continue to offer support to, the Government in their attempt to ensure that a definitive peace is reached in Northern Ireland and throughout the whole of Ireland. In that spirit, may I ask the Secretary of State to ensure that the Government are in no way deflected from the courageous course on which they have embarked, and that they will not sacrifice tomorrow's lasting peace because of today's headlines?

Will he also assure us that the Government are well down the road to ensuring that a framework document will be available to all of us which can be debated openly and freely by elected Members of this place?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Of course we shall not be deflected from the search which I have described, and which I will not describe again. It is far too important for the lives and welfare of so many people in Northern Ireland, and more widely, for us to do that.

As soon as agreement is reached—if it is reached—there will be immediate publication, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister promised as long ago as last October, so that the people of Northern Ireland in particular, and people everywhere else, can consider the document. That will be the time for the parties to consider whether it is sufficient to get them around the table, and whether they wish to examine carefully the issues that it contains.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Has my right hon. and learned Friend looked carefully at the cross-border bodies and all-Ireland arrangements that existed under the Unionist Government before 1972 and the fall of Stormont? If he has not, will he study them very carefully when he prepares his framework document? I believe that he may find them helpful.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Some time ago, I drew attention in several speeches in Northern Ireland to the fact that the principle is not new. Under the Stormont regime, there was at least one example—and I believe that there are more—of bodies which were put in place and were supported in order to make common cause in areas where there was a common interest. That was done without the slightest intention of diminishing sovereignty or impinging upon it. It was seen to make sense and to work.

If that approach is available in future, and it is supported by the parties and by the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum, I cannot think of a point of principle that should lead the British Government to say, "No, we are not going to do it."

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): The Secretary of State told the House in his statement that he recognised some of the phrases published in *The Times*. Surely he should be more explicit and admit that he recognises every syllable in *The Times* as, later in his statement, he said that it was but part of a very long negotiating document. As that is so, will he also tell us whether the bits that have been published in *The Times* are those items which are still in contention between himself and Mr. Spring, and what exactly he has already agreed to?

Surely what is printed in *The Times* are the demands of the Irish Government which would lead inevitably to an all-Ireland republic, and well the Secretary of State knows that. Is it not clear, even to this Secretary of State, that the whole process of the framework is now so tainted and damaged that anything that emerges labelled "framework document" will immediately and inevitably be rejected by the Unionist population, because they will see it not as a framework but as a cage designed to limit their freedom

of movement so as to create an all-Ireland republic? Will the Government therefore take some good advice today, change course and seek another way forward?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: If it were the Government's intention in the negotiations that they have been carrying on to lead the people of Northern Ireland to an all-Ireland republic, we would indeed change course. However, I am not going to recommend that any course be changed, because that has not been our purpose. The hon. Gentleman should know that, because he has been told it often enough, together with all hon. Members.

It is not the purpose of the British Government to lead to a united Ireland, for the very good reason that it would not stand a dog's chance of receiving the consent that would be essential. The hon. Gentleman knows that. If I have not made it clear before, I make it clear yet again now. However, I have made it clear.

I am not going to be led into the premature publication of a document, and I am not going to say what is tentatively and contingently agreed and what is not agreed. Nothing in that document has received the consent of Her Majesty's Government. It remains to be agreed as a document. That is my answer to the hon. Gentleman.

Sir George Gardiner (Reigate): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that certain lessons can be drawn from the events of the past 24 hours? They are, first, just how uncertain is the path to peace in Northern Ireland; secondly, that nothing can—I repeat, can—be done to impose a particular solution upon the people of Northern Ireland; and, thirdly, that perhaps a little more openness is called for on what is happening in the tortuous negotiations, if only to avoid misunderstanding in future.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has said. Of course the path to peace is uncertain. I do not think that we should have had a conflict of the horror and length that has disfigured Northern Ireland and the whole of the United Kingdom based upon Irish problems, for so long if it were otherwise. We must recognise that such things will happen, and that some extremely malign forces are at work and will make themselves felt from time to time, but we are not going to be deflected from our search.

Nothing can be done or will be done to impose a solution on the people of Northern Ireland. It would be idle to suppose that the United Kingdom Government can impose upon the people of Northern Ireland anything against their will. The history of Ireland, England and of the United Kingdom as a whole has been such as to make that abundantly clear. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made that clear. Even more important than that, both Governments—the Irish Government as well—made that clear in the Downing street declaration last year. It is idle to suppose that anything else would work. That is the case.

I sympathise with my hon. Friend about being more open and so on. It is very important to be open about the principles which will govern one's negotiations. It is absolutely impossible to be open at every stage that one has reached in continuing negotiations. That is the balance that we have to strike.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): The Secretary of State said that this is a sensitive time. I agree with him. The selective leaking of the document is irresponsible and damaging. I share the view of the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter)—it was disgraceful.

I recall that it was the Government's hope and intention to publish the framework documents some time last year. Obviously, with the Irish Government's difficulties at the end of December, the timetable slipped. Clearly it is important, if there is not to be the start of a vacuum in Northern Ireland, for the Government to produce the framework documents as quickly as possible. When will the Secretary of State be able to do just that?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I agree with the hon. Gentleman on the importance of maintaining a momentum and not allowing a vacuum to develop. That is very important. I cannot tell him when or if agreement is going to be reached. As I indicated a little time ago, both Mr. Spring and I said at the end of our meeting on Thursday that work of an important kind had to be done. That remains the case.

Of course we want to see an early agreement so that there is early publication, the matter is out in the open, and we can carry it forward, but that does not rest with us alone. It would be wrong to put that ahead of the need to ensure that the principles that the Prime Minister has outlined so frequently are fulfilled.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure the House that there is no question of any proposals or policies relating to Northern Ireland being established or constructed under a constitutional regional or all-Ireland framework within the legal aegis of the European Union?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Yes. The British Government have to remain loyal to their obligations, and they have to continue to assert their rights under the treaties. That will be the case, and my hon. Friend need not fear that which he set out in his question.

Similarly, it seems to make some sense if a local application of European policies—if they carry the wishes and consent of the people and parties—were to be put in place. I cannot go any further than that.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Is it not unfair of the Secretary of State to criticise *The Times* for bringing to the attention of the British public what the Government have been doing behind the scenes, when similar leaks appeared the previous week in Dublin newspapers? This morning, the Secretary of State said that we should all remain quiet and calm. Does he recognise that we are pleased that, within a few hours, he rejected his own advice, and decided to come before the House to make a statement, and that we are also pleased that the Prime Minister recognised the seriousness of the situation and has now decided to broadcast to the nation?

The Secretary of State referred to all-Ireland bodies with executive powers, and not simply to cross-border bodies created by the Northern Ireland Assembly. Does he recognise the distinction between those two institutions? Does he know that the Ulster Unionists support cross-border bodies with executive powers, founded and created by a democratically elected Assembly in Northern Ireland, but that we oppose all-Ireland institutions being imposed upon us?

[Mr. John D. Taylor]

Does he recognise that peace in Northern Ireland does not just depend on having Sinn Fein on board, but on the majority of people of Northern Ireland, of which the Ulster Unionist party is a leading factor, being on board?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I hope that I have made it clear that I regard it as essential that any proposal that is put forward is likely to carry the consent of the broad majority of people in Northern Ireland. That is fundamental.

The right hon. Gentleman says that I have been critical of *The Times*, and that I should be equally critical of other newspapers. I am critical of those who originate a leak with a purpose which, I believe, is absolutely self-evident. It is not really for me to comment on journalistic practice, and I shall not do so. The right hon. Gentleman should be concerned about those who, for mischievous and destructive purposes, make leaks of this character, and I deplore the use of selective and distorting extracts.

The right hon. Gentleman reminds me that today I said that I thought that the people of Northern Ireland would welcome some steadiness and calm. I know that that can sound irritating or condescending, but I not intend it to be in the slightest. I hope that the people will listen to what is said by the Government, what has been said by the Prime Minister, what will be said by him tonight and what I have said this afternoon, and that they will wait until such time as a document is published and offered to the parties.

We do not seek to impose a document. I find it odd to be criticised for being other than calm when I have come before the House to explain what the Government have been doing and our response to the leak as I have tried to do this afternoon.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): Once again, the House has been told to wait for the publication of a document. I remember a previous matter—the Anglo-Irish Agreement—when the House was told likewise. Yet last week, the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic met a representative of murderers, Gerry Adams, and we were told after that meeting that they discussed matters relating to the framework document. We were also told that other meetings would be held with the SDLP to discuss matters relating to the framework document. Interestingly enough, Unionists once again must await the final issuing of a document before gaining any knowledge of its contents. It reeks of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Hon. Members talk about *The Times* being scandalously irresponsible. Surely it is those who drew up such proposals, which do not stand a "dog's chance" of succeeding, who ought to be condemned. If they are civil servants, surely the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland must carry the final responsibility for their actions.

Lastly, as the Prime Minister has consistently come out fighting for England, Scotland and Wales to remain a vital part of the United Kingdom and said that the Government could not countenance a diminution of that union in any shape or form, why do not the Government state unequivocally today that they desire Northern Ireland and would not countenance a change in its position as an integral part of the United Kingdom? That would certainly assist, but I am sure that we shall wait a long time before we get such a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I shall not play the game of hiding behind civil servants. I recognise the strength of feeling with which the hon. Gentleman speaks, and I know of the appalling experience that he and his family underwent when his home was attacked last year. But I shall not play his game of saying that all this is down to civil servants. I wish to make it perfectly clear that negotiations that have taken place over a long time have been under ministerial direction.

The hon. Gentleman says that the Irish Prime Minister has discussed with others matters relating to the framework document. We have discussed over a long period matters relating to the framework document with representatives of political parties in this House. That was right, and we shall continue to do so. We have not felt it right, however, to disclose in mid-negotiation the precise text which we are in the course of negotiating, because that is not how future negotiation would prosper.

Lastly, the hon. Gentleman asked why we do not say in Northern Ireland what we say in Scotland. That is exactly what the Prime Minister has said. In Scotland, he said that one cannot keep a nation within a union against its will, and precisely the same argument applies in Northern Ireland. I suggest that the sensible thing to do is say that whatever appeals to and is demanded by the majority of people living in Northern Ireland must determine what happens there. That is what not just the British Government but the Irish Government have said.

Dr. Joe Hendron (Belfast, West): Does the Secretary of State accept that, because of the leak in *The Times* today, the necessity for the right hon. and learned Gentleman to make a statement to the House this afternoon, and the fact that the Prime Minister will address the nation later this evening, there is bound to be disquiet and apprehension in both communities in Northern Ireland?

Does he therefore agree that it is important that politicians on both sides—not just in the House but from both communities in the north of Ireland—exercise restraint and absolute responsibility? Will he further state, as he did before, that, no matter what is in the final framework document, the principles as expressed in the Downing Street declaration will continue to be the political bible for the people of Northern Ireland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I got into trouble this afternoon for suggesting that there should be calm and steadiness, so I shall allow the hon. Gentleman's words to speak for themselves. It is important that people should encourage agreement, if that can be reached. Nothing will work in a Northern Ireland with the character that we describe unless it is based on consent and agreement. It is because we are so determined to do all that can properly be done to prevent a recurrence of the violence that has disfigured Northern Ireland for so long that we shall not be deflected from our course of trying to secure the agreement that I described by the events that we are discussing this afternoon.

Sir Nicholas Scott (Chelsea): My right hon. and learned Friend should recognise that he not only deserves but has the support of the vast majority of people in the House and the country for the work that he is putting into

the enterprise to which he has set his hand. If that enterprise succeeds, it has the promise of lifting from the backs of the people of Northern Ireland the burden of terrorism that they have borne for so long. I wish him well—I am sure that the House does—in the enterprise to which he has set his hand.

At the end of the day, the head, the hoof and the heart of that enterprise is consent by the people of Northern Ireland. The buck will stop there: they will have the right to say yea or nay to the outcome of my right hon. and learned Friend's undertaking. We all wish him well in his endeavours.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend, who served for so long in Northern Ireland. I appreciate what he has said, and I agree entirely with his comments about the paramount importance of consent.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Does the Secretary of State realise that the credibility of this morning's story in *The Times* is greatly enhanced by the fact that it is entirely consistent with the leaks that have emanated from the Irish Government in recent weeks? Does he realise that its credibility is also enhanced by the fact that his statement today contains nothing which is in any way inconsistent with what was said in the story? Furthermore, the story is corroborated by the statement that his hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) made during the most recent Northern Ireland questions.

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman further agree that it is totally disingenuous to say that there will be no joint authority when it is proposed that legislation from Westminster will go over the heads of the Northern Ireland assembly to set up a body which people will have a legal duty to attend, with default and enforcement powers if they fail to carry out the Irish Government's will? That is joint authority and it cannot be described as anything else.

The Secretary of State's failure to be frank both in his previous contacts and today—particularly his prevarication in answering the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux)—robs him of credibility.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I do not follow what the hon. Gentleman said about there being legislation over the heads of the Northern Ireland assembly. There will be no Northern Ireland assembly unless and until there is legislation, and there will be no legislation unless and until we secure the agreement of the parties and of the people of Northern Ireland. I thought that the hon. Gentleman, with his democratic credentials, would welcome that.

I also thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome proposals for establishing a Northern Ireland assembly which thereafter would provide the staff to discharge the functions of a north-south body, if that is what the people have shown they want in a referendum, and it is what the parties want also. That is the position.

If we can achieve agreement to restore democratic responsibility to Northern Ireland—again, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that—I hope that he will then encourage his right hon. and hon. Friends at least to discuss the principles in the document.

Mr. Trimble *indicated dissent.*

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but I do not see why he should be so reluctant to discuss the issues that are raised in that way. If he is reluctant to do so, that must remain his position. However, I think that many people will regret his decision.

Sir John Gorst (Hendon, North): Have my right hon. and learned Friend and his Cabinet colleagues learnt a wider lesson from the events of the last 24 hours? While it is obvious that the democratic process cannot operate satisfactorily without a free press, is it not the case that those newspapers which peddle half-truths—seemingly for circulation purposes—perform no valuable task in the public interest? Was my right hon. and learned Friend given the opportunity at any stage to point out to *The Times* the damage which would flow from the half-truths about which it intended to write?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I was not given that opportunity. I think that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was given an indication very late last night that something of that character would be published, but the content was not disclosed.

I do not think that I shall say more than I have said to the House already this afternoon in answering my hon. Friend. The partial and distorting publication of parts of the document which have come into the hands of the newspaper is damaging. However, I think that the principal damage is done by those who, for whatever purpose, seek to make public something of this character at this stage of complex, delicate and rather dangerous negotiations.

Points of Order

4.29 pm

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance on a matter of some importance—the selection of Members to serve on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill Select Committee. I understand that it has always been the custom, if not the rule, of the House that such Committees be seen to be as objective as possible. That is presumably why Members representing Kent, for instance, were told that they could not serve on the Committee, even though their constituencies were not directly affected.

I have learnt to my surprise, however, that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson)—I notified her that I would be mentioning her name; I also notified the other hon. Member whom I shall mention later—had been appointed to the Committee, even though she stated, clearly and frankly, on Second Reading that her borough was directly affected by the high speed rail link. One can imagine the embarrassment that would be caused if a petition was received from her borough. She will not be seen as totally objective. No doubt she would be a splendid member of the Committee, but her membership of it hardly seems to conform with my understanding of the traditions of the House.

Even more surprisingly, another Member has been appointed to serve on the Committee, even though on Second Reading he spoke robustly about certain points relating to important aspects of the Bill that are likely to be the subject of petitioning. I refer to the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape). We all know him to be a splendid Member of the House, but on this subject he is about as impartial as I am. He certainly does not seem capable—on this issue—of fitting the mould of independence, impartiality and open-mindedness that has long been required by the traditions of this House.

It seems to conflict with the customs, if not the rules, of the House that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East should be a member of the Select Committee. Decisions of the Committee of Selection are not debatable on the Floor of the House, so presumably the rules have been observed—if not the practice and custom.

I therefore seek your guidance, Madam Speaker, on what steps can be taken to ensure that the Committee is selected on the usual criteria of the openmindedness and objectiyity that we have come to expect in respect of all private and hybrid Bills.

Madam Speaker: I have listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has had to say, and have done so with great interest. I am afraid, however, that I am not in a position to assist him.

In the first place, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate was appointed to the Committee by the decision of the House last Friday, 27 January. It was at that time that an objection could have been raised.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East was appointed by the Committee of Selection at its meeting last Wednesday. The House has delegated this power to the Committee of Selection, and such appointments do not subsequently come before the House for confirmation. I am therefore unable to take the matter further, as the House gives me no authority in these matters to do so. But I take the hon. Gentleman's point seriously; I shall give it some thought for future occasions.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: No, I am sorry: I cannot take a further point of order. I have ruled the point of order already. I know that the hon. Gentleman is equally concerned, but once I have given a ruling, it is not my intention to go further. I have done the best I can. I shall not let the matter rest there, but I want to give it further consideration.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): On a different point of order, Madam Speaker. What advice can be given to witnesses who come before Select Committees? I have in mind Sir Iain Vallance, who yesterday told the Select Committee that he worked harder than junior doctors do. He then immediately retracted the remark outside the House. Does he not owe an apology to the Select Committee, and more particularly to the junior doctors?

Madam Speaker: I hope that the gentleman in question worked extremely hard when he appeared before the Committee, and that the Committee made him sweat.

Births and Deaths Registration (Amendment)

4.33 pm

Mrs. Angela Knight (Erewash): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 in connection with the procedures relating to the registration of deaths in England and Wales.

The Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 allows a death to be registered only in the district in which it occurs. My Bill proposes that that procedure be modified, so that the necessary details and declaration of death may be made with the registrar of any district. That registrar would then forward the details to the district where the death occurred for registration to take place.

That which I propose may seem to be a small, superficial and rather obscure change, but it is one that would make a substantial difference to the difficulties that some find themselves in now when a death occurs. The difficulties add to the distress at a time of grief.

Last summer, a family of mother, father and baby daughter—all constituents of mine—went on holiday to Skegness. One morning, the parent woke up to find their seven-month-old baby daughter dead in her cot. All parents will know how such a death, and fear of such a death, worries them. We all know how many times we check our sleeping babies to ascertain that they are still breathing. Surely we can all imagine what the mother and father felt at that fear becoming a reality.

Given the suddenness of the baby's death, the coroner who covers Skegness was notified. He directed that a post mortem should be performed by the specialist paediatric pathologist who is based at the Queen's medical centre at Nottingham, which is a hospital of considerable renown. It is one that is used extensively by Erewash, and it was therefore close to the home of the family.

The mother and father returned from Skegness to Nottingham, the post mortem was undertaken, cot death was confirmed, and arrangements for the funeral were set in hand. It was only then that the parents found that, to register their daughter's death, one of them had to return in person to Skegness. That is the requirement of the law as it stands. The 200-mile round trip was bad enough, but having to revisit the place of the tragedy added to the grief that my constituents were already experiencing.

Such a procedure can be changed. One way would be to allow the registration of the death to take place in any district. Although that has the immediate attraction of simplicity, it would cause other complications, about which registrars and coroners have expressed their concern. If the present system continues without change, however, it will inevitably continue to add unnecessary upset to many people each year.

My Bill would allow the necessary documents required for death registration to be received by any registrar, who would then forward them to the appropriate district. My constituents would have been able to go to Nottingham, Derby or Ilkeston. The documents would then be sent by post, fax or electronic mail to Skegness. Thus, while maintaining the continuity of the place of registration, the parents of the baby would at least have had the process made emotionally and physically easier for them.

The 1990 White Paper on registration contained proposals for change similar to those that are set out in the Bill. The White Paper met with approval from doctors, coroners and registrars. The Derby registrar and coroner, whose districts cover Erewash, have expressed support for the changes that I propose. I am grateful to them for their assistance and advice as I am to the registrar of Ilkeston. The Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths has advised me of its support. It was my constituents' general practitioner, who wrote to me initially about the case to which I have referred asking for a change in the law, who prompted the Bill.

The mother of the baby girl said to me two weeks ago, "Make my case public." She added, "I will do whatever is necessary, so that no one else finds themselves in the situation that I did." I agree with her.

The House is in a position to do whatever is necessary. We spend much time on the great affairs of state, as we have this afternoon, and rightly so. Yet it is often the smaller things of life that most affect, for good or ill, people's lives.

I am proposing a small change. The Bill is only a modest measure. However, the small change could make a significant difference to many people. The Bill would change the registration process so that no longer would it add to people's hurt at a time of great personal distress. Instead, the procedure would help them. That is why I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Angela Knight, Sir Timothy Sainsbury, Sir Ivan Lawrence, Mr. James Clappison, Mr. Peter Butler, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Mr. John Heppell, Mr. Gyles Brandreth, Mr. Nick Hawkins, Mr. Alex Carlile, Mr. John Greenway and Mr. David Lidington.

BIRTHS AND DEATHS REGISTRATION (AMENDMENT)

Mrs. Angela Knight accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 in connection with the procedures relating to the registration of deaths in England and Wales: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 February, and to be printed. [Bill 42.]

Orders of the Day

Local Government Finance

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Before I call the Secretary of State to move the Government motions, I must announce that Madam Speaker has put a 10-minute restriction on all speeches except those made by Front-Bench spokesmen and the spokesman for the Liberal Democratic party.

4.40 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): I beg to move,

That the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1995-96 (House of Commons Paper No. 161), which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the Special Grant Report (No. 12) (House of Commons Paper No. 162), which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

That the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1995-96 (House of Commons Paper No. 163), which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

Our proposals this year are rigorous, as they need to be if local government is to play its part in fighting inflation and to increase prosperity and jobs in commerce and industry. They are also, inevitably, more complex this year because of the establishment of the new police authorities. We have worked with local government to minimise any turbulence resulting from that change, and I am particularly grateful for the practical help that local authority associations continue to give, even where we may differ on the political judgments that have to be made.

On 1 September, I issued my settlement proposals for consultation. They included the total provision for local authority spending, the central support for that expenditure and my proposals for calculating standard spending assessments. I also announced provisional capping criteria. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced his proposals for police grant on the same day. Since then, my colleagues and I have met many delegations from local authorities and received many written representations.

We considered carefully all the points that were made during the consultation. My final decisions in respect of grants and notional amounts are embodied in the reports before the House. Of course, final decisions on capping criteria are taken after local authorities have decided their budgets.

Local authorities account for about a quarter of Government spending. Any Government who are serious about controlling public expenditure must, therefore, take real account of what councils spend.

I announced on 1 December my proposal for total standing spending for England for 1995-96 of £43.51 billion. I hope that the House will recognise just how large that figure is and how important, therefore, it is in the general consideration of the health of the economy. It included the English element of police grant, which is distributed on a formula basis in England and Wales. In the light of consultation—the details of which I shall come to later—we have decided to adjust slightly the balance of police funding between England and Wales, with the result that the final TSS figure for England for 1995-96 will be £43.507 billion. That represents an increase of £843 million—or 2 per cent.—compared with last year's figure. It includes £647.6 million transitional community care special grant.

Leaving aside the increase in provision for community care, my proposals still amount to an increase of just under 1 per cent. in provision year on year. The total aggregate external finance for England will be £34.686 billion. The revenue support grant element of that total will be £18.314 billion.

We have had to make tough decisions on all areas of public spending this year, and this settlement is no exception, but I believe that, seen against the background of low inflation, low pay settlements and the scope for efficiency, the provision is fair and realistic.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): How can the settlement be fair to school children, parents and teachers in Bolsover and in other parts of Derbyshire, when the level per pupil in Surrey is £272 higher than in Derbyshire and when the figure in Hertfordshire is £248 higher than in Derbyshire? That means that if teachers get more than a 1.5 per cent. pay increase, there will be reductions in staff and schools will suffer even more. On top of that, the Minister told Derbyshire that, if it spends more than £550 million, it will be capped, so there is no way out for the children, parents and teachers and others who use its services. Why does not the Secretary of State change the criteria and stop favouring people in the south? Why does he not look after those in the north as well?

Mr. Gummer: Spending per pupil has increased by nearly 50 per cent. in real terms since 1979. We are spending considerably more on every child than we did then.

The figures are decided according to a formula that is discussed in detail and thrashed out with local authority organisations. At the very time when the hon. Gentleman asks for more money for Derbyshire, other counties are asking for more for themselves; but they admit that a common formula that is as objective as humanly possible cannot direct money towards specific councils. Every county would like more money, but I fear that they cannot give good enough reasons.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) asked a perfectly respectable question, and I want to answer it fully.

Derbyshire has a considerable advantage as, unlike many other counties, it does not have a long history of lean administration. Its budget includes many areas in which other counties have already found ways of saving money. Derbyshire, perhaps of all counties, will be able to examine its overheads and expenditure carefully with the aim of helping school children directly. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to assist his council.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): You acknowledge in correspondence that Solihull loses out as a result of the changes in education standard spending assessment methodology. In the light of what you have just said—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman has been in the House long enough to know that we do not use personal pronouns.

Mr. Mills: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. How much care did the Secretary of State take in calculating SSA for councils such as Solihull, which, unlike Derbyshire—

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: Sit down!

Mr. Mills: The councils to which I refer have an extremely good record on cost-effectiveness. The Secretary of State says that there has been a redistribution of funds—

Mr. Olner: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) has had quite enough time to ask a simple question.

Mr. Gummer *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Will the Secretary of State bear with me for a moment? I will take the point of order.

Mr. Olner: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it right for so many Conservative Members to seek to intervene with what appear to be prepared scripts when many of them may not be called later?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This is a democratic Chamber. The Chair does not control the number of hon. Members who seek to intervene; whether the Secretary of State gives way is entirely up to him.

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to say that I have a piece of paper relating to every authority in the country, as many hon. Members may ask direct questions and all of them will be serious.

I examined Solihull's position very carefully. I do the same in regard to every authority, particularly those whose case hon. Members wish to put to me. As I have said, about 100 different groups have asked me specific questions. I cannot see any aspect of the objective methodology bearing on Solihull that gives me cause to investigate whether it could immediately be altered. However, the small but nevertheless important amount that is available for education in Solihull gives rise to considerable concern. I have told Solihull authority and a number of other Conservative and Labour-controlled authorities that I shall carefully consider their fears about the methodology when we decide with local authority associations what changes I can make in the coming year. I cannot do so at the moment because there is nothing to suggest that the methodology has been improperly applied. If it had been, I could have a look at it, but I cannot look at a particular authority on its own.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I should like to make some progress and thereafter give way as much as I can. I am trying to make a fairly short speech to allow time for hon. Members to ask questions. I know that that is unusual for me, but I shall try to answer as many points as I can.

I have said that the settlement will allow most authorities to increase their spending year on year. *[Interruption.]* It will allow them to increase their spending, but the difficulty is that most of them would like to increase it by more. That is a difficult issue.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) as she was the first to rise in the area of the Liberal Benches.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Is the Secretary of State aware that Rochdale will lose £163,000 in the community care grant, over and above the other cuts in community care and in education. What is the council supposed to do? Is it supposed to cut services or put up charges?

Mr. Gummer: It should first look at the efficiency of its services. The fact that the hon. Lady thinks that there are only two options—to put up the price or reduce the service—shows that she has not considered the issue. I do not want to go too far along this line, but I may have to give some painful examples.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that a great many complaints from authorities about underfunding are nothing more than a cynical attempt to dodge responsibility for their failure to manage resources properly? Does he further agree that one of the worst examples of this is Labour-Liberal controlled Suffolk county council? Since taking control in May 1993, that group has splurged £10 million of resources on such loony left fripperies as the appointment of an equal opportunities officer, the payment of councillors—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I appeal to all hon. Members to be brief. I have already had to announce a 10-minute restriction on speeches. There is now a one-minute restriction on interventions.

Mr. Gummer: I am tempted to take a particular path. As I drove home at the weekend, I noticed that Suffolk county council had put up a series of new yellow signs, which are extensive in their vulgarity and cost. Upon the signs, the council had put the name of the village and underneath it put another notice stating "village" in case people did not know that they were passing through one. There is no doubt that Suffolk county council has shown by its actions that it has spent money that could more easily and properly have been spent on police and education.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I shall continue with my speech and then, to be fair, I shall give way to an Opposition Member.

The Audit Commission regularly finds ways in which local authorities can save money through efficiency. The best authorities are quick to follow its recommendations.

[Mr. Gummer]

In particular, I hope that all authorities will pay heed to the report on white collar pay in local government, and ensure that unnecessary bureaucracy is weeded out.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Secretary of State agree that any increase in something that is already sadly deficient is not sufficient? In Newham, which, as he knows, is statistically the most deprived borough in the country, we are £10 million short through the lack of an interest payment on the standard spending assessment that has been approved by the Government. We have £7 million less for housing and we could receive another £25 million if Newham were an inner-London authority. Will he tell his friends in the Treasury, who presumably produced the formula, that that is unjust and is not up to the standards, as he knows, of even the Old Testament, let alone the new? Will he tell them to sin less next year?

Mr. Gummer: I listened with great care to Newham's case on whether it should be an inner or outer-London authority. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that I listened with concern and, as far as one is allowed in what I suppose is inelegantly referred to as a quasi-judicial position, with sympathy in an attempt to see whether I could meet its wish. The hon. Gentleman's position, however, is not entirely supported. Other Labour boroughs in London have made it clear that they would be extremely annoyed if past action by Newham council were rewarded at the expense of more efficient local councils.

There are some prime examples in London of where savings can be achieved. I note, for example, that the average number of non-manual staff in central services is 3.46 per 1,000 in inner-London boroughs, but 7.7 per 1,000 in the London borough of Tower Hamlets. Savings could be made there and applied to what is accepted as a less than adequate education service.

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): On the question of efficient versus inefficient councils, is there not a case for reconsidering the scrapping of capping, so that taxes increase in local authorities that are inefficient, clearly showing that responsibility lies with those authorities, rather than with central Government?

Mr. Gummer: I find that view extremely attractive for this reason: the capping mechanism was introduced because, in some areas, people were unable to pay the high costs of administrations, which, in all fairness, were mainly Labour controlled. They found themselves in terrible difficulty. As a resident of then Labour-controlled Ealing, I was one of those people who saw exactly what happened when people were suddenly faced with enormous bills. Tower Hamlets supports 7.7 non-manual staff in central services per 1,000. If we compare that with, for example, Wandsworth, which supports fewer than two per 1,000 of those staff, we understand why Tower Hamlets charges its often poor residents large sums of money. A real problem exists. The capping regime operates to protect those people. I have come down on that matter, not least because, if we add it all up, local government spends so high a proportion of what the nation makes that the Government may be blamed, and it would have a serious effect on the Government economic's policy.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I should get on with my speech, but, to be fair, I shall give way to the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans).

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): The Secretary of State consistently insists that the methodology that he adopts for the fixing of grant is fair. He will be aware that the council tax for a band A property in St. Helens is £652, and that it is £245 for a Band A property in Westminster. Does he ascribe that huge difference to the efficiency of Westminster and to the enormous grants that it received, or does he ascribe it to the inefficiency of St. Helens council? If he ascribes it to the latter, will he get that piece of paper out, stand at the Dispatch Box, and tell me so?

Mr. Gummer: The standard spending assessments are worked out as clearly as possible according to criteria that we have discussed long and loud with local authorities. If St. Helens spent as far below its SSA as Westminster, it would have an even lower council tax. It has a high council tax because it is a high spender. St. Helens should learn from Westminster's efficiency. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) is laughing. He wants to laugh because he does not want us to be reminded of the efficiency of his borough of Camden. Camden has the second highest external debt per capita in the country. Its total debt has increased by 14 per cent. in the past five years. A recent district auditor's first report revealed that Camden had a debt of £50 million rather than a surplus of £18 million, which its internal addition had suggested. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has the effrontery to giggle despite representing a Labour-controlled authority with such a record.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): The Secretary of State talks about Camden having a £50 million debt. Will he refer to his Department's documents rather than articles in *The Daily Telegraph*? Will he confirm that Camden is in dispute with him and his officials about debts owed to it of £38 million on the housing revenue account because it says that it is not being treated in the same way as other councils? Will he confirm that Camden has commenced legal proceedings against the Department but has stayed them until Ministers have had an opportunity to respond?

Mr. Gummer: I will confirm that in 1991 Camden forgot a loan repayment of more than £24 million, which meant that, in many cases, rents rose by a third. I shall quote from someone who is not noted in his professional life for doing other than supporting a range of Labour authorities. I shall do so although I deprecate some of the attacks made on people by turning their perfectly proper professional behaviour into a political issue. Andrew Arden said:

"the standards applicable to dealing in vast sums of money have been found wanting; it is as if pockets of what I can only describe of entrenched amateurism have been allowed to prevail."

Camden could save at least £2 million every year if its staff working hours were increased to the local government norm. Camden's members services unit,

which is open only to Labour members of Camden council, costs £143,000 a year. For every £5 spent on housing repairs in Camden, £1 is lost in administrative costs. That compares to an average of 30p in inner-London boroughs as a whole, and that average is pushed up by authorities such as Camden. Just in case it has been missed, I should say that Camden's grant to the Camden lesbian centre in 1994-95 will be £44,228. No wonder the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras giggles. The only people in Camden who do not giggle are those who have to pay the bill for such incompetence. Those who think that the Labour party would make a Government should remember what has happened to Camden under Labour's control.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Secretary of State confirm that he and his officials are in dispute with the borough of Camden about whether the Department owes Camden £38 million?

Mr. Gummer: When the hon. Gentleman confirms publicly each and every one of the facts—not disputes—that I have just given and dissociates himself from his council, I will be happy to look at his point.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I must get on. There is an equal amount of objection on both sides of the Chamber.

I have given only one or two examples culled at random from what could have been a much larger list. We can do without the ritual parade every time we ask authorities to take the same tough decisions on their costs as the Government are taking and that the private sector always has taken. During the recession, private companies made cuts and they have now emerged leaner and fitter to lead Britain into a new export-led recovery.

Local government must ensure that it reduces overmanning, takes out tiers of management and uses contracting out as a means of better service delivery. Many efficient authorities are already taking such measures and, in my criticisms of particular authorities, I hope that local government in general will recognise that I honour the many local authority officers and members who have done increasingly well in meeting the needs of their areas in a lean and fit way.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his excellent speech so far. Does he share my disgust and fury at the antics of Liberal-controlled Devon county council? It is spreading terror among 300 teaching staff by telling them that they are all to be sacked because of the Government's rate settlement and it is making old people fear that they will be put out on the street in the cold. In fact—I should like the Secretary of State to confirm this—the amount that Devon will receive next year is more than this year and the education grant is twice as high as the national average. Will he tell Devon county council that it should get rid of some of its 30,000 staff. It has more staff than the entire bureaucracy of Brussels. Will he ensure that it does something—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I was sincere when I said that interventions should be under a minute.

Mr. Gummer: The increase in Devon's education SSA is about twice as high as the average for the counties. Its staff numbers have increased by more than 2 per cent. in one year. A county in that position should not frighten people. It should look at its own internal arrangements and find ways of saving money so that it can be spent on the front line—on those who really need it.

It is important to take this seriously. I have with me the telephone directory of Cornwall county council—I am not just dealing with inner London. It is a pretty big list and its tone sums up what we need to look at carefully. For example, on the page that says, "Chief Executives Office" it lists numbers for the chief executive, assistant chief executive, assistant chief executive and a third assistant chief executive. I then see two secretarial staff, five support staff, three press and public relations staff—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I thought that it was impolite to point.

Mr. Gummer: I think that Opposition Members may have been trying to ensure that I address the Chair directly. I apologise if I did not do so. It enables me to say directly to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there are also five members of staff whose only job is to deal with the local government review and to send out various documents to frighten people about what might happen if they were to lost control of Cornwall. Many local authorities have spent large sums of money advertising themselves.

I have to be careful because another case from Cleveland is now in the courts. The House has passed legislation and debated its results yet some authorities have spent vast sums of ratepayers' money not only on advertising their superiority over others but on frightening people against possible changes. They then fight in the courts even beyond the point at which, when the judgment is read, anyone spending his own money would feel that the case against him had been proven.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I give way to the hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien), who rose first.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his courtesy in giving way. He will be aware that Warwickshire recently received a very good auditors' report and that the only time that it has been poll tax capped recently was when it was under Conservative control. However, parents in Warwickshire are facing larger classes for their children and the sacking of 200 teachers in the county. This issue has united Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour councillors in condemning the Government for the way in which they have calculated the SSA. Warwickshire spends 9 per cent. more on education than allowed for in the Government's education SSA. If it is to comply with the Government's requirements, Warwickshire will have to cut £10 million from its education budget. That is not acceptable. What is the Secretary of State's message to the angry parents of Warwickshire who do not want larger classes or a decline in education standards?

Mr. Gummer: Whatever Warwickshire councillors say, they have not been able to convince any other county that the methodology is wrong and that Warwickshire should have a special arrangement. The hon. Gentleman is saying that because Warwickshire has not found a way to deal with these matters as

[Mr. Gummer]

effectively as other counties it should have a special arrangement. The system does not allow for that—perfectly properly—whether Warwickshire is run by the Conservatives, the Liberals or Labour. Were it to do so, there would be no objectivity.

I know Warwickshire and I know many of the people who have come to put their case to me. I believe that Warwickshire will need to examine its spending pattern carefully. It needs to get its priorities right and aim money where it is most needed. Many counties are providing extremely good education without any more resources than those that Warwickshire has.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Lancashire has 13 per cent. surplus places in its secondary schools, many of which are in Labour areas so the county council is scared stiff to touch them? However, were it to remove them, there would be more money to spend on other schools. Moreover, Lancashire spends £93 more for a resident in a county home than for one in a private home. No one wishes the county homes to close but we can ask that they should be as efficiently run as private sector homes. If they were, there would be a cool £10.8 million to spend on schools, home care services or some other purpose.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend has been patient in trying to intervene. Lancashire has one of the highest proportions of staff per head in England, which suggests that there are ways for it to make improvements in addition to those that she has suggested.

It is very easy for county councils and district councils to tell the electorate that they can do nothing but cut the education budget or any other services of great importance. It is important for the House to remind people that if the priorities are right, if money is put where it is most needed and if central spending is reduced, in most cases substantial savings can be found.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I shall give way in a moment to my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth). The areas where the difficulties are greatest are those where there has been a tradition of prudence and care and where councils feel that they are coming to the end of what they can do. I have examined those areas particularly carefully, but very few of those with a tradition of prudence and care are represented by the Labour party.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Warwickshire is asking not for special treatment but for a fair deal. Our frustration is that year after year after year our representations appear to be ignored. It is no surprise that in a zero-sum game other local authorities are not interested in easing Warwickshire's position. If we care about the quality of our democracy, we should be strengthening the independence and scope of elected local government for which a strong mechanism of accountability now exists through the council tax. Does my right hon. Friend agree that our future quality of life, as well as our economic competitiveness, depends to a large extent on whether we invest in our schools? I therefore very much regret the Government's proposals for capping and SSAs—certainly as they bite in Warwickshire—which run counter to these purposes.

Mr. Gummer: I agree that education is at the heart of the nation's needs. That is why we have increased spending per pupil by nearly 50 per cent. in real terms since 1979. The difficulty, however, is that if the total spending is part of the total assessment of Government spending, when one local authority spends significantly in excess of what is available to other local authorities, it has a direct effect on us all because of its playback into the nation's economy.

Other honourable Members have to take into account the fact that Warwickshire is spending 4 per cent. above its SSA on education. It will have an increase of 1.2 per cent., which is above the average for all counties. I was concerned about Warwickshire's claim, which is based not on the particularity of Warwickshire but on the belief that the way in which the system works does not give adequate representation to factors that might colour our assessment. Because of that, I shall look closely with the local authority associations at Warwickshire's concerns next year. I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon and they lead me back to the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills). One or two other authorities have believed consistently that the mechanisms seem to have failed their particular problems, and I shall reconsider their cases carefully.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I must get on, but I shall give way first to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King).

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Is not my right hon. Friend right to say that every one of us has concerns about the current methodology? The right way to decide next year's determination is with local authority associations and the silliest way is to take the advice of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), who said that this was an extremely important debate but who has not even bothered to turn up. He was encouraging some Somerset Members of Parliament to vote against the motion. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that were the House not to approve it, there would be no funds available for local government and no ability to pay and local authorities would not be able to make a rate determination or issue demands? Would not that cost the whole of local government a considerable sum of money?

Mr. Gummer: I confirm all that my right hon. Friend says. I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) is not here. I had thought, from all the letters that he had written to Members of Parliament of his own party and others, that he may have found it possible to come to this important debate. Is the matter important only in his constituency and not in the House?

I wonder whether the right hon. Member for Yeovil has noticed that if there was a redetermination, it would be unlikely that Somerset would have benefited more. Indeed, the likelihood would have been that other counties would have noticed that Somerset had received a 2.5 per cent. increase in its education standard spending assessment, which is well over twice the county average; that in personal social services, it had a 2 per cent.

increase, which is considerably more than the county average; and that in other services it had a 4.6 per cent. increase.

It appears to me that in all the measurements, Somerset has done significantly better than many other counties. Yet the right hon. Member for Yeovil has rushed immediately to frighten people. The attempt by Liberal Democrats to frighten people as part and parcel of their party-politicking is the worst aspect of a party which has little to commend itself in general.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I will not enter into the argument in which the right hon. Gentleman has just engaged. May I invite him back to the subject of north-west England for a moment? He will consider, as I do, that there is plenty of scope for savings in cities such as Liverpool and that there is certainly scope for greater efficiency. However, does not he also recognise that the formula and the way in which it has been calculated is a great cause of concern? After all, if the European Union grants a city such as Liverpool objective 1 status, it is slightly bizarre that the city should be a long way down the league table of local authorities as listed for deprivation. Therefore, will he specifically look at its SSA for social services and the need of children? He will have received representations this year and last, and I hope that he will look at those seriously because children are at risk and will suffer deeply if that specific aspect is not addressed.

Mr. Gummer: I have, of course, looked very carefully at what the hon. Gentleman has said. I tried to look across to see whether there was something about the new method which was deleterious to Liverpool, for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman has outlined. As far as one can compare the last years of the previous system before 1979 and the years since, the gap between what Liverpool gained with what the authorities which are often compared with it gained was significantly larger. So that problem has been delineated before.

There are difficulties in places where the population is falling, for example. I have looked at the matter carefully. Many of the things that we have taken into account this time have been helpful. I think that the hon. Gentleman would agree that the use of unemployment as one of the elements to consider has been helpful. That is something for which the associations asked and which was denied them by previous Governments. I am pleased that we have brought in that element. I shall look again, but, after all, Liverpool is third in the north-west as I understand it. It has significant resources, but I shall be happy to look specifically at the points that the hon. Gentleman makes.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I must continue for a moment. I shall allow hon. Members to intervene, but another paragraph would be helpful.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) has reminded us that we have to strike a balance between the proper responsibility of central Government to the economy of the country as a whole, including the control of inflation, and the proper duty of local government to decide how much it wants to spend to meet local needs. That is the knotty problem on which I tried to help my hon. Friends and hon. Members who represent Warwickshire.

Before I move on from aggregate spending figures, let me say a word about the total provision for education and personal social services, on which hon. Members have raised points. Provision for spending on education is set to rise by 1.1 per cent. That comes on top of a 2.4 per cent. increase for 1994-95. In real terms, as I have said, spending per pupil has risen by almost 50 per cent. since 1979. It is remarkable that that has happened. It would be wrong to ignore it. It is against that background that we have fixed the figures for this year.

It will be up to local education authorities and schools to deploy their resources to maximum effect to give priority to front-line services. If I had had the opportunity earlier, I would have made the point about the tone of the Cornwall telephone directory. The proportion of people who are admitted to be in administration—clerks and the like—as compared with people out in the field is on a scale which no private industry could support.

Sir David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the difficulties in Bedfordshire. Will he confirm that it is utterly untrue to say that central Government has ordered Bedfordshire to make a 4 per cent. cut in school budgets throughout the county? That is absolutely mischievous and misleading and will he condemn it?

Mr. Gummer: Not only is it absolutely untrue, but I am afraid that it is typical of the thought process of authorities not uninfluenced by the Liberal Democrats. I can sum up the thought process in the words of a Liberal opponent of mine—he was perfectly reasonable in every other way—who, when I asked why he had put out a leaflet which he knew was utterly untrue, said, "Well, all's fair in politics, isn't it?" That is the sadness of local authorities which put out documents which they know to be untrue. I must say that the Labour party has a much better reputation for that than the Liberal Democrats, whose idea of truth is very different from what we find in the rest of the political scene.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): In response to the comments that the Secretary of State has just made, may I say that I, too, deprecate anybody who puts out a document containing information that he knows to be incorrect. Will the Secretary of State confirm that, notwithstanding all the comments that he has made about the increases in education spending since 1979, the standard spending assessments per pupil are to be reduced this coming year compared with last year? Yes or no?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the total amount of money available for a local authority increases. If a local education authority decided that it should spend less on education or more on administration, it would spend less per pupil. But there is no reason why the hon. Gentleman's local authority or any other authority could not spend more on pupils and less on administration. It is difficult to understand how the hon. Gentleman can condemn the practice in general when the Liberal Democrats do it on every occasion. I remember what they did in Tower Hamlets; and they should still be hanging their heads in shame.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): My right hon. Friend may like to know that the Liberal Democratic

[Mr. Mark Robinson]

party has been circulating petitions in my constituency which talk about massive cuts by central Government on Somerset spending.

Mr. Gummer: I have read out the figures. There can be no such statement. The facts are that Somerset's SSA has gone up by much more than the county average for England. It cannot be presented as a cut, because it is an increase. I am sure that the hon. Member for Bath will wish immediately to renew communications with the public. In it, I hope that he will not only put right the fact that Somerset's SSA is not being cut, but ensure that no resident of Somerset misses the fact that the number of Somerset staff has increased by 3.4 per cent. in a year.

No private company could have managed such an increase while staying in business. The hon. Member for Bath should be ashamed of what Somerset Liberal Democrats have done and of the non-existence of the leader of the Liberal Democrats, who has made such a fuss. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman is afraid.

Mr. Don Foster *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: If the leader of the Liberal Democrats cares to come to the House, I shall give way to him so that he can explain why he has written to members of my party to ask them to vote for him when he has not even bothered to turn up for the debate. I am ashamed of the right hon. Gentleman.

We have heard much about the funding of the community care reforms over the past few months. I believe that the figures speak for themselves.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): Yes, they do.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) accepts that. Next year, local authorities will have £1.8 billion in recognition of their new responsibilities. That is an increase of 44 per cent. over the figure for the current year. As I have said, in 1995-96 there will be a ring-fenced grant totalling £648 million for authorities to spend on community care—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may feel that that information is to be yawned at, but most of the people involved in community care know that we have carried through our determination to enhance the powers and responsibilities of local authorities by giving them the new duties and the means to carry them through.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Mr. Gummer: No.

As I have said, total standard spending for England will increase by 2 per cent. next year.

Mr. Clelland *rose—*

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I will give way to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks).

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to the Secretary of State. It seems that the Government are running rather scared from the west country woolly hats at the moment. I felt quite sorry for the Secretary of State earlier when he looked like a Christian being thrown to the lions. However, if he is going to start cherry-picking among local authorities, my sympathy will run out. What has he got to say about Westminster? He has praised that council so far, but according to the *Evening Standard* tonight, the council did not collect £30 million in service charges in respect of flats and properties that it had sold. What has the Secretary of State got to say about that in terms of the misappropriation of resources?

Mr. Gummer: What I say about the figures that I have given is that I take them from the published figures and the facts as set out by the auditors. As far as I understand it, the figure referred to by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West emanates largely from the Labour party in Westminster. I would want to look more carefully at the figures before I confirmed or denied what the hon. Gentleman has said.

However, I can tell the hon. Member for Newham, North-West that, no matter what party it comes from, if there is evidence of impropriety or improper behaviour I would condemn it. I only wish that that was a more general view on both sides of the House.

We are increasing aggregate external finance at a lower rate than total standard spending because we believe that it is right that local taxpayers should fund a slightly higher proportion of the cost of local services. However, the level of council tax is a decision for each authority and will depend—

Mr. Clelland: Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman has asked me to give way "on that point" on several occasions. I want to make more progress and more than three lines of my speech would be reasonable.

The level of council tax is a decision for each authority and it will depend on the level of service that councils choose to provide, the improvements that they can make to efficiency and effectiveness and how well they can collect what they are owed. I am therefore not about to start predicting council tax levels.

I will not make such predictions because I have tried to learn from the Labour party. Last year—*[Interruption.]* The Opposition Front Bench spokesman should not make comments from a sedentary position because I am going to tell him what I have learnt. Last year, Labour predicted that—*[Interruption.]* The point may be short, but it is worth listening to. Last year, the Labour party predicted that council taxes would rise by 6 per cent. They actually increased by only 2.2 per cent. The Labour party was wrong.

Indeed, Labour was wrong just as, in three successive years, the former shadow Environment spokesman was wrong when he said that the number of teachers had fallen. He was only slightly wrong. He should have said that the number had risen. That is the difference. The trouble is that the Labour party constantly cries, "Fear!" and "Danger!"

Mr. Clelland: Will the Secretary of State give way on this point?

Mr. Gummer: I will certainly give way to the hon. Gentleman on this point.

Mr. Clelland: I am grateful to the Secretary of State. Is he aware that, under his criteria, the city of Newcastle

upon Tyne will be forced to cut £5 million from its budget while, at the same time, reducing band D council tax by £70? Is he further aware that the local newspaper has conducted a survey of residents in the area which showed that, by a margin of 20:1, the people of Newcastle would prefer to keep the council tax at its present level and avoid any cuts? Why cannot the Secretary of State accommodate the electorate of Newcastle?

Mr. Gummer: The people of Newcastle have an authority which has consistently spent very highly. If it intends to take more from the population than is reasonable, that will have an effect on the total spending on local government in the nation. That has a real impact on the economy. There is no way in which Newcastle can avoid being part of the United Kingdom economy. We try to achieve a reasonable balance.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): My right hon. Friend referred to teaching numbers. Will he confirm that Devon county council increased its staff levels last year by 2.4 per cent., or 718 people? If it can increase its staff by that amount, and in view of the settlement that it is now receiving, will my right hon. Friend confirm that there is no reason why a single teacher should be dismissed in Devon?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is being too kind to his local authority. He should tell his authority to answer a simple question. Does it think that education is important and, if it thinks that it is, will it put its additional resources into education and reduce spending on the unnecessary extra staff which it has decided, under the new administration, to add to its payroll? Unless the authority can say yes to that, the people of Devon will receive the bad deal which they are being offered at the moment under the guise of blaming the Government. It is right that my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) should press that point strongly.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I should come to a conclusion quickly. However, before I do so, I should warn the House that there will be attempts to suggest that the system is unfortunately not as it should be. The Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, will, now that he is so widely recognised as an expert on local government finance, put forward the view that the SSA system benefits Conservative-controlled councils rather than Labour-controlled councils.

Before the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras rises, I want to give the House the opportunity to take the following fact on board. Of the 50 councils with the highest SSA per head, only three are Conservative controlled—*[Interruption.]* At any opportunity, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras suggests that we somehow fiddle the figures to help ourselves, but that is manifestly not true. The House is aware of the facts.

If hon. Members listen carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, they will no doubt hear him refer to phoney mathematics. The phoney mathematics involves comparing the outturn figures at the end of the year with the SSA additions for the beginning of the year. In all my time in the Department of the Environment and before that, I have not heard an Opposition Member make a speech on the subject in which the phrase "phoney mathematics" did not appear.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: In a moment.

I must warn the House that there will be another "phoney" reference and that is the reference to phoney facts. The Opposition spokesman will suggest that one does not get the same deal in St. Helens as one gets in Westminster. In fact, one gets a better deal. First, there are better services which are provided better and, secondly, if the councils spent at the same level, a higher proportion would be covered by the grant.

There is one fact that we will not hear in the speech of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras because, unfortunately, he has been unable to find it. Every local authority in the Association of County Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities was asked to provide examples of the way in which councils had to sack people—

Mr. Frank Dobson: Not by me.

Mr. Gummer: Ah, so those Labour-dominated authorities provided the information entirely of their own volition with no intention of passing the results to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. I understand why they did not pass the results on. Having written to all the authorities asking for examples of the number of compulsory redundancies which they had to make as a result of the appalling policies of the Government, there was no reply. No examples could be found. The authorities could not manage to come up with the information. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras will not be able to give that fact, although he longed to do so. I hope that we shall look carefully at that matter.

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): Nottingham city council has tried to respond to what the Government have said in the past. In the past three years, it has saved £15 million. However, under the assessment, it would need an extra £3.3 million just to keep level with inflation. Savings were made in the past, and the Government tried to heap savings on top of them.

Mr. Gummer: Savings cannot be made in one period and then ignored for the rest. Nottingham is spending 8.8 per cent. above its standard spending assessment. As in any business, the programme of being more and more efficient has to take place. I know that matters are difficult in Nottingham city council, because it has a bad example in Nottinghamshire county council. Nottingham councillors recognise that, because it is part of the embarrassing relationship between those two bodies. If both tried to save, the citizens of Nottinghamshire would benefit immensely.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I must now refer to the distribution of grant. We have a system whose sole aim is to ensure that

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available resources are divided fairly, according to needs, so that each authority is placed on an equal footing. We try to work those out—

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At the start of the debate you had to announce that a 10-minute limit will be imposed on hon. Members, with the exception of the Front-Bench spokesmen. The Secretary of State has spoken for an hour, and he has deliberately provoked interventions in order to prevent hon. Members from speaking. Do you deprecate that behaviour, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Can you offer us any protection from this deliberate filibuster?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair observes that Members are honourable Members. Presumably, they are capable of controlling their bodies as to whether or not they rise to intervene. Many hon. Members have been rising to intervene. If hon. Members would resume their seats, the Secretary of State might come to a conclusion.

Mr. Gummer: It is a little harsh to say that I have been speaking for an hour. Several hon. Members have had an opportunity to put their points of view.

There are those who want more money for their local authority. The only way in which that can be done is either by taking money from other local authorities or by increasing the total amount. That is why we shall look with considerable care at the comments of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. He must tell us, if he does not like the settlement, how much more he would spend, where it would come from, what taxes he would raise in order to deliver it, and whether the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has given his permission for that statement. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will give way to my right hon. and hon. Friends if they wish to remind him of that fact and, perhaps, ask again for his point of view.

To all councillors and hon. Members who ask, "Why does the system not give my authority more resources?", I say that, if we had a system which is as objective as we can work out with the local authority associations, it would not allow me to change the sum of the resources for an aggrieved authority or tilt that system toward a particular local council. I have seen that problem particularly when dealing with Newham, where there is an issue about the way in which spending is categorised between different groups of local authorities. I cannot make the point strongly enough that we can change the distribution methodology only when a different objective formula is justified. If the hon. Gentleman has some points that he would like to put into the formula, as his predecessors had, for they had several suggestions, I shall be very willing to consider them.

Last year, we carried out a thorough review of the distribution methodology and incorporated many changes. We needed a period of stability thereafter. We have made some changes, particularly to accommodate the police arrangements. There is more up-to-date information on pupil numbers, which makes the methodology much more up to date, as many people would agree.

We have also had to make a change in the SSA for the fire service, to take account of calls to incidents such as road accidents, and to recognise that maritime authorities have less scope for drawing reinforcements from neighbouring fire brigades. We have considered once more area cost adjustments, and we have responded to local government representations on the deemed debt of the former Greater London council and the levy of the London Pensions Fund Authority, which has helped inner London councils considerably. Detailed discussions with local authorities have led to that.

Since then, during the consultation period, we have received a number of representations from authorities about the data that we propose to use in the calculation of SSAs. Some of those representations brought to light errors that we have been able to correct. In particular, we have been able to improve data on pupil numbers, and we have tried to find ways of dealing with imperfections relating to pensions in the police SSA. We shall continue to discuss the SSA methodology with local authority associations.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Gummer: I undertake that, if right hon. and hon. Members are able to produce examples of a different way of doing all that, particularly suggestions in regard to weighting, I shall be happy to consider them. I want to try to have a system that is increasingly able to meet changing circumstances such as those mentioned by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), who spoke of certain difficulties in Liverpool. Hon. Friends from Devon raised other matters.

I said in December that I would continue to pay a special grant to compensate authorities that have lost more than 4 per cent. of SSA as a result of the incorporation of the new census data and the changes stemming—

Mr. Raynsford: That is a backhander.

Mr. Gummer: The House should hear the comments of the hon. Member for Greenwich. He said, "That is a backhander." It is what local authority associations have universally ask me to do. It is a pretty wide backhander if we give it to every local authority. The hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of himself for saying that.

This is a fair arrangement, phasing out transitional support so that grant can be redistributed elsewhere. I propose also to pay a special grant to police authorities whose combined SSA and entitlement to police grant next year will be reduced by more than 2 per cent. as a result of the move to the new police funding formula. Perhaps the hon. Member for Greenwich would say that that universally asked-for change is a backhander. Special grant report No. 12 will establish those grants for 1995-96. Some £261 million of special grant will be distributed to local authorities in that way.

The capping of local authority budgets—I come to the last point that I want to make—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Opposition Members have asked me to give way. I have no means of orchestrating the Labour party, nor does anyone else. The hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) rose, but he was unable to intervene. He cannot complain because other hon. Members had an opportunity to put their points of view.

I have considered carefully the representations that Ministers in my Department and in other Departments have received from a range of authorities. In the light of those representations, I have decided to make one change to the intended capping criteria announced in December.

Last year I announced in a similar debate an adjustment that benefited authorities that had been the subject of a substantial reduction in SSA as a result of the SSA review implemented in last year's settlement and which, under the initial criteria, would have been required to reduce their budgets in cash terms. I propose to make a similar change this year. It will apply to any authority whose SSA was reduced as a consequence of the 1993 review by more than 10 per cent. as measured for the purpose of SSA reduction grant. The effect, as last year, is that any such authority will be required to freeze its budget rather than to reduce it in cash terms.

I also announced in December my proposals for the calculation of notional amounts for authorities whose boundaries or functions will change from 1 April. They provide the base from which I shall measure increases in budgets in determining whether those increases are excessive. In addition, I announced provisional criteria which made allowance for that expenditure on care in the community which is being met this year by the special transitional grant.

Apart from the changes which I have described, my intentions as regards capping criteria remain as I described them in December. The House will recognise that capping is an essential tool for retaining the effective control of overall spending required by the Government—indeed, any Government's—economic strategy. I understand that there are even suggestions that capping would form part of a Labour Government strategy. We will not hesitate to use our capping powers should it prove necessary.

This year's settlement will give local authorities some difficult decisions to make, but, in the interests of the national economy, local government—like central Government—must restrain spending and make each pound it spends go further. The settlement also demonstrates the Government's continuing commitment to a fair distribution of available resources, on a basis which uses up-to-date information and objective formulae. I commend the settlement and these reports to the House.

5.50 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Now that the 70 minutes of sermonising are over, we should return to the real world. I remind the House that, in this coming year, real council tax payers in England will end up paying more and getting less. There may be a few councils where the council tax will not go up, and there may be one or two where services will not be cut, but, taken overall, nearly every council tax payer in this coming year will pay more and get less because the Government are cutting the grant.

It is not just the Labour party which is saying that. The Minister of State—using elegant phraseology to which I could not possibly aspire—is reported as saying:

"We have all been stuffed by the Treasury".

Councillor Rita Taylor, the Tory chair of the Association of District Councils' finance panel, said:

"the public are going to have to pay more . . . Conservatives in local government are in despair at this settlement".

The general situation has not changed much since the Minister made his statement at the beginning of December. From the Government's figures, we can expect the average council tax increase over the whole country to be about 6 per cent. It will be lower in some areas and higher in others, but even including that average increase, and using again the Government's figures, the money available for councils will be £1.5 billion short of what is being spent on services this year. That does not allow for any forthcoming pay increases, the additional cost of about 100,000 extra children starting school, the needs of more old people, better services for the disabled and other demands.

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: I would rather get on, if I may. *[Interruption.]* Legions of hon. Members want to speak on behalf of their communities. We had a speech of 70 minutes from the Secretary of State, and I shall give way to a limited number of hon. Members. *[Interruption.]* I shall give way to the Minister.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman says that the settlement is inadequate. Therefore, the Labour party would either give more grant or would allow capping to be relaxed and council taxes to go up. Which is it to be? By how much would revenue support grant go up? By how much would the hon. Gentleman be willing to see council taxes rise? There is no alternative to one of those two options, or perhaps both.

Mr. Dobson: We are not hear to discuss what a future Labour Government might do. We are here to deal with a proposition that the Government are putting forward today. It is fairly unlikely that the Labour party will be in charge of the country within the forthcoming financial year, although I hope that we are. We look forward to dealing with the problems and making the best of the opportunities. We are discussing the Government's proposals tonight, and it is up to them to defend them.

The Government's figures suggest that, during the next three years, council tax payers will have to find an extra £2.8 billion in council tax. That is equivalent to 1.5p on the standard rate of income tax. They will have to find that not just next year, but the year after and the year after that. People can expect to pay more and get less.

Ministers try to give the impression—God knows the Secretary of State has taken enough time in doing so tonight—that the formula is objective and is as "fair as humanly possible", as the Secretary of State said. However, the standard spending assessment is based on the Government's assessments of need, and one does not need to be a member of the Royal Statistical Society to see that that cannot be right.

Never mind how the Government arrive at their criteria for deprivation—what one should do is judge them by the outcome. According to the Government's social index of need, Westminster is more deprived than Brent, Lambeth or Southwark; Runnymede is more deprived than Oldham or Liverpool; Hove is more deprived than Hartlepool; Salisbury is more deprived than Knowsley; Windsor—I know that it is going through a bad time at the moment—is more deprived than Bury, Langbaurgh, Ipswich, Thurrock or Darlington. I do not think that anybody believes that that is right.

The system is a party political racket, and everybody knows it. It has been designed to help Tory areas and to help keep Tories in power. A supreme example is the

[Mr. Dobson]

special fiddled funding for Westminster. Westminster used to be the Tory flagship, but scandals are turning it into the Tory ship of shame. If the Conservatives think that Westminster is their flagship, they should remember that their last flagship was the poll tax, and Westminster will sink them like the poll tax did.

Time and time again, the Government have rigged the grant to help Westminster, first to keep down the poll tax and then to keep down the council tax. The Secretary of State may say that there was no rigging. Let me read from a note prepared for Lady Porter, the leader of Westminster city council, on 9 May 1989. The note compliments the Secretary of State—he was not the Secretary of State at the time—and says that he is the "most alert" of Ministers to political nuances, and that he would be particularly conscious—

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hesitate to raise this point of order, but I thought that we were speaking today about the revenue support settlement for the coming year, not for some years ago. If all that the Opposition can rely on is something which happened years ago, it shows that they are fairly bankrupt of ideas.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must draw the attention of all hon. Members to the fact that the motion is concerned with the revenue support grant and the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1995-96. Anything may be used in evidence, but that obviously is the primary purpose of the debate.

Mr. Dobson: You will be familiar, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the fact that one of the reasons why Westminster is in such a good seam at the moment is that skulduggery and fiddling in the past have allowed the council to build up enormous balances. In many cases, those balances exceed the amounts of expenditure which some councils can look forward to in the coming year.

I now return to the report, written when Westminster started building up those balances. It was reported to Lady Porter that the Secretary of State—then the Minister of State—would be particularly conscious that, with safety nets, a number of high-spending Labour London boroughs would appear to get off the hook with community charges "lower than Westminster". The Tories then set about making sure that those community charges "lower than Westminster" did not come about.

Westminster will have to be given very large sums of money this year to make up for the millions of pounds that have been lost within the council through corruption and incompetence. That is not just a matter for Westminster, because the extra funds which are constantly found for that council and which, it is proposed, should be given to Westminster in this settlement, are taken from the funds available to councils elsewhere. That is in not just the rest of London, but the rest of the country. Every other council gets less so that Westminster can get more.

At a previous Question Time, my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) drew attention to the rather unfair treatment of St. Helens compared with Westminster, despite the fact that they have about the same population. My hon. Friend will give further details if he manages to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. St. Helens receives £104 million in grant from the Government while Westminster receives £194 million. The grant per head for St. Helens is £578 and the grant per head for Westminster is £1,024.

It could be argued that, as St. Helens is not in central London, those figures are not strictly comparable. As the Secretary of State seems to be obsessed with the London borough of Camden, let us compare Camden with Westminster. Both boroughs are roughly the same size, geographically and in terms of population, and are adjacent to one another. Virtually the only difference is that more rich people live in Westminster than in Camden. One would think, therefore, that Camden would get more money than Westminster, but that is not so. Westminster receives £194 million whereas Camden receives £178 million. Westminster will have got nearly £16 million more in this settlement. It got £21 million more in the year that is coming to an end and £20 million more the year before that. However, that clearly does not have a direct effect on performance because, as the Secretary of State's officials can confirm, the Audit Commission's indicators show that Camden is better run than Westminster.

How has the grant been rigged to benefit Westminster at the expense of everywhere else in England? Some time ago, Westminster received £7.2 million to spend on flood defences. It spent £700,000 and therefore had a kick-back of £6.3 million. It was also given £2.2 million to give a grant to the English National Opera and the English National Ballet. It gave £200,000 and kept £2 million for itself. That is £8 million to start off with, which others should have received in a fair system. However, the swindling is much more systematic than that. The special weighting for tourists was doubled at one stage to £5.3 million. The standard spending assessment for Westminster includes a £54 million allowance for the extra cost of visitors.

Another special factor is at work in Westminster, which, for some reason, is not allowed for in the SSA. In the current year, Westminster receives more than £20 million in income from parking charges, and that sum is expected to be more than £30 million in the forthcoming year. One would expect a Government who are so concerned with public spending to abate or to reduce Westminster's grant to reflect that massive income, which is not available to other councils. Instead, Westminster is allowed to keep every bit of it. It is a racket: extra money for visitors is not offset by the money that visitors bring in. Moreover, it has all been done as part of a political swindle.

Why was that necessary? First, it was to keep the poll tax down; secondly, it was to keep the council tax down—

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No.

Thirdly, it is to make up for money lost by that Tory council deliberately by fraud, incompetence and corruption. Everyone in the country now knows that Westminster council is being done by the district auditor for the "homes for votes" scandal in which £21 million has been lost, but there has been a more recent revelation.

The Secretary of State said that he did not deal with figures unless they came from the auditor. These figures are from the auditor—Westminster's internal auditor—who says that the council lost £30 million by not

collecting service charges, management charges and the cost of repairs to flats and houses that it sold. That cannot simply be forgotten, as it did not happen by accident. It was deliberate, and the papers show that the council ignored legal advice and kept the facts from committees and the public. That is why the Labour party is calling for a special audit of Westminster city council. I now challenge the Secretary of State to order a special audit of—

Mr. Arnold: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought that we were debating the Local Government Finance Report (England)—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already ruled on that matter. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not listening when I did so.

Mr. Dobson: In case the hon. Gentleman does not understand, the money that Westminster city council has not collected is having to be made up by Government grants. Therefore, grants are not available to people in his area or in areas represented by my hon. Friends.

Will the Secretary of State establish a special audit to root out corruption in Westminster, or do the Tories reserve special audits for Labour councils?

Mr. Gummer: The auditor is, at this very moment, dealing with a number of the issues that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned. The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong to say that any of those makes any difference whatever to the distribution of grant, either this year or in previous years. So he should not mislead the House. Moreover, the House will have noticed that he has now been speaking for 15 minutes but has dealt with nothing except the past arrangements of Westminster city council and has given no answers about scandals in Camden, the lists of which were public, not spread about by leaked documentation. The hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of himself.

Mr. Dobson: How can the Secretary of State say that the scandalous waste of public funds in Westminster has not affected the funds that it receives from central Government? He says that he did not know about it. If he and his officials did not know about it, they would not know why there were such gaps in the accounts, which had to be made up in this settlement. That is why we are concerned about what is going on.

If the Secretary of State wants to bandy about figures for Westminster and Camden, let me give him a few. The Audit Commission selected 12 indicators at the middle of last year. On those, Camden far out-performs Westminster. There are 12 indicators and 12 inner London boroughs. Camden comes top in four of those indicators and is either first or second best in seven out of 12. Westminster comes top in only one and either first or second best in just three of the 12. Camden has the best educational results in inner London, even before they are adjusted for deprivation. When deprivation is taken into account, Camden is second best in the whole of England, and Westminster is 99th. I hope that the Secretary of State is proud of that. When it comes to handing out mandatory awards to students, 99 per cent. of students in Camden got mandatory awards on the due date, whereas no students in Westminster got mandatory awards on the due date. So I hope that the Secretary of State will shut up for the time being.

Is the Secretary of State satisfied with the present arrangements, powers and resources of the Audit Commission and the district auditor, or does he agree with the Labour party that the present system is letting everyone down and that the Audit Commission and the district auditor need to be strengthened to eliminate fraud and corruption wherever it arises?

Mr. Gummer: As the hon. Gentleman has obviously not listened to anything anyone has said, I shall repeat it. I am opposed to impropriety of any kind, wherever it comes from, and will seek to ensure that it is rooted out. I note that it has occurred in a number of boroughs and, in those circumstances, no one has been more ready to support those who have been found innocent and oppose those who have been found guilty. The hon. Gentleman seems not to remember that it is a principle of English law that a man or organisation is not found guilty until he or it is proved guilty. He thinks that he can fling about any statement in the House because he is protected by the privileges of the House. I wish that he earned those privileges.

Mr. Dobson: I have never said anything in the House that I am not willing to repeat outside it. In commenting on Westminster city council in the House today, I have only repeated what I have said on television and on radio.

I may seem to have spent a lot of time discussing the Westminster city council, but the Government's treatment of it shows how unfair and party political is the system. Only four places in Britain—Hackney, Tower Hamlets, the Scilly Isles and the City of London—receive a higher proportion of Government support than Westminster. The rest of us get less so that Westminster can get more.

I shall give some examples of the reduction in council tax that would occur in other areas if those areas received the same level of external Government help as Westminster. The Camden council tax would be reduced by £261, the Croydon council tax would be reduced by £73, the Enfield tax would be reduced by £274 and the Bristol tax would be reduced by £258. That is nothing compared with many other councils. If they received the same level of external Government support as Westminster, council tax payers in Bury and Oldham would not pay anything at all—they would get a refund every year. The same thing would apply in Redbridge, Plymouth, Dartmouth, Langbaurgh, Gloucester, Dover, Stockton-on-Tees, Southampton, Northampton, Carlisle, Watford and York. I do not understand how anyone could think that that is not a racket.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman does not understand how people would not think that it is a racket, but why does not the Association of County Councils think that it is a racket? It thinks that there is a reasonable level, as does the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and all of the other people and organisations which are involved in the process. The decisions are arrived at after full discussion with local authorities. The only other person who does not agree with it is the hon. Gentleman's predecessor on the Opposition Front Bench.

Furthermore, independent authorities such as Mr. Tony Travers have said that what the hon. Gentleman says is simply not true. The only people who think as the hon.

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Gentleman does are those who have done so little homework that they do not understand how the system works to the benefit of the whole country.

Mr. Dobson: I have done enough homework to recognise what the Minister means. When he says that decisions are taken in consultation with local authorities, he really means that he decides after he has consulted with them—and he usually ignores what they have said.

The results reveal the true integrity and fairness of the system. Under the settlement, people will pay more this year and receive less: council tax will rise and services will be cut. I do not have time to list all of those services because I want to keep my contribution short.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): My hon. Friend did not mention wonderful Wolverhampton in his list of authorities which would benefit in the way that he outlined. Wolverhampton is an exemplary authority—the Secretary of State would confirm that if he got to his feet—but in the coming year, in order to stand still, we shall have to find an extra £7 million by either increasing charges or reducing our services because the Secretary of State has not honoured his commitment to the wonderful people of Wolverhampton. They will bear the pain in the next financial year as a result of the Government's failure to recognise the needs of local government.

Mr. Dobson: I apologise to my hon. Friend for not mentioning Wolverhampton in my list of places which would receive a refund if their councils were as well supplied with Government funds as Westminster. However, we do not have time to list them all. He reiterates what Labour Members have said: in most cases, people will pay more and receive less.

I shall give some examples of what is happening to council services. As more children are living in poverty today than at any time in the past 30 years, school meals should be becoming more important. In 1979, when the Government came to power, 63 per cent. of children took school meals; now the figure is only 43 per cent. The reason is that the price of school meals has increased from 20p all over the country to 120p in some areas, while at the same time nutritional standards have been abandoned.

Will the Secretary of State confirm whether there will be further rises in the price of school meals in the coming year? Will nutritional standards fall further? We asked him those questions when he delivered his statement in December but he did not answer. If he cannot be bothered to answer now, it is clear that he does not care.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No.

Apparently, some Tories claim that the size of school classes does not matter—which is strange as nearly all of them send their children out of the regular school system to be educated. They send their children to the fee-paying schools which have smaller class sizes. *[Interruption.]* I do not know why Government Members are getting excited because I do not know anyone on the Opposition Benches who sends his or her children to a fee-paying school.

Let us assume, therefore, that the children of Tories benefit from smaller class sizes. Most people think that it would be a good idea if all of our children could enjoy the educational benefits of smaller class sizes. According to the Government's own figures, in the past 10 years there has been a 9 per cent. increase in class sizes in primary schools and secondary school class sizes are rising as well. There are reports of that occurring all over the country. I ask the Secretary of State: will there be further increases in school class sizes? Does he know? Does he care? I can assure him that parents care, but they are faced with paying more and getting less.

Youth clubs are another part of the education service which is increasingly neglected. Those clubs do not constitute a statutory provision and they are closing all over the country. Government Members then ask why there is an increase in juvenile crime. In London, and in many other parts of the country, the youth clubs which used to keep children occupied have been closed. I thought that the right hon. Gentleman, with his religious leanings, would recall the old saying, "The devil makes work for idle hands." The closure of youth clubs has certainly led to other problems.

Mr. Yeo: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No, I shall certainly not give way. As to clubs at the other end of the age spectrum—

Mr. Yeo: Give way.

Mr. Dobson: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is just standing there, because I can remember his abominable behaviour on previous occasions.

Mr. Yeo: Give way.

Mr. Dobson: No, I shall not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Opposition spokesman clearly does not intend to give way to the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo).

Mr. Gummer: Will the hon. Gentleman reconsider what he has just said? He made a direct assertion about my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South, but he will not give way to him. Will the hon. Gentleman have the courtesy to give way to someone whom he has insulted?

Mr. Dobson: I can cast my mind back to the occasion when the hon. Member for Suffolk, South made assertions about the veracity of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). That led to Madam Speaker having to make a statement about the whole matter—so I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Yeo: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to make unsupported assertions, in respect of an hon. Member sitting in the Chamber, about what happened in a previous Parliament, and then to refuse to give way to him?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair deprecates personal comments even if they are not ruled out by "Erskine

May". I think that this whole debate has become a little too excited; but how hon. Members conduct themselves in entirely up to them.

Mr. Dobson: In 1979, luncheon clubs provided meals for 15 million old people. In the last year for which figures are available, they provided meals for only 7 million people. Those clubs provide old people not just with a meal but with a chance to get out and enjoy a bit of company—to stir out of their homes, in which some of them feel imprisoned because they are fearful of going out. Will more or fewer pensioners be having meals in luncheon clubs as a result of today's announcement?

As for care in the community, there are all sorts of calculations about NHS funding, local council funding, voluntary sector funding and private sector funding. I admit that the system is byzantine in its complexity, but the evidence of people's eyes and of our advice services and post bags show that the figures speak for themselves—sad figures, stumbling around the streets with no one to look after them. People have come to us because their neighbours cannot help being a nuisance when they are in a crisis, but there is no one to look after them; there are no acute or secure beds to cope with them. From the inner cities to the shire counties, care in the community is not working properly—and we all know it.

I shall continue with a few more examples of what seems likely to happen. No doubt the Government will refer to them as anecdotes. These days, the definition of an anecdote is a reality that gives the lie to Government statistics. The Government claim that the threats to services are exaggerated by councils. There may be some truth in that; there may be exaggeration by teachers and by pensioner groups. For every spoonful of hyperbole on the part of local people, we get a bucketful of litotes from Ministers. [HON. MEMBERS: "Of what?"] For Conservative Members who have not had the benefit of a classical education, I shall try again. For every ounce of exaggeration by local people, we get a ton of complacent understatement from Ministers.

In Warwickshire, there is a threat to schools. Yesterday, I encountered someone in a meeting to do with the green side of my environmental duties. Towards the end of our discussions, he suddenly said, "I hope you are going to oppose what is happening to schools in Warwickshire, because we are faced with a possible loss of one teacher from every primary school and every secondary school. That will harm the education of my children and of the children of my neighbours." Does the Secretary of State deny that that is likely to happen?

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud) *rose—*

Mr. Dobson: No, I want to get on with my speech so as to allow some of my hon. Friends to speak up for their communities.

Shropshire faces a £1 million reduction in spending on the elderly. It faces a reduction of nearly £500,000 in spending on people with learning difficulties, and a loss of more than £500,000 for spending on services to children in families—including the council's efforts to prevent child abuse. Last night I, like all hon. Members who attended the debate, heard about the nationwide concern over the funding of the police service and the attendant threat to the fight against crime.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for referring to Shropshire. Can he confirm that the immense problems that we face there stem not just from this year's settlement but from a succession of four bad settlements which have meant that services have been consistently threatened for four years? There is near-universal agreement in the county that the only way services can be maintained is by going through the capping limit.

Mr. Dobson: I understand that. We are not making a party political point because, as we understand it, all the members of Shropshire county council—Tory, Liberal and Labour alike—believe that the capping limit is too low to allow them to provide the services that they believe their people deserve.

If we can believe what we read, the Tory members of the county council have been making representations to the Secretary of State, presumably to the same effect—although I hope that they have been more successful than some others who have made representations. I have checked on what happened to the seven Tory-controlled councils—there are so few of them these days—which have made representations to the Secretary of State or to one of his Ministers. They include Solihull, about which the Secretary of State was looking so concerned. Solihull went to ask for more; it ended up with £51,000 less. Castle Point went and came out with less. Likewise Dartford, Ribble Valley, Rushmoor, Thanet, and above all Brent, which went and lost £500,000 as a result of its representations. And that is what happens to Tory councils.

Even more seriously, last year the fire service in South Yorkshire was so short of funds that it had to capitalise fire fighters' pension lump sums. In ordinary language, it took out a mortgage to find the money to pay the lump sums to fire fighters retiring from the service. The Government accepted that South Yorkshire was skint enough to have to do that. This year one might have expected the council to get a bit more from the Government to ease matters a little, but it got less: a cut of £1.4 million from a total budget of only £32 million. For the past two years, that fire brigade has not been able to afford new uniforms or new tyres for the fire engines. It needs to replace the fire engine tyres: worn tyres are not exactly a good idea.

The chief fire officer says that the authority cannot cope. I have to tell the Secretary of State—I had hoped that the Government machine would warn him of this—that the Home Office inspector has said that South Yorkshire cannot meet its minimum standards of fire cover on its current budget. So the people of South Yorkshire will have to pay more for less fire cover. I understand that the same applies on Merseyside, which has a £4.7 million shortfall. The authority fears that it will be in breach of its statutory duty.

While we are in South Yorkshire, let me mention Barnsley, which is apparently far less deprived than Runnymede and similar places. Over the past few years, Barnsley has lost 20 pits. In their desperate efforts to get the pit closure programme through the House, the Government promised to set up enterprise zones in the areas most deprived as a result of pit closures, yet they are so slovenly and useless that not one of those enterprise zones is yet in operation. The one in Barnsley certainly is not, and Barnsley has been capped on its standard spending assessment. It faces the prospect of having to close day centres for the mentally handicapped, for

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instance. Even if it can avoid that, it may have to withdraw one of those little, kindly forms of gentleness that make life better for people who are in a bad way. Until now, when people have gone to the centres for the mentally handicapped in Barnsley they have been given a little pay—£4 or £5 a week—to give them a bit of self-respect and spending money. Under this settlement, it seems likely that, even if the centre can be kept open, that little bit of self-respect will have to be withdrawn.

Mr. Yeo *rose—*

Mr. Dobson: No.

I think that the Barnsley experience epitomises what is happening in Britain under this Government. Taxes increase and vulnerable people suffer. Vital services such as the fire brigade suffer; our children's schooling suffers. Old people suffer while the rich get richer. The operators of privatised buses line their pockets at everybody else's expense. Tory Ministers receive their pay-offs by joining the boards of industries that they privatised, or boards of city firms that have made a fortune out of privatisation. All this is happening while corruption in Westminster continues to be subsidised by the taxpayer and the council tax payer in the rest of England. We are all sick of it. We do not want to pay more to get less.

6.30 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) made a disappointing speech. Smear, hyperbole and shroud waving are no substitutes for policy. It is little short of a travesty to suggest that changes in standard spending assessment have been fiddled. I well know that the changes have been brought about by local authority associations. I have in mind especially those recommendations that related to unemployment and social deprivation, which were fought hard, but accepted. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras was so uncertain of his argument—the House will draw its own conclusions—that he did not dare allow a Conservative Back-Bench Member to intervene in his speech.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was right when he said that we are dealing with a tough settlement. It is one of the toughest local government settlements that I have seen, but no settlement can be judged on the basis of one year. Last year's settlement was extremely good for local authorities. It was much better than it appeared to be at the time. There was no justification for the extravagant claims which were made, such as serious reductions in service. The net fall in the number of people employed by local authorities was slightly more than 1 per cent. Taking into consideration schools that opted for grant-maintained status and the effects of compulsory competitive tendering, we see that last year's settlement was about neutral.

The fact that this year's settlement would be tough has been well flagged in the specialist press. It is well known that directors of finance and leaders of councils, being prudent men, have taken note of reports that the settlement would be a difficult one. They have had much more than three quarters of a year to prepare for it.

We know from a recent Audit Commission report, entitled "Paying the Piper", that there is about £500 million within the system that could be diverted to front-line services.

Mr. Don Foster: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not have unlimited time. I have only 10 minutes. If possible, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman towards the end of my speech.

We have seen the usual parade of amputated stumps. Young people and the elderly have been used as battering rams. When my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) talked about parents and elderly people being in terror, Opposition Members broke into laughter. I do not believe that that happened because they are callous. They laughed because they know the truth; they know, for example, that no teachers will be made redundant.

Cuts in teacher numbers will not be made. I know that, as do Opposition Members and the media. The only people who do not know that there will be no such cuts are frightened people. Opposition Members may not have had to deal with people coming into advice bureaux shaking with fear because the local authority is threatening to take away home care from their elderly parents. There are also parents who are worried about their young child returning from school with a letter from the local authority suggesting that teachers will be made redundant. I believe firmly in the professionalism and independence of local authority officers. If, however, the majority party of a council decides that a letter should be sent to the people of the area, I do not accept that it should be sent in the name of a local authority officer.

I believe that head teachers are entitled to protest. They are entitled to say what they think about the level of service within their responsibility. If, however, schools are short of resources, they are not entitled to use school notepaper to draw attention to what they regard as shortages, thereby depriving schools of equally valuable resources.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: What does my hon. Friend say about a leaflet that was issued by the education officer of Kent county council to parents throughout the county, at a cost of £4,000? There were claims within it that various cuts would be made, despite the fact that Government funding for Kent has increased by 2 per cent. overall.

Mr. Pickles: My hon. Friend had the courtesy to show me the leaflet. I believe that the officer concerned stepped over the mark. That officer has mistaken a majority view in the council for a view that should be passed on to the public. As I have said, I firmly believe that local authority officers have high standards. If, however, they are to retain their independence, they must retain party political independence.

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): Surely it is a bit rich for the hon. Gentleman to give us lessons in the use of local authority funding. When he was leader of Bradford council—this happened on the casting vote of the lord mayor—he took £13 million out of the council's budget and set the pubs of Bradford running.

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman has given me the opportunity to remind him that, during my time, spending on or in schools increased, as did the number of teachers.

The reduction in teaching numbers came when the hon. Gentleman was leader of the council. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to apologise for that.

The most extravagant claims have been made about secondary schools. I am pleased that such schools in my constituency have been free from them. One of the reasons is that Brentwood and Ongar is the only constituency in which all secondary schools have opted out of the local authority's control. They are free, therefore, from political bias. I have little doubt that the shroud waving of Opposition Members will encourage others to join Brentwood and Ongar.

Parents in my constituency enjoy schools that are free from dogma. Mr. Leo McKinstry's description of a Labour administration

"mean-minded cocktail of political correctness, bureaucracy, intervention and abuse of public money"

when talking about Islington could well fit Essex county council, which is controlled by the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats.

My constituents have been the victims of a combination of fuzzy dogma and incompetence. The county council is damaging them over a relatively small sum. They have been denied care in the community services. Beds in local hospitals are being blocked. Children are worried about the future of their elderly parents. It should not, and need not, have happened. It has, however, because the county council has decided to use the elderly as a battering ram.

No one ever thought that care in the community would be a cheap option. We always knew that it would be expensive. That is why the sum made available by the Government to Essex county council for care in the community was increased last year by £32 million. There will be an extra £18 million this year. Since 1990, the grant for care in the community to the county council has risen by 95 per cent.

My constituents have been the victims of poor decision making. There has been a transfer of about £500,000 from the care in the community budget to support inappropriate services, and the charging policy has been turned completely on its head, to the tune of £1.25 million. That is almost the exact sum that the county council chooses to take away from elderly people.

The county council has decided to end the policy of selling old persons' homes. I have some experience of this because I visited Brooks house. Before the election, I saw an old, rundown building where the staff offered excellent care. Unfortunately, it was not a place where elderly people should see out their last years. When it came to the surroundings, there was no dignity and no respect. The sale was fought hard by the Liberal Democrats; indeed, it has ended that policy. I had the pleasure of opening Brooks house last year under the new regime. What I saw there was respect for the elderly people, the same staff running it and a better organisation. Under the new regime, it is a lot cheaper and a lot better in the private sector. Essex county council could buy considerably more care under that process if it would follow the example of putting the care of those old persons into the private sector.

I firmly believe that it is within the power of Essex county council to use its not inconsiderable balance of £28 million to put care back where it is needed—into the hands of the elderly in my constituency.

6.40 pm

Mr. Gordon Oakes (Halton): The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) will forgive me, I hope, if I do not follow all the points in his speech, although I wish to refer to some of them.

It was refreshing to hear a voice from local government talking about the motion, because in your absence, Madam Speaker, the debate became a shambles. I have attended many of these debates. It was no fault of your deputy, Madam Speaker. The fault lay in the fact that the Secretary of State quite deliberately allowed interventions over and over again from Conservative Members. I know that a Secretary of State or a Minister gives way to interventions, but not repeatedly like that.

I have taken these motions many times in the House. I have proposed them from the Front Bench. One allows a few interventions, but one does not base one's speech on interventions. One should try to explain to the House what the motion is about. That the Secretary of State signally failed to do by talking about street signs in Suffolk and lesbian centres in Camden, by criticising the fact that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) was not in the Chamber—all that sort of silly arguing. I wish that a video of the debate would be sent to every councillor, especially Conservative councillors, who, like us, are concerned with the community. They are caring people, just as Labour and Liberal councillors are caring people. They are colleagues of ours in a different sphere. To be treated in that way in what is probably the most important debate for local government was nothing but a disgrace.

The motion has been described as harsh. I would go further and say that it is intolerable, because local authorities will find not only that their services have diminished but that they will be unable to provide some services at all because of lack of money—not from malice, not from putting people in fear, but simply because they have run out of money for those particular services.

I am an honorary—I stress that word—vice-president of the Association of County Councils. It is opposed to the motion and finds it deplorable. I also represent a Cheshire constituency. I hasten to tell the Minister that it is not a Labour-controlled authority but an alliance between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats and they oppose the motion because of its injustice.

Let us take two Departments in central Government—the Department for Education and the Department of Social Security. I understand that the figures for this year—limited though they are—are 4.1 per cent. for education and 3.7 per cent. for social services. The actual figure this October, with all the changes in police orders, and so on, is 0.5 per cent. for each of those services in local government. That shows the disgraceful discrepancy between the way in which central Government treat themselves and the way in which they treat what should be their partner—local government.

I have another criticism, and I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), whose intervention was on this subject. One reason why there are discrepancies between Cheshire, Derbyshire, Cleveland and Tyneside is that an area cost adjustment is built into the system. That adjustment is supposed to compensate for the fact that it is more expensive to pay staff in London and the south-east than in the rest of the country. That might have happened at one time, but I

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challenge that assumption now on national wage bargaining. Even if there is some truth in it, it does not excuse the enormous advantage that counties and boroughs in the south-east have over the rest of the country. There is no way in which that can be excused. I do not think that it is a coincidence that most of the Conservative seats in the country are in the south-east.

I wish briefly to look at one service, because the motion covers a vast subject—social services, to which the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar rightly referred. It is central Government and local government at the sharp end. It is where the Government come into contact with the most distressed people in our society: the old, the sick, especially the mentally sick, and children, right at the centre of their lives. As Members of Parliament, we all know that. We see it in our surgeries and we gladly pass on those cases to the county or borough social services department. Alas, when we do that in future, many of those services will not be able to be provided, because the departments will not have the money after the settlement.

The ACC estimated the cost of such social services. There is a shortfall in the amount that departments are to be given under the motion—I have the figures, but will not go into them, as that would waste time—of £261 million. The people who will suffer are the old, the sick and children in need of care.

A couple of years ago, Cheshire county council introduced a system of charging for care. Now, I understand, more than one third of councils are forced to charge for care. As a result of the settlement, I guarantee that the percentage of councils that are forced to do that will be 100 per cent., because there is a built-in system whereby 9 per cent. is assumed to come from charges. We are talking about the most vulnerable section of the community. It is likely to come from the poorest—those not with low means but, in many cases, no means. There is no way in which a caring—even an uncaring—county council can recover those sums.

What will that mean, then, in human terms? We have debated the figures—they are major figures—but it comes down to human terms. One of the few ideas that the Government had was to implement the community care scheme. Everybody agreed to it—the Association of County Councils and every shire county. It is a far more humane system. The national health service has benefited from it, quite rightly, because people are better off in the community. Previously, people were institutionalised, either long term in a hospital or in some other institution. The community care scheme should have been the Government's flagship, but the transfer from the NHS has not been followed up and matched by a fair transfer of finance among the authorities.

What is happening now? We see it in our streets. In the community, local authorities have the responsibility of care; they would willingly provide that care, but they do not have the money to do so. The Secretary of State may say that that is because of waste or inefficiency, but that is not what the Audit Commission says. It is not what his own inspectors say when they examine how the community carries out the schemes.

We must look at the subject in human terms, in terms, for example, of the people who suffer from schizophrenia. There have been some dreadful, tragic cases, for the person concerned and for his or her family, and sometimes the family of the victims. The money will not be available to provide the care needed.

We must think of special needs teachers. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) would have raised that matter had he not been upstairs in a Select Committee. We must think of children who need to be put in care as a result of sexual or other physical abuse: places will not be provided, as they were in the past. We must think of meals on wheels, and other services for elderly people. Those, too, will be cut.

Finally, we must think of the carers who save the country millions of pounds more than the revenue support grant, through the love and care that they devote to, for example, sufferers from Alzheimer's disease for 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. At present, councils can provide places that allow those carers some respite, but they may not be able to do so in the future.

Many Conservative Members are as caring as Opposition Members. When they vote tonight, let them remember that.

6.50 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I hope that the right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) will not be offended if I do not follow his speech. It was an excellent speech, although I could not agree with all of it, but I am constrained by the time limit.

The right hon. Gentleman's speech was a marked and welcome contrast to that of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), which was boorish, ignorant, graceless and thoroughly uninformed. At least it had the virtue of being entirely consistent with every other speech that I have ever heard the hon. Gentleman make, and we should also give him credit for coming here to make it: that is more than can be said for the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), who has played a significant part in the misrepresentation of the current settlement. Despite the steps that he has taken to misrepresent what is going on in the west country, the right hon. Gentleman could not even come to the House today. I find that remarkable, and think that it should be noted.

It is in the nature of politics that politicians, whether they are Labour, Liberal or Conservative, seek to put the best possible construction on their actions. Sometimes, the public feel that that amounts to dishonesty; I do not think that it does. Obviously, any political party will try to set out its stall as well as it can. However, what has happened in Devon in recent weeks goes far beyond that. The Liberal administration there has not merely put the best possible gloss on its own policies and the worst possible gloss on those of the Conservative Government; it has engaged in a campaign of deceit, disinformation and downright lying. I have a fairly thick skin in political terms—I need to—but that campaign is so appalling that even I have been surprised at not only what the Liberals have done but at the extent to which, so far, they have got away with it.

What the Liberals have done in Devon, and the way in which they have presented the position, is wicked, because it obscures the debate. If the Government had produced a settlement for Devon that was not fair, the

Liberals' behaviour and the fact that it can be rubbished so easily would actually make it harder to bring Ministers to account—if, indeed, they had to be brought to account.

We Members of Parliament make the mistake of thinking that, because we all understand—to a greater or lesser extent—the way in which local government is financed and the way in which it works, our constituents will understand it as well. Most of them do not. What parents know, certainly those in Devon, is that their children have only one opportunity of being educated. If the Conservatives sort out Devon's education service when they are returned to power there, it will not help someone who has already gone through the school system.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) used a phrase for which he was derided; he should not have been. Let me use the phrase again. What terrifies parents is that they do not know the minutiae of local government funding. They do not understand that a local education authority has certain functions to perform, and has discretion to set its own priorities; what they know is that they are being told by their councillors—their councillors would not lie to them, would they? Would they hell!—that there will be massive cuts in the classroom. Teachers will be made redundant, and parents are outraged about that.

Let me draw attention to one of the most unfortunate aspects of all this. If my hon. Friend the Minister cannot deal with it today, I put down a marker: I shall pursue the matter in correspondence. What the Liberals in the west country are saying has been given some credibility by the fact that local government officers are prepared to sign letters that are no more than the crudest party political propaganda. Those same officers are also prepared to speak on television programmes, doing the Liberals' dirty work for them. It is almost as though my hon. Friend the Minister had a tricky television interview coming up, and persuaded his departmental permanent secretary to do it for him.

We may wonder why professional council officers allow themselves to be traduced in that way. We can imagine the pressure that they must have felt themselves to be under, to allow their professional expertise to be employed and their cloak of apparent honesty to be thrown over the shoulders of the Liberals.

What are the Liberals up to? Any lie must be told in a big way. They have held briefings, and I have observed the results from telephone calls, letters and visits that I have received. People have been told that Devon county council will receive less money this year: that is the first thing that they have been told. Is that true? It is false. Last year, the police authority was maintained within the council, but it is now maintained separately. If we compare like with like, we find that there has been a 7.8 per cent. overall increase rather than a decrease.

Parents are being asked—in a sense, this is the chief criterion—whether Devon is performing better than the average, in an average way or worse than the average, and they find that it is performing far worse than the average. I have discovered from meetings that they have even been told that Devon is the worst-funded county in the United Kingdom. The truth is, however, that it has received the fifth largest standard spending assessment increase. As for educational SSA, it has received double the national average. At the mention of annual capital guidelines. parents' eyes will glaze over, but hon. Members understand the significance of those guidelines. They specify what local education authorities can spend. Devon does not receive as much as it used to and it never will, but it receives about half as much again as the national average.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Nicholls: No; time is short. My hon. Friend can make his own speech in his own way.

The Liberals say that an increase that is less than the increase they want is really a cut. They think that, if they say that long enough, someone will believe them. Once they have convinced parents that the cuts have been imposed by the Government—almost suggesting that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said that there must be cuts in the provision of a particular school—we suddenly discover the existence of reserves. How did I find out about the reserves? A headmaster in my constituency telephoned me. He said, "Have a look at the papers. They have squirrelled away £17 million." When I said, "If there is £17 million there, why do you not take the matter up with the council?" he said, "It is more than my job is worth." There is a climate of fear in Devon. The headmaster will not even take the matter up with his own Member of Parliament.

What was the attitude of the Liberal county council to the reserves? On day one it denied that they existed; on day two it said that it was scandalous to suggest that they amounted to £17 million—there was only £16.8 million. We now discover from a written parliamentary answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) that there may be as much as £51 million.

The fact is—and parents in Devon needed to know this—that a local education authority can set its own agenda. It is entitled to decide its own priorities, and the priority of Devon county council is to threaten to cut the number of teachers, when in the past year it has increased staff numbers by a huge 718. Then it has the nerve to turn around and say that, because of Government action, it will have to cut pupil numbers. That is utterly dishonest. Here is a body that employs more people than the European Union, and it says that it must cut the number of teachers.

The LEA has a question to answer: where do its priorities lie? Is it concerned about core functions at county hall, or about services in county schools? I do not expect parents to accept uncritically everything that my hon. Friend the Minister will say; not do I expect them to accept uncritically anything that a Conservative Member of Parliament says. All that I will say to parents in Devon is this. Democracy is a two-way street, and citizens have a responsibility to see what is being done in their names. Yes, by all means send in the letters in their hundreds and question Conservative Members of Parliament about what they are doing, but also question the LEA, which has the funds to set its own priorities if it wishes. Ultimately, if parents question both Members of Parliament and the LEA, they should get the truth, but that process has not yet started in Devon. I should like to think that, as a result of tonight's debate, it will.

6.59 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): As I intend to touch on a number of education matters, it is important for me to

[Mr. Don Foster]

declare my interest as an adviser to two teacher associations. I assure the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) that I shall shortly deal with his points.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the Government have no love for local government. They do not like it, and they do not trust it. Therefore, they have set out systematically to destroy it, and they are doing that by reducing its powers, often giving them to remote, undemocratic quangos. In addition, as we have noticed in the debate, the Government are attempting to starve local government to death, and with it many of the much-needed and valued services that it provides. For evidence, we need only look at the settlement.

We all know the figures as they have been discussed already, but perhaps the best source of information is the press release issued by the Department of the Environment on 29 November last year. It states that, net of community care, the settlement represents a cash decrease of 0.4 per cent. As all hon. Members know, when inflation is taken into account, that means a significant cut in the amount of money being made available to local government. I do not need to refer to more up-to-date information, because figures contained in recent announcements are almost identical to those in that press release.

Despite all the delegations that came to plead with the Secretary of State and the Minister, very little has changed. Little notice has been taken of the people in those delegations, all of whom care about local government. The present cuts are on top of cuts in previous years. The Government are calling for local government fat to be removed, but the fat was removed many years ago. The flesh has now gone, and the bones will soon be bleached white.

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) spoke about savings that were outlined in the Audit Commission report. He will correct me if I am wrong, but I think that the report suggested about £540 million. I am sure he accepts that those savings were intended to be made over seven years, and that more than 50 per cent. of the report's recommendations have already been enacted.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): The hon. Gentleman talks of fat in local government. Is he aware that, in my area, North Yorkshire county council received a 1 per cent. increase in this year's allocation but is complaining about drastic cuts? It wants to reduce the number of fire engines in Scarborough, although we all know what happened last year to the Richmond hotel. The council owns 13,000 acres of farmland in North Yorkshire, which is worth £10 million. There is no thought of selling that. Local authorities must be made to face difficult decisions. That council should be forced to decide whether it wants to provide fire engines or farmland.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, because it gives me the opportunity to remind him that the sale of assets does not immediately make available to the local authority the whole of the proceeds. The Government limits the amount that can be spent. I hope the hon. Gentleman agrees that, when assets are sold, the most useful use for the proceeds is to create new assets for the local authority.

Mr. Sykes *rose—*

Mr. Foster: Madam Speaker has given me dispensation to go beyond the allotted time, but I have promised that I shall try to abide by the spirit of the 10-minute rule. Therefore, I will not give way.

The purpose of the cuts is clear. There will be cuts in the fire service, community care, library services, housing and roads, but the worst cuts will be in the education and youth services. The cuts in education will be across the board, but especially important is what will happen in the classroom. Those cuts are real. As many hon. Members know, even the Secretary of State for Education, in her letter to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, warned of the possibility of problems in education because of this settlement.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Why is the Liberal Democrat administration in Devon threatening massive cuts in the education budget, even though the administration has a surfeit of more than 700 people? Perhaps that is fat. How has the administration at Exeter managed to achieve more than double the average increase in the education SSA?

Mr. Foster: I shall be happy to deal with that when I reach that topic in my speech. I wish to set the national scene, and I shall then reply to the points that hon. Members have raised.

Within the settlement, the Government expect local education authorities to manage with less money per pupil. Of the 117 LEAs, only four have avoided a real-terms cut in their SSA. Across England, the cut is the equivalent of £50 per primary pupil and nearly £200 per secondary pupil. Altogether, that represents a cut of £750 million.

The Secretary of State said that local government must get its priorities right, but one must question the Government's priorities, because they say that there must be significant cuts in the amount spent on each pupil. That is based on the Secretary of State's figures.

Mr. Gummer: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is making general points, but perhaps I could make a specific one. In Devon and Somerset, Liberal administrations or Liberal-supported coalitions have increased the number of employees. There have been significant increases in the amount that those administrations receive from the Government, but they have written to schools telling them that there will be staff cuts. Those matters do not hang together, and the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) is not here to defend the words that he put in letters to Conservative Members. Many of us are beginning to wonder whether the Liberals are being honest on this.

Mr. Foster: The Secretary of State is repeating interventions that have already been made, to which I have promised to respond. He is taking up precious time. He knows that, because of the unfairness of the area cost adjustment, all the LEAs in the south-west are placed at a considerable disadvantage. On average, they have £130 per pupil less to spend in the classroom.

I said that I would reply to some specific points. Some hon. Members spoke about Somerset. Based on information provided by the Department for Education, in real terms the SSA per primary pupil in Somerset will be cut by £46. The cut for secondary pupils will be £147. The overall shortfall for the Somerset budget as calculated by the county treasurer is £20.4 million, of which £12.4 million is in the education budget generally and £9 million is in the schools budget in particular.

Although a number of Conservative councillors in Somerset initially disagreed, I understand that they have now accepted those figures from the county treasurer. The Devon figures show a cut of £46 per primary pupil and £178 per secondary pupil in real terms in the SSA in this settlement.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: No, I am not giving way again.

Many people fail to understand that marginal increases fail to take into account the increased number of pupils.

Right across England, local education authorities are expected to do more and more, with less and less. As one head teacher put it recently:

"We are running a medium sized business on peanuts and goodwill".

As all right hon. and hon. Members know, standard spending assessment cuts will be compounded by the results of the teachers' pay award. Unless the Government fund that centrally, even less cash will be available for use in the classroom.

The Prime Minister told us that education was one of his Government's top priorities. Today, the Secretary of State for the Environment told us that education was at the heart of the needs of the nation. The settlement, however, shows that neither the Secretary of State nor the Prime Minister are putting our money as taxpayers where their mouths are. They would rather put their party before this country's future. Instead of investing in education, they want to cut money from it, giving themselves room for tax cut bribes before the next election. But they have been rumbled.

Mr. King: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: No. *[Interruption.]* I have already said that I would not give way again. You, Madam Speaker, have asked me to comply with the 10-minute ruling for speeches.

The nation knows that every right hon. and hon. Member who votes for the settlement tonight—that includes the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King)—is voting for teachers to be sacked, for rising class sizes, for less money for books and equipment in our schools, and for less money for much-needed repair and maintenance. Worst of all, they are voting to ensure that no real possibility exists of the much-needed expansion of nursery education.

Conservative central Government have admitted that the settlement is tight for education and for all other local government services. The Secretary of State called it a "tough" settlement. It is far worse than that—it is a deplorable settlement. Anyone who cares about local government and the services it provides should vote against it tonight.

Mr. King: Will the hon. Gentleman answer one question?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) has sat down.

7.11 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I do not want to follow the line that the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) elocuted in his speech, because it is not worth following.

I praise one of my councils—Derbyshire Dales district council. Its standard spending assessment was some £6,069,000, and it is estimated that it will spend some £6,007,000. Basically, that results in a reduction of 8.1 per cent. for the council tax payer in Derbyshire Dales.

I am grateful that that council has managed to achieve that within what I accept has been a tight settlement. I praise all members of Derbyshire Dales for their prudent running of the local authority. They have reduced the community tax, and, at the same time, total council expenditure contains growth of 3.4 per cent. and inflation of 3.3 per cent. They deserve praise for the way in which they have run a prudent and efficient system.

Yet again, Derbyshire county council has been using its usual tactics to frighten everyone about the implications of its spending settlement. I say "its usual tactics", and I have slight evidence for that. I was looking through some papers this morning, and I came across a report from the county treasurer. It states:

"Taking the above factors into account, the County Treasurer anticipated the County Council operating in circumstances where the cost of maintaining services based on a realistic estimate of pay and price increases, amounted to £470 million, whilst the Secretary of State's assumption on Derbyshire's level of spending was £435 million, a reduction of £35 million."

He said that that £35 million would mean the cutting of one of the following:

"2500 teachers, the entire regular police force, maintaining County roads and supporting public transport, residential and support services for children, and elderly and physically handicapped people."

That report was presented on 16 December 1987.

The problem is that, year in and year out, we hear such arguments from local authorities about the way in which they run their services. They then tell us that they should be allowed to continue in their present form. My right hon. Friend has in front of him the Derbyshire review. I do not believe that Derbyshire county council is an efficient service provider, and I hope that he will carefully take that into account when he considers his response to that review.

I accept that much of the money is spent on education. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) mentioned school meals. We know about school meals in Derbyshire because, in the past 14 years, Labour-controlled Derbyshire county council has spent more than £100 million on subsidising school meals. If that £100 million had gone into schools and education, the council would be in a far better state to provide services.

Providing those services would have been better than subsidising my children to go to those schools and to have cheap meals. What nonsense. How stupid and ridiculous. Yet the hon. Gentleman sought to defend that argument. I find that unbelievable.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): Will my hon. Friend confirm that Derbyshire council has an abysmal record in the amount of money that it holds back for central administration? Will he confirm that, if it was as efficient as Nottinghamshire council, which itself is not

[Mr. Charles Hendry]

very efficient, it would have another £70 to spend per child in schools? That would be better than spending the money on its bureaucrats in county hall.

Mr. McLoughlin: That fact has come out of the research that we have done. Derbyshire county council may score high on spending, but its allocation on schools is the lowest of any shire county. It spends more on central administration than any other county. I am not proud of that record, because I would prefer money to go into schools.

Until a few years ago, there was no option in the state system. All schools were run by the local education authority. Back in 1988, I was pleased to be parliamentary private secretary to my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold). We took the Education Reform Act 1988 through the House, which allowed schools to become grant-maintained.

Now, there is another option for education. I welcome that option, because it makes Derbyshire county council be careful about some of the nonsensical decisions that it has taken in the past. We had the crazy situation in which all school notepaper was taken back to county offices to be overprinted with "Derbyshire supports nuclear-free zones." It has become a bit better in recent times.

I should like to share with the House some of the experiences of schools that have gone grant-maintained. The head teacher of Belper high school said recently:

"The school has benefited from enhanced funding because although we are linked to the Derbyshire formula the element for central costs can be spent specifically to meet our own needs. Independence enables us to manage our finances far more effectively because we have full control. We received an emergency grant from the DFE to replace our twenty-year-old boilers. Queries are always answered promptly and clearly by the DFE which has made the task of management much easier."

Dr. Dupey, the head of Ecclesbourne school, said:

"The last four years have been the most professionally fulfilling of nearly two decades of headship. Not only have we been able to put right most of the physical deficiencies of the School's site and buildings, we have been able to assign a much higher proportion of what was our share of the resources allocated to Derbyshire for education to the business of teaching and learning. The effort wasted on petty politics and bureaucracy has also been significantly reduced, leaving more time, energy and enthusiasm to devote to the needs of our students.

Mr. Gummer: Does my hon. Friend agree that that is probably the reason why the leader of the Labour party has chosen a grant-maintained school for his child? He knows that the money will be spent on the child and not on the bureaucracy.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am not sure whether my right hon. Friend knows this, but it is even worse than that. As I understand it, only one school in the country has opted out of the national pay negotiations. I shall not give my right hon. Friend any prizes for guessing which school that is.

We have a further alternative in the education system. That is a positive step.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. McLoughlin: I would rather not give way, because I have a great deal to say.

I could speak on this subject for a long time, but time is short. There are alternatives for education.

I am particularly concerned about the area cost adjustment. Some of us wonder whether the Department of the Environment has got the formula right. It should be looked at. It might mean that some London boroughs will have to lose money. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) did the House a disservice by spending 25 minutes talking about London. Many hon. Members are much more interested in what is happening in the rest of the country than in history lessons about Westminster. Will my right hon. Friend consider carefully the area cost adjustment?

When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was Chief Secretary, he talked about the pay review bodies reporting after local authority budgets had been set. That does put local authorities in an awkward position, in that they do not know what the pay settlements will be in the coming year. It should be looked at. It is not fair that they should find out what the pay review bodies say after they have set their budget. That is not the most efficient way to move forward.

I have no doubt that we will hear the same bleating as we have heard over the past few months—some of which may be genuine. Scaring parents is deplorable and does no credit to the people involved. Year after year, we hear the same excuses. I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to use every opportunity to expose what the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats are trying to do, and to explain what the outcome will be.

7.22 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): The only point on which I agree with the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) is his concern about the area cost adjustment.

This year's revenue support grant settlement is a great disappointment to Durham county council, which provides services in my constituency. It appears to have been severely punished under the capping regime for having adopted a cautious and realistic approach to past spending.

For a long time, the county council has sought changes to the area cost adjustment, but it has been ignored. It is the county council's contention, and mine, that the area cost adjustment is fundamentally flawed. It is now three times higher than five years ago and it has grown six times faster than local authority resources generally in that period. Some local authorities may need to be compensated for labour cost variations, but it is difficult to understand the size and distribution of the compensation—or perhaps that was explained to us earlier. It could have something to do with the political control of certain councils in the south of England, but perhaps I am being cynical.

The settlement is divorced from reality. The three major employment groups are teachers, the police and firefighters, who are all on nationally agreed wage scales. Durham county council, like many other authorities outside south-east England, has been deprived of its fair share of SSA.

The capping limit has been increased since last year's settlement, but it is well below last year's level for Durham county council. I appreciate that some factors have changed in the calculation of SSAs. Nevertheless,

the county will have to save £14.5 million this year to set a budget at the capping limit. If it is to save that money, it will have to make cuts, including in administration, to maintain services to the community. It is inevitable that services will suffer. Specific decisions have not yet been taken, but, without doubt, some appalling cuts will be made. That is not scaremongering. Libraries will close.

Durham county council has given schools funding of £1.5 million to take into account the increase in pupil numbers. The Government have ignored that cost and have failed to provide any extra funds to pay for the cost of the teachers' pay settlement in 1995-96. That will have dire consequences on school budgets.

Road maintenance schemes will be cut by £500,000 and public transport support will have to be cut. Economic development, to which the council has attached great priority in recent years because the Government closed the mines and the steelworks in the north, will be severely cut.

I accept that the money transferred to social services under the special transitional grant is sizeable, but it is inadequate to meet needs, particularly the growing number of private nursing home places. Consequently, those services will come under significant pressure and will face cuts. Community care in Durham is under threat.

Cuts are not being made for the first time—far from it. In 1991-92 the council had to cut £1 million; in 1992-93 it had to cut £4.2 million; in 1993-94 it had to cut £6.9 million and in 1994-95 it will have to cut £10 million. It cannot go on.

Mr. Allason: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steinberg: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not do so; I have a lot to say.

Durham county council's education committee has been instructed by the policy resources committee to cut £2.125 million from its budget. No final decision has been made, but the cuts may include a reduction in education welfare posts, an increase in outdoor education charges, cuts in swimming provision, cuts in child guidance and an increase in school meal prices. The hon. Member for West Derbyshire may disagree, but many children need subsidised or free meals because it is often the only decent meal that they get during the day. Cuts will be made in resources for local education authority initiatives and in the GEST—grants for education support and training—programme.

School budgets will have to be cut because the Government have reduced the SSA calculations in Durham by £95 per primary school child and £195 for each secondary school pupil. As I have already said, the Government have made no provision for teachers' pay increases.

That scandal means that the council has no alternative but to reflect those cuts in school budgets. In addition to failing to fund teachers' pay increases, the Government have failed to recognise the increase in the number of students or to take account of inflation. Schools will have to deal with those factors themselves.

What does that mean to individual schools? The head teacher of Durham Johnston school told me that if his funding is cut by 4 per cent., which seems likely, he will have to find £120,000 from his budget. Apart from staffing, which accounts for 80 per cent. of his budget, he will have to cut repairs and maintenance to his school, he will have to stop purchasing any new furniture or replacing computers. He will have to reduce ground maintenance and cut a large percentage from the allocation to subject departments to buy books and equipment. Mr. Dunford, the head teacher, wrote to me and said:

"This school now has just over 1,400 pupils, including a Sixth Form of 280. It is, as you know, popular and over-subscribed. In short, it is not the sort or school which we were led to believe would have financial problems under the LMS formula. But there are no safe havens now—all schools are facing a very difficult financial year. If this were to be an isolated school year, the situation would look bad, but what concerns me even more is that we are told that the Department of the Environment intends to follow the same policy in local government finance for the next two years. If we are asked to prune our budget by a similar amount in 1996 and 1997, I do not believe that it will be possible to educate all children full-time up to the age of 16. We will not be able to afford the staff to be able to do so.

I believe that the situation is reaching a crisis point".

That reveals a desperate situation. Those are the words of one of the country's most respected head teachers—I am not exaggerating as I believe he is vice-president of the Secondary Heads Association and serves on many national bodies. If a head teacher of his renown is saying such things, we are certainly in a deplorable state.

Even the Secretary of State for Education wrote to her Cabinet colleagues recently about the effect that the teachers' pay award would have on school budgets. She recognised that schools were in an impossible position. She has already urged the Prime Minister to cut any recommendations of the independent—or so-called independent—teachers' pay review body to 1.5 per cent. She recognises that local education authorities cannot pay any more. Once again, teachers are going to be punished thanks to the inadequacy of this year's local government finance settlement. The independent review body should recommend a fair pay settlement and the Government should fund it fully.

The revenue settlement this year clearly shows the Government's lack of commitment to state education and, in particular, to teachers. If the Government had any real commitment to the state system, they would ensure that schools were well resourced and teachers were well rewarded for their work, but all that we get from them is rhetoric. In the meantime, however, millions of children go on suffering in our schools.

7.31 pm

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): I shall read my speech very quickly and I shall not take any interventions.

I do not dissent too much from the speeches made by right hon. and hon. Members who are in the Conservative parliamentary party and I am grateful to the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), for seeing representatives of Norfolk county council on 4 January. His hon. Friend, the Under-Secretary, Department of the Environment, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), wrote to me on 27 January about that meeting. His letter states:

"At the meeting the council representatives asked for a higher spending limit for Norfolk and spelt out their particular concerns on the reduction in Education SSA, on the Area Cost Adjustment, and on personal social services. These views will of course be taken into account by the Secretary of State prior to making his decisions on the 1995/96 Local Government Finance (England) Report and the Special Report."

[Mr. Michael Carttiss]

My hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) spoke about the area cost adjustment and reflected the considerable concern that exists in many counties, irrespective of party control, about the unfair way in which it works.

The result of Norfolk county council representatives' meeting with the Minister of State was that, between the announcement on 1 December of Norfolk's revenue support grant settlement and today's debate, Norfolk's grant was cut by £210,000 by the right hon. Gentleman on the Front Bench.

Norfolk has consistently spent well below the average for English counties. Suffolk is represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo), who intervened on a fellow Member—the Secretary of State—who represents another Suffolk constituency, to complain about the Lib-Lab way in which Suffolk was being run. Curiously enough, despite knowing the bad way in which it is being run, the Secretary of State has given Suffolk an increase of £300,000 since 1 December.

Surrey's grant goes up by £2.69 million. I accept that it is a big county and has high expenditure but the increase goes down very badly with my constituents in Norfolk, bearing in mind the fact that, in 1992-93, Norfolk county council spent £584.54 per head on county-provided services whereas the average figure for English counties in the same period was £613.78. The county council has a spending limit set by the Government of £424.4 million. The county treasurer calculates that this represents a shortfall of £20 million on projected expenditure in 1995-96.

As several right hon. and hon. Members have said, local authorities want to spend more. Most people, including Conservatives, seek local government service because they want to promote improved services for their communities but county treasurers cannot always have as much as they want.

"Norfolk has a long history of strict economy when budgeting and it has every reason tonight to expect as many of its parliamentary representatives as possible to impress on the Government, as have other right hon. and hon. Members, that enough is enough."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 93.]

I quote further:

"Norfolk has been a sensible, moderate, low-spending authority".—[*Official Report*, 25 July 1985; Vol. 83, c. 1331.]

Those are the words of the then Secretary of State for the Environment, which I cited in my speech on 20 January 1986. The Secretary of State who spoke appreciatively of Norfolk when he announced the 1986-87 RSG settlement on 25 July 1985 was the then right hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford, now Lord Jenkin.

On the night of 20 January I also said:

"Socialists and Liberals have never controlled Norfolk county council, and they never will, because I am confident that, recognising the strength of feeling among Conservative Members, the Government will introduce a more equitable system next year."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1986; Vol.90, c.95.]

In fact, my predictions were doubly wrong: the Government did not introduce a more equitable system and nor have they done so for Norfolk today. My prediction about the election result was wrong because in 1993, for the first time in the history of my county, we were lumbered with a Lib-Lab alliance to run our affairs. I partly blame the Government for that result.

The overall increase allowed for in funding essential county services in Norfolk is 0.5 per cent. If the Government had said on 28 November that they were going to limit the increase in their contribution to the European Union budget to 0.5 per cent., I would still be a member of the parliamentary party because I would have voted for that. However, we are giving money to the European Union but are making our own local authorities impose cuts.

People who say that there will be no cuts are wrong—of course there will. One cannot increase overall expenditure by a mere 0.5 per cent. at a time of 2 per cent. inflation without making cuts. Let us not be mealy-mouthed about that. If the European Union can have the money, so can Norfolk. I want it spent on schools in Great Yarmouth and on highway maintenance in my villages, not on subsidies for tobacco growers in Greece and olive growers in Italy.

This afternoon, the Secretary of State for the Environment talked about the difficult decisions faced by the Government in restraining and reducing their own spending. In fact, the Department of Health—

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Norfolk has assisted area status.

Mr. Carttiss: Someone is interrupting although I said that I would not accept interventions. He is saying that my constituency has assisted area status but we got precious little money back from Europe for that.

The Department of Health's budget, quite rightly, goes up by 3.8 per cent. this year. The Department of Education's budget rightly goes up by 4.1 per cent. Very difficult decisions have to be taken by right hon. Gentlemen on the Front Bench to limit central Government expenditure—4.1 per cent. on education and 3.8 per cent. on health—but, at the same time, they are telling local authorities, which have to run such services locally, that they will receive an increase of only 0.5 per cent.

On that famous night of 20 January 1986, to which I referred, 29 Conservative Back Benchers voted against the Government. None of them lost the Whip; some of them were ex-Cabinet Ministers—Lord Pym, Lord Prior and Lord Gilmour—and some of are in the Government now. The hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) voted against the Government in 1986; he is now Minister of State in the Treasury. He should know that if the settlement was not good enough when it was much higher in 1986, this year's settlement is not good enough.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) is now a Minister of State in the Foreign Office and I accept entirely that he cannot be expected to worry about revenue support grants, but he voted against the Government that night. Look how these people get on when they vote against the Government.

Notably, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the Member for Hertfordshire, West, wrote to me—I quoted from his letter—and told me that Norfolk could manage and that the settlement was fair and equitable. It was not fair and equitable to him when he voted against the Government on 20 January 1986. Now, as Under-Secretary for the Environment, he is telling me that 0.5 per cent is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. This is all very interesting as a defence of the hon. Gentleman's case, but could he get down to local government finance?

Mr. Carttiss: I am drawing attention to the fact that right hon. and hon. Members on the Front Bench say one thing when they are where I am, yet when they have a chance to put into effect what they said when they were on the Back Benches, they conveniently forget it. If that is not relevant to my contention that Norfolk has been treated badly, I do not know what is. However, I defer to your judgment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and as the clock shows that my time is up, I shall conclude with three quarters of my condemnation of the Government happily left unsaid.

7.41 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I shall speak about the problems faced by the city of Newcastle upon Tyne, although similar problems face the metropolitan borough of Gateshead, which, as a recent written answer to a question asked my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) showed, has the unenviable record of being eighth out the 10 authorities that have lost the largest sum through the changes to the education standard spending assessment formula.

Tyne and Wear fire and civil defence authority is facing a £1.8 million cut in its budget, which will result in a loss of jobs and will affect our emergency services, with consequent threats to life and limb. In that context, I draw the House's attention to early-day motion 489, which 27 hon. Members and I have signed.

Hon. Members have drawn attention to the fact that the settlement is harsh. I must remind them that it is harsh not on Labour councils, which no doubt is the intention, but on the people who will lose their services and the many who will lose their jobs.

Newcastle's SSA is £224 million. The provisional capping criteria allow the city to spend 0.5 per cent., when, as the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) has just reminded us, inflation is 2.5 per cent. If the capping criteria are unchanged, Newcastle will have to cut £5 million from its budget of £239 million to meet the cap limit.

Cuts of £5 million require a £2.3 million net cut in education, a £750,000 net cut in social services and a £650,000 net cut in leisure services. Two million pounds will be taken from schools, which will result in the loss of the music service, £100,000 will be taken from libraries, which will result in branch closures, £300,000 will be taken from child care services, which will result in the closure of nursery and welfare rights projects, the number of social workers and occupational therapists will be reduced and residential homes for the elderly, respite day provision and day centres will close.

Those cuts will be made despite the fact that in the past five years £40 million—almost 20 per cent. of the budget—has already been cut, resulting in 1,500 redundancies, the loss of 2,500 jobs and a loss of services. I say to Conservative Members who accuse us of spreading scare stories that since 1989 pupil-teacher ratios in Newcastle have risen from 14.4:1 to 16:1 in the secondary sector, eight homes for the elderly, three residential homes for children and two day centres have closed, the library book fund has been cut by 28 per cent., branch library opening hours have been reduced by 13 per cent. and the arts budget has been cut by 15 per cent.

All that has happened despite Government recognition, under city challenge and other initiatives, that the city needs more, not less, help. How can it possibly make sense that a day nursery in Scotswood in my constituency faces possible closure, when the policies of the same Government made that place the centre of the city challenge area? If the Government's present policies persist, Newcastle will face a further three years of cuts worth £20 million, resulting in the loss of another 1,000 jobs.

None of that is desirable and none of it is wanted by the people of Newcastle. The stark reality is that none of it is necessary. When the Government's revenue support grant to the city is added to other income and to council tax income, the total is sufficient to maintain services at current levels and to avoid the painful cuts to which I have referred. The nonsense of the capping criteria is such that the council cannot spend at that level and is therefore obliged to cut council tax by £70 in band D, rather than maintain jobs and services.

That was explained to the people of the city by the local evening newspaper, the *Evening Chronicle*. In a survey of opinion, it reported that people were in favour of maintaining the council tax at its current level to avoid cuts by a ratio of 20:1. That opinion has been further confirmed in the city today, where a huge demonstration against Government-imposed cuts has taken place.

If Newcastle were allowed to freeze its council tax and set a budget at that level, there would be no net service cuts in the city. If Newcastle were given the inner-London capping criteria, the cuts would be reduced by £1.7 million and council tax would fall by £50 in band D and by £33 in band A. If the city were given the same support as Westminster, it would be able to improve services and give council tax payers money back.

If the capping criteria are not changed, Newcastle will be forced to consider for the first time the possibility of setting a budget above the provisional cap, just as Shropshire and other councils are. Like Shropshire, the appeal to the Secretary of State to recognise Newcastle's problems was supported by Tory and Liberal Democrat councillors from the city.

All those facts are a vindication of Labour's policies to decentralise power and give it back to local communities. When the people of Newcastle, or anywhere else, are prepared to pay for a service in their own communities, based on their knowledge of the needs of their community, why should some Minister in an ivory tower in London tell them that they cannot make those decisions and that they will have to cut taxes, despite the consequences and their own wishes? It is a clear example of the erosion of local democracy under this Government and it emphasises the importance of Labour's policies to restore to the people of the regions, the nations and the localities of Britain the power to pursue their policies according to their priorities and at their pace. All those who believe in local democracy should join us in the Lobby and vote against the motion.

7.48 pm

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): Somerset has already featured in the debate and it has been a source

[Mr. Mark Robinson]

of considerable controversy, especially locally, where the Liberal Democrats have been at their campaigning best in sending out petitions, organising letters and shouting and screaming about the education budget that they, of course, have decided to impose on the county. Indeed, the Somerset county council policy and resources committee aims to secure a reduction of £12.5 million in the education budget. The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) has written to all Somerset Conservative Members of Parliament urging them to vote against the settlement. I am always prepared to consider representations from any source, but it is a pity that the right hon. Gentleman did not stick his head into the Chamber for just a few minutes to listen to the debate when he is urging us to vote against the settlement.

Mr. Gummer: Did my hon. Friend notice that, although we were promised clearly by the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), that he would explain how Somerset could increase the number of people it employed by more than 3 per cent. and how it could receive significant extra sums this year, but that that meant there had to be a cut in the education budget, he did not manage to get to that point in his extremely long speech? Does my hon. Friend know the answer?

Mr. Robinson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already provided the answer to that point, although I hope to develop it later.

Because of the way in which Somerset's local management formula works on schools, the budget will be very harsh if the county council persists in its course of action. That would be extremely disappointing for many people because Somerset county council has been doing very well in the education league and, over recent years, it has brought its pupil-teacher ratio up to the national average.

There is no doubt that this year's settlement is difficult, but we must ask whether Somerset county council's response is legitimate in those circumstances. Together with my Conservative colleagues in Somerset, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) and my hon. Friends the Members for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), I have examined the county council's proposals. We agree that alternative strategies could be followed which would protect Somerset's education budget from the kind of unjustified pressure that will be placed on it if the Liberal Democrats have their way.

We are supported in our view by the very experienced Conservative leadership on the county council, including the well-respected former chairman of the education committee, Councillor Bea Roberts. As part of our scrutiny of the county council's budget, we uncovered underspending in this year's budget.

I suppose that we should not be surprised that, since the Liberal Democrats took control two years ago, meetings allowances and travelling expenses have escalated, as has already been pointed out. A recent Audit Commission report shows that the size of the council's legal staff is well above average and record sums have been spent on legal costs.

However, Somerset has had no difficulty finding the funds to protect its anti-hunting crusade. One moment it takes steps to remove travellers from its land at Podimore in my constituency and the next moment it invites them back to spend a month-long Christmas holiday there, to the fury of local landowners who have suffered damage and threats to their livestock.

We now have a tight settlement, but the council's so-called community initiatives, which involve the establishment of information points or offices in 13 Somerset towns, seem to be more important than protecting teachers' jobs. There is no question of cutting those initiatives.

Some of the things that I have mentioned may involve only small amounts of money, but they all add up. At no stage is there a suggestion that an audit of expenditure should take place to discover whether further savings can be found. We believe that such an audit should be carried out as a matter of urgency.

However, larger sums can also be identified. For example, the county's capital fund could produce over £2 million with some judicious postponement of planned projects until the funding improves. In addition, revenue balances could be utilised and, if I am not mistaken, those balances are net of cap. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that when he replies.

The county council has informed me that those balances amount to £9 million. However, I understand that the Department of the Environment estimated a substantial cash balance of £36.4 million on 1 April 1994. Can my hon. Friend the Minister confirm his Department's view of the state of Somerset's cash balances, given the different figures that are now being bandied about?

What is so typical of the Liberal Democrats is that they refuse point blank to discuss or consider any alternative ideas. I can only conclude that their strategy is to put party advantage first and children's education second. That is already clear. The weakness of the Liberal Democrats' argument is shown not just by the fact that the right hon. Member for Yeovil could not take part in what he regarded as a very important debate, but in the fact that the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) would not give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater. The weakness of the argument can be exposed very easily and it is exposed by our very experienced county councillors who have drawn up their alternative budget.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already stated that the settlement proposes an increase in spending. However, local Liberal Democrat-inspired petitions talk about the "massive cut" in funding from central Government. How can an overall increase in SSA for Somerset of 1.4 per cent. compared to the overall county average of 0.6 per cent. be considered a massive cut? It is absolute nonsense.

Mr. Don Foster: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Member for Bath was not prepared to give way to my right hon. Friend, so I do not see why I should give way to him.

Mr. Sebastian Coe (Falmouth and Camborne): Will my hon. Friend thank the chief executive of Somerset county council for passing on to me, and to my two colleagues in Cornwall, some remarkably helpful information which I have with me in the Chamber? That

information supports my hon. Friend's point and it reveals the lie about massive cuts. Cornwall county council's total spend per head of population is £589.60, which is £18 higher than the county average. How on earth can that be portrayed as a cut? We are talking about priorities which are being set by Liberal Democrat councillors.

Mr. Robinson: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. The information with which he has been provided shows that Wiltshire's provisional SSA provision per head is below that of Somerset, but I understand that Wiltshire is making no cuts in its education budget. That supports the argument of the Conservative leaders on Somerset county council.

With regard to education, the SSA is up by 2.5 per cent. in Somerset compared with an average of 1.1 per cent. across the counties. It seems that Liberal Democrats do not care about children or teachers; they care only about securing political advantage by any means at their disposal.

As my hon. Friend the Minister is aware, my right hon. and hon. Friends in Somerset and I, together with the right hon. Member for Yeovil, have joined county councillors of all persuasions to press for a modernisation of the area cost adjustment formula which appears weighted against the south-west, mainly through outdated criteria.

I give the people of Somerset an assurance that we shall continue to press our case on that score. In supporting the motion tonight, I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to see that the current reviews of methodology are given a sense of urgency. We met the Minister last summer about that. Progress must now be made to bring the matter to a conclusion to ensure that we do not have to return to this argument next year.

7.58 pm

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate and I make no apology for returning to a theme that I have pursued for the past four or five years—the continuing disgraceful treatment that the people of St. Helens receive from the Government in the annual revenue support grant settlements.

Local government finance is a difficult and complex subject, but it directly affects every man, woman and child in my constituency. When they receive neither justice nor fairness, they have a right to expect a Member of Parliament to speak out on their behalf in the Chamber. St. Helens has consistently been treated unfairly by the system, although, at the same time, the council has striven to improve the delivery of service to the public.

Staffing in St. Helens council has been reduced by 11 per cent. since 1992, and overall spending has been reduced by £13 million over the past two years, but the system continues to discriminate against the council. In 1995-96, the council faces further cuts of more than £7 million to avoid capping, but council tax payers face an increase of more than 14 per cent. due to losses in revenue support grant. It will be impossible for St. Helens to fund any increase in teachers' salaries in the coming months.

The Government frequently imply that, in some way, the problems of St. Helens are due to inefficiency on the part of the Labour council. Indeed, in an intervention, the Secretary of State hinted as much again tonight. Is St. Helens council inefficient? It is not, according to the district auditor who, on several occasions in the past few years, has praised the council. Indeed, last year he gave it a glowing report.

The district auditor's report for 1993-94, which was produced in December, praised the council's work in relation to the implementation of the citizens charter, the quality of children's services, the financial management of schools within the borough, progress in implementing care in the community, and progress on issues that the district auditor raised in previous reports. He finished his comments by saying:

"We are pleased to confirm that the Authority has made good progress towards implementing the recommendations made in these reports, consequently there are no issues we would wish to draw to members' attention."

The auditor's reports make it absolutely clear that St. Helens is a well-run, efficiently managed council. However, that cannot be said about the London borough of Westminster, whose previous auditor's report three years ago was a devastating exposé of maladministration and corruption, with senior councillors and officers threatened with a £21 million surcharge, which is still hanging over them. There have been no further auditor's reports on Westminster over the past couple of years, so God alone knows what the current position is. It is sufficient to draw attention to the front page of today's edition of *The Guardian*. It is revealed that, according to documents which have been leaked,

"Thousands of people who bought council flats in the Conservative run city of Westminster have been given unlimited free repairs to their homes for life, under a deal revealed in a confidential report by the council's own auditors."

Incredibly, the Government do not accept that Westminster council is corrupt and inefficient. Indeed, Tory Members claims that the reasons for Westminster's low council tax are its efficiency and enterprise. I ask hon. Members to consider the reply to me by the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment on 18 January. He said that the average council tax for a band D property in St. Helens

"is £652 and for Westminster £245. If St. Helens were to spend at the same rate as Westminster relative to standard spending assessment, the band D council tax in St. Helens would be £224—even lower than in Westminster."—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. 698.]

Even the Prime Minister, in reply to a question that I put to him on 3 May 1994, referred to

"some of the reasons why Westminster is so efficient".—[*Official Report*, 3 May 1994; Vol. 242, c. 589.]

However, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, in answer to my supplementary question, said:

"To describe St. Helens and Westminster as broadly similar authorities is ridiculous".—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. 698.]

I decided to investigate further the two metropolitan boroughs, Westminster and St. Helens, which have exactly the same statutory duties placed upon them by Her Majesty's Government. I used the citizens charter for the information, because it requires local authorities to publish their performance indicators. I discovered that 96 per cent. of housing repair jobs in St. Helens are completed within target times, whereas in Westminster the figure is 7 per cent. In St. Helens, 5 per cent. of tenants owe 13 weeks' rent or more, and in Westminster the figure is 10 per cent.

[Mr. John Evans]

Management costs per dwelling per week in St. Helens are £4, and in Westminster they are £21. In St. Helens 14 per cent. of benefits claims are processed within 14 days, and in Westminster it is 66 per cent. In St. Helens, 92 per cent. of housing benefits claims are processed within 14 days, and in Westminster the figure is 76 per cent. The gross cost of administration per claimant in St. Helens is £64 and in Westminster it is £226. As for the council tax, the percentage of net yield collected in St. Helens is 100 per cent., and in Westminster it is 91 per cent. The net cost of collection per dwelling is £16 in St. Helens and £25 in Westminster.

No one could seriously dispute that, on that information, which has been supplied by the authorities themselves, St. Helens is far more efficient than Westminster.

On many occasions I have drawn attention to the huge differences between the Government's SSAs for St. Helens and those for Westminster in respect of education and social services. Tonight, because of the time constraints, I shall refer to only one example, and that is children in care. The SSA for St. Helens is £30,000 per child per annum. In Westminster, it is £50,000 per child per annum. It is nonsense that Westminster should receive £20,000 more per child.

Another interesting matter is highways and street lighting. Incredibly, the boroughs are rather similar. St. Helens has a greater length of roads, whereas Westminster has more traffic flow and more visitors. I do not know whether the Minister is aware of the effect of extra traffic and visitors in respect of maintenance costs. According to Her Majesty's Government, it is significant. The SSA per 1 km of road in St. Helens is £8,004, and in Westminster it is £28,895. Extra traffic can add considerably to maintenance costs, but surely not to the extent of £20,000 per 1 km of road.

How much strain do visitors to Westminster place on the council's finances? It is no less than £3.7 million. That shows just how much additional SSA is paid to Westminster in respect of highways and for "visitor nights".

St. Helens and Westminster serve similar populations. The resident population of St. Helens is more than 180,000, and that of Westminster is 189,000, but how much do those authorities need to spend on services such as leisure, libraries, parks, car parking and refuse collection? The amount that is allowed to St. Helens for those services is £27.2 million. The figure for Westminster is nearly £109 million.

I shall put the matter into perspective. When Westminster spends £1 on services, it is required to ask for only 3p from the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

8.8 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Like many other hon. Members, in particular those who have had some local government experience, I do not deny that it is a tough, tight settlement. Nevertheless, it is entirely defensible and entirely manageable. Indeed, it would be totally hypocritical if I argued with the Treasury that Government spending should be kept down, as I have done consistently, and then ignored £43.5 billion out of total Government expenditure of £262 billion at the first whiff of grapeshot. Indeed, I appreciate that the 1.5 per cent. increase for Hereford and Worcester overall is a tough settlement. The settlement for education is 2.3 per cent. Nevertheless, it is an increase, and 2.3 per cent. is only marginally less than the rate of inflation.

It is entirely unjustified for somebody like Russ Clayton, the chairman of the county council, to try to scaremonger among parents in the county by arguing that there will be significant reductions in services before he knows how many pupils he will have to educate, before he knows what the teachers' pay settlement will be and before he even knows the final details of the SSA education settlement.

We were talking about the distribution mechanism of SSA. I suppose that nothing is perfect, and everybody will have their own point of view on the matter. Nevertheless, it is worth saying that a recent study by Rita Hare of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and Tony Travers of the London School of Economics stated that no overseas country appears to have a full grant system which goes so far in its attempt to achieve full equalisation. I was going to say—in an awful pun—that that means that what the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said was an absolute travesty. I believe that reforms are continuing to be made to the SSA mechanism, and it is as fair as we can get, although I have one or two things to say about matters which I believe should be reformed.

That there is room for economies in a service that nationally spends £43.5 billion is beyond doubt. For instance, my district council—I was happy to recommend that it was capped to protect local council tax payers from its profligacy—spends no less than £10.5 million; fully 25 per cent. above its SSA. If one bears in mind what neighbouring authorities of a similar type spend on their SSA, it shows the excessive expenditure of the council.

What is more, the council—despite the fact that it is spending £1 million more than its capping limit—has had to take money out of its reserves. No specific attempt has been made by the district council to cut back and make the long-term economies which would mean that services are protected and the council tax thereby reduced.

It is significant that, from 1987 to 1993, non-manual costs of local government rose by 85 per cent. It is equally significant that the Audit Commission has suggested—the House should not forget that the vast majority of costs in local government are staff costs—that few authorities have a consistent or coherent approach to crucial questions such as how many staff they need, how much they should be paid and how they can get the best from their staff.

I have four points about the mechanism this year. First, although I was in favour of having my district council capped to protect local council tax payers, I do not believe that that is desirable in the long term. It is a matter of some regret that now only 20 per cent. of local expenditure is raised locally.

Mr. McLoughlin: Less than that.

Mr. Coombs: It may well be less. It is unfortunate because it breaks the link of accountability between the local electorate and the council. I know that a debate is going on within the Department at present, but I hope

that the sins of the profligate should be visited upon the profligate. There is a case within the limits for either a relaxation of the existing capping limit or giving the Minister discretion. That should depend on the efforts of the capped authorities to order their affairs more sensibly.

In addition, I am concerned about the use of the social and economic index as it affects councils like mine, which have a significant amount of deprivation in towns with populations of less than 100,000, but which otherwise cover rural areas. The index also affects towns such as mine, which have a small ethnic minority population. The use of the social and economic index means that those towns are deprived of £1.04 million out of a £10 million budget. The Government should be looking at how those indices work.

My second concern relates to area cost adjustments. I do not regard it as acceptable that Hereford and Worcester county council should be given £104 less on primary and £139 less on secondary education than a county such as Oxfordshire. I defy anybody to believe that the costs of living in Oxfordshire are significantly greater than those of Hereford and Worcester. Those figures alone show that ACAs are in urgent need of review, and I hope that that is done as quickly as possible.

My third concern is the way in which councils use their own assets. Not enough councils have used private finance—purely for ideological reasons which they will later regret—particularly in housing, to introduce more capital into their coffers which they would then be able to spend to their tenants' advantage. The net receipt for my district council—I hope it will read the debate in *Hansard*—if it transferred its housing stock to housing associations would be no less than £51.2 million. At a stroke, the council would eliminate its debt, and would have about £12.8 million to spend on capital improvements for the benefit of the people of the area. That also takes into account what the council regards as the fixed part of its expenditure—some £4 million out of £10.5 million. A significant proportion of that is payments on debt charges for capital projects on which it has—possibly unwisely—embarked in the past. The Minister will see that there is significant potential for councils such as mine if they are prepared—with the acquiesence of their council tax payers—to effect large-scale transfers of their housing budgets.

My final point concerns the teachers' pay review body. Obviously it is important that teachers are properly rewarded to attract good-quality people into the profession. We all agree with that. But equally, I happen to believe that pay determination is best done locally and according to local labour markets. From talking to teachers, I know that if the implication of them not taking an extra 1 per cent. or 2 per cent. in their wage packets was that they would be able to keep on staff who would otherwise be made voluntarily or compulsorily redundant, they would—on the basis of what was needed locally—be prepared to forgo that increase.

The fact is that, since 1990, teachers' pay has increased by 36 per cent. against a national average of 23 per cent. This year the teachers' pay review body may give an increase that is entirely unrealistic. I suggest that that be used merely as a guideline, so that teachers' pay is locally determined—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order.

8.18 pm

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): As I have only 10 minutes, I do not intend to accept interventions. The Secretary of State, having gone on for 70 minutes in a most blatant abuse of the House, effectively prevented other Members from making points. We clashed last year, during debates on what I called the "blatant fiddle" of the revenue support grant. I have seen nothing in this consultation, or in the final proposals, that causes me to modify my view. Past devices used to rig the grant have been maintained and, in some respects, added to.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) detailed many of those issues and exposed the fact that, under this settlement, council tax payers throughout the country, irrespective of the political complexion of their local authorities, will pay more for less.

I wish to discuss revenue support grant as it affects my authority, Coventry, and Westminster city council. Coventry councillors are angry and frustrated, having raised this year, as they have repeatedly raised before, legitimate issues of anomalies within the settlement only to find that those have not been dealt with. Moreover, the final formula contains new anomalies that have not been the subject of consultation with local authority associations.

Coventry has asked for changes to the use of "homelessness" as an indicator, because it costs the city nearly £2 million per annum and is not a reliable indicator of need. It has asked for the type of tenure not to be used as a proxy for deprivation, as it punishes areas with higher-than-average home ownership. It continues to be appalled by the massive over-allowance being delivered to some authorities via the area cost adjustment. As usual, Coventry was listened to politely, but it discovered that, in the final settlement, changes were made without consulting the local authority sub-group. Those changes benefit some inner-London authorities and punish Coventry and other metropolitan boroughs. That has happened despite the fact that the Minister agreed with the findings of last year's Environment Select Committee report that transparency in decision making should be improved. One must conclude that that commitment paid no more than lip service to the report.

Over the next three years, cuts of £21 million will have to be made in Coventry, while this year tax levels will rise by 10.5 per cent.—3.2 per cent. as a result of the Budget in the autumn, and 7.3 per cent. as a result of Coventry losing grant to other authorities. We are left with the feeling that our lobbying on revenue support grant has been a failure, so we have looked at how other authorities lobby and, in that regard, at the workings of Westminster city council.

Westminster city council has lobbied and gained significant increases in its grant share over the years. It is well satisfied with this year's settlement, having received a 9.7 per cent. increase in standard spending assessment and the grants that flow from that. As a result of its success, and Coventry's lack of success, in lobbying for higher grant, massive anomalies have arisen. Spending per head of population in Westminster is 30 per cent. higher than in Coventry, but a 90 per cent. difference in grants turns that completely around at taxpayer level. The SSA for Westminster was 60 per cent. higher per head than for Coventry, which translates into grant pound for pound.

[Mr. Robert Ainsworth]

In education, the SSA per pupil in Westminster is 52 per cent. higher than in Coventry. Much of that difference is due to area cost adjustments, which assume that it will cost 32 per cent. more to employ a teacher in inner London than it will in Coventry. That is absurd, as the London weighting premium on teachers' pay is less than 10 per cent.

I do not have time to discuss the massive anomalies that have arisen in social services. In SSA for the elderly, Westminster receives 2.49 times that of Coventry. That, too, is absurd. The proportion of elderly people on income support in Coventry is higher than in Westminster, but Westminster gains because elderly people on income support are not taken into account when calculating the SSA, while elderly people in rented accommodation are. That has little statistical justification and leads to the absurd anomaly whereby an elderly Member of Parliament living in rented accommodation in Westminster counts as having special needs, but a single pensioner living alone on income support in a small owner-occupied terrace house in Coventry is not classed as such.

Westminster's SSA for highway maintenance is 1.52 per cent. higher than Coventry's, which is ridiculous given the borough's special ability to generate car parking income. Coventry's highways budget of £9.1 million is offset by car parking income of £1.6 million. This year, Westminster is expected to collect a staggering £34 million for on-street parking and is struggling to spend that sum. It is now repairing Westminster bridge outside this place to try to get rid of the money that is sloshing around in its account. Effectively, it is doing so at the expense of taxpayers in Coventry, St. Helens and elsewhere. A Touche Ross report on Westminster city council shows that it has massive balances in its account which it simply does not know how to spend.

Westminster's SSA for "other district services" is 3.94 times that of Coventry and the highest per head of any council in England. That arises because Westminster's SSA population is almost doubled by commuters, overnight visitors and day visitors. Its SSA for tourists is about 60 per cent. of Coventry's SSA for the entire resident population. Most absurd is the fact that commuters and tourists in Westminster are assumed to have exactly the same social characteristics as the resident population. For example, 12 per cent. of tourists and commuters coming into Westminster are assumed to live in overcrowded accommodation; 24 per cent. are assumed to be from an ethnic minority; and 36 per cent. are assumed to live in purpose-built—mainly council—flats. The idea that people who have a job in Westminster and can afford to stay in a hotel, or who visit Westminster on a day trip, should be classed as deprived is utterly ridiculous.

How does Westminster council achieve those marvellous levels of grant support? Has it used the same lobbying methods as Coventry and other councils? No, it does not have to do that, and it never did. A note to Lady Porter on Westminster city council's lobbying methods and results has come into my possession through the digging activities of the district auditor. It details how individual members of the Government should be approached and targeted, and how blatant political considerations are used to get more money. With regard to the Secretary of State, the note says:

> "John Gummer is the most alert of ministers to political nuances. He will be particularly conscious that with safety nets a number of high spending Labour London boroughs will appear to get 'off the hook' with Community charges lower than Westminster."

The note then details the work done on behalf of the borough in bringing pressure to bear to get its grant increased at the expense of other local authorities.

That is how it is done. One does not lobby the Department of the Environment using solid analysis of the grant system; one lobbies the Tory party, stressing its electoral interests. That is the real reasoning behind many of the changes that have undermined the credibility of the grant system.

I am firmly of the opinion that we are dealing not just with a renegade local authority at Westminster, which has been buying electoral advantage by such mechanisms as "homes for votes" and free repairs for leaseholders at the expense of council tenants, but with a Government who are up to their eyeballs in this issue. We need an urgent decision on an extraordinary audit into Westminster city council. We need an end to the abuse of grant distribution which is punishing good, well-run authorities like Coventry. We need to restore credibility to the grant system because the people of Coventry and elsewhere are tired of paying other people's taxes, as they have constantly been forced to do through this disreputable system of grant distribution.

8.28 pm

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor and Maidenhead): We have heard much about certain cases today. I shall return to the essential elements of the debate as outlined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State at the beginning.

Like most hon. Members, I receive a substantial postbag every day crammed with letters demanding extra spending on all the items that we are discussing today. As all hon. Members should, I point out to my correspondents that the Government have no money of their own but only the ability to tax people. However, none of my correspondents is enthusiastic about paying higher taxes to provide greater resources to meet their massive demands. That is the background against which the Secretary of State's settlement must be viewed.

In the present circumstances, I believe that the settlement is reasonable. The economy is growing steadily in a sustainable way—although I know that many people are still waiting to feel the effects of the recovery. We have had a tough spending round. Many Conservative Members argued that public spending should be held down and we are not ashamed of that view now.

Local government has an almost insatiable appetite for funds which must be held in check, especially when the national economy demands it. The Government are concerned about the size of the public spending borrowing requirement. It is not the only national economic factor of central importance, but local government cannot be immune from the PSBR. The country as a whole must reduce its borrowing.

With underlying inflation at its lowest level in 27 years, I believe that this year's local authority finance settlement is fair. The Government believe that local authority revenue spending should increase by 2.2 per cent. in 1995-96, which is very close to the rate of inflation.

Against that background, it is up to local authorities to stay within the public sector pay guidelines suggested by the Government. They must make sensible budgeting decisions and look for further efficiency savings. Such good advice is not confined to local authorities; we must all expect to make savings. Government Departments are being asked to do it and private business understands the necessity of cutting costs while producing high-quality goods and services.

When considering local government finance, the really important question is: what do council taxpayers want? The answer is simple—they want good, effective services at the most reasonable cost possible. We have heard today from the Audit Commission's report, "Paying the Piper", which clearly highlights areas where local authorities can make further efficiency savings. The Audit Commission saw scope for councils to target their resources more efficiently and to increase staff productivity. It also pointed to the benefits of local pay management. That should be a model for all boroughs.

For some 15 years, I was an inhabitant and ratepayer of the London borough of Hackney. When it comes to Hackney, I know what I am talking about. I was part of a minority in Hackney: I was one of the few people who paid domestic rates. Since being elected as a Member of Parliament for the royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead I have, very sensibly, taken up residence there.

However, the brief journey from east London to east Berkshire has been more than just a change of address; it has been an education in local government at its worst and at its best. It is highly relevant to the local government finance report because in both cases it is our money that is being spent.

When I saw Mr. McKinstry's article in *The Spectator*, it was like returning to Hackney. He said:

"The hallmarks for which Labour local authorities have become renowned"—

are—

"accusations of racism, whining social workers, massive procedural delays, and rumours of corruption . . . Waste, bureaucracy and political correctness characterise too much of their work".

Those are the words of a former Labour party supporter. Fortunately, that is not the case in Windsor and Maidenhead, where there is a long history of responsible management.

The royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is a tightly run ship. Therefore, it is perhaps no surprise that it has done reasonably well in this year's settlement. In the settlement just announced, the royal borough has been given a 2.83 per cent. increase on 1994-95 funding levels. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for what will be seen as a reasonable outcome.

The royal borough makes its case to the Department of the Environment with reasoned argument. Last year, the royal borough made a case to the Secretary of State about three main issues and I joined the council in pressing its case: first, it raised the matter of the all ages social index; secondly, we thought that the figures which were used in the standard spending assessment calculations understated the population; and, thirdly, we argued that it was unfair that there was no allowance for day tourism.

I am glad to say that some relief was given in respect of each of those three factors. First, the social index factor was split in two, which helped to a small degree; secondly, a more realistic population figure, based on the 1991 census, was used; and, thirdly, a new day tourist factor was included.

In this year's settlement, a further significant increase of slightly more than 1 per cent. has been applied in the population figure which is used to calculate SSA. That is good news for Windsor and Maidenhead. However, other changes made in the previous year continue to affect the royal borough.

The third factor recognises the impact that day tourism has upon towns which attract many day visitors and it applies to the town of Windsor in my constituency. In leading for the Opposition this afternoon, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) lumped Windsor with some very distinguished towns as though it were one of the very wealthy shire county towns. It is not.

If the hon. Gentleman had allowed me to intervene, I would have informed him that, not so long ago, Windsor had a Labour mayor. I am very distressed that the Labour party is no longer so well organised in Windsor, because I am keen to encourage a higher Labour vote there.

Windsor is not one of the super wealthy towns of the Thames valley, and Engels would have been familiar with many of its housing terraces. Its housing stock is not dissimilar to the old housing stock in Hackney. Many people who lived in Windsor when the houses were built in the last century worked at the castle and there is surprisingly little housing of a substantial size.

Windsor is a complex town. It is dominated by its magnificent castle, which was begun by William the Conqueror and is now known throughout the world. The castle gives Windsor a wealthy and cosmopolitan image, but that is not the reality.

Hon. Members may recall the disastrous fire which occurred in the castle a few years ago. I am pleased to report that considerable progress has been made in restoring the basic fabric of the affected part of the building and plans for the interior rebuilding and redesign were published last week. I am also pleased to say that the number of visitors to the town and to the castle has held up well. Some people feared that the fire would lead to such adverse publicity that tourists would stay away. Fortunately, that has not happened. That is a good thing, because many people in and around Windsor earn their living, one way or another, from the castle.

Away from the castle, down our main shopping street—

Mr. Olner: How much council tax is paid by the occupants of Windsor castle?

Mr. Trend: I make it a point of principle never to discuss the affairs of the people who live in the castle.

A little way down our main shopping street, Peascod street, there is a thriving town in its own right which, like all towns in the Thames valley, has had to fight hard to retain the loyalty of local shoppers. That is the Windsor which most of my constituents know and it does not sit easily beside the tourist town up the hill.

My constituents know that, as council tax payers, they bear many of the costs associated with the daily influx of tourists. It is sometimes difficult to move along the pavements of the high street outside the castle in the high tourist season because of the procession of visitors. A mother with a pram may not be able to push her children down one of the main roads in the town because of the

[Mr. Trend]

mass of tourists, some of whose associated costs she also meets. I was therefore very glad when the Government recognised in last year's settlement the problems that day tourism can cause.

8.38 pm

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): In the hothouse atmosphere earlier this afternoon, it was difficult to follow what the Secretary of State was saying. Let me try to paraphrase it. This has been a tough and tight financial settlement. Public expenditure has to be kept control of, and local authorities must share the pain—and by the way, they have to be more efficient. That was the gist of what he said.

A number of hon. Members have today attacked local authorities in a fairly vicious way. I would therefore like to record the fact that, in recent years, local authorities have worked hard to make efficiency savings. They have implemented information technology; they have slimmed down management. Resources have moved from county halls to schools. The hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) talked about land sales. Nottinghamshire county council aims to sell £8 million-worth of land each year to support its budget.

Local councils, I believe, are becoming ever more efficient. That is also the view of the Audit Commission. Its reports of seven years ago said that savings of £541 million could be made. Today they are being made by local authorities. They are taking stock, and they are making the necessary changes. Ultimately, efficiency savings run out; one day, the pips will really squeak. Such savings are not endless.

We should also take a look at central Government, whose overall public spending has risen by 3.3 per cent. Next year, the Department for Education will have an increase of 4.1 per cent.; MAFF will have an increase of 13.5 per cent. So the pain is not being shared evenly.

What can be done to remedy the problem? We could look first at the hideous local government review. Fifty million pounds has been top-sliced off this settlement for that review. We do not know what its final costs will be. We are told that the transitional costs in Cleveland may be between £13 million and £18 million—that is what the Local Government Commission estimates. The bids coming in from councils in the area amount to about £30 million.

What will happen in the next financial year, 1996-97? How much will be top-sliced then: £150 million, or £200 million? No one knows, because the Department of the Environment has not taken the time to study what the costs of the review may turn out to be. It is a leap in the dark, and I predict that, by the end of the process, very few savings will emerge.

Secondly, we might look at capping. When it was introduced 10 years ago, it was designed to get the dirty dozen—the handful of difficult councils—but now it is universal; 85 per cent. of councils' grant now comes from central Government. The element of local discretion no longer exists.

I am astonished to find that Nottinghamshire county council has been given a capping increase of 0.5 per cent. The new police authorities are getting a capping increase of 4.9 per cent.; the inner London boroughs one of 3.2 per cent. If it is good enough for people in Brixton, Lambeth and Westminster, the increase should be good enough for my people in Blidworth, Lowdham and Walesby. Why cannot the Government stand by one set of caps for the whole country?

As I said, the London boroughs are being given an increase of 3.2 per cent. Applied generally, that would release £600 million for local authorities, and some of the real problems that local councils face would disappear forthwith. There would be no cuts in social services and few in education.

We also need to focus on the area cost adjustment system, which other hon. Members have already highlighted. When I met the Minister of State earlier this year, I was pleased to hear him say that research into this matter would be carried out. I should like him to consult widely in the course of that research. I am not sure whether looking at travel-to-work areas will help. The research must focus on real costs, not notional costs. If councils do not pay more, they should not receive extra grant. The system should be fair and transparent.

Bills in Nottinghamshire are set to rise by £30, or 6 per cent. People there will pay more for less after 1 April. There will be real cuts in education. The county council intends to spend £373 million next year, against an SSA of £347 million—a spending above SSA of £26 million, or 7.5 per cent. But there are going to be cuts. As many as 300 teachers will lose their jobs.

Abbey Gates primary school in Nottinghamshire, an excellent school, is a case in point. The chairman of the governors wrote to me to say:

"We find ourselves unable to set a budget which is both legal and responsible, financially and educationally sound".

He is going to lose three teachers. The children will suffer, and class sizes will increase. That is what Ministers call a tight and tough settlement. In fact, it is a double whammy: people pay more for less.

This is an unjust settlement, and we must throw it out.

8.44 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) said that he did not agree with the settlement, but he and other Labour Members ought to look at the waste over which some Labour-controlled councils have presided for 10 years or so—debt, rent arrears, non-collection of council tax and so on. It is staggering to think that those authorities built up empires of extra staff and, at every turn, blamed the Government.

If Norfolk had behaved like them—overspending year in, year out—it would not, ironically, be suffering from some of its current difficulties, because it would have a higher spending base. There is something inherently unfair in a system that allows that to happen.

One has to try to put this year's settlement into the wider context of the economy. My hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Mr. Trend) did exactly that. This settlement is very different from those of previous years, because of the Chancellor's decisions at the time of the public expenditure survey round. If he had not been tough on public expenditure, the successful and satisfactory course of the economy recently would not have been maintained.

My right hon. and learned Friend would not have been able to sustain the confidence that has allowed businesses, especially in my part of the world, to say that they are more optimistic now than they have been for many years. That is because world markets have confidence in our Chancellor's economic management and fiscal and monetary policy.

I do not see how the Chancellor could possibly have ignored the sector that takes up one quarter of total public expenditure. Those who say that cuts in Government Departments must be made, and that some fat remains on various bones, cannot simultaneously claim that local government must be immune. So this is a tough settlement, and a difficult settlement for Norfolk, which will find life extremely hard over the next few months while implementing the cuts that will have to be made in some areas.

I did not agree with everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) said a moment ago, but it does seem strange that, while the overall settlement for local authorities has risen by 2.2 per cent., Norfolk's increase amounts to 0.5 per cent. I cannot see how that stacks up.

Many people in Norfolk are worried about the area cost adjustment, which the hon. Member for Sherwood discussed. Area cost adjustment bears down unfairly on shire counties such as Norfolk. Norfolk is an extremely pleasant place in which to teach in a school or to work, but, as a result, many of the staff working for the local education authority in particular are at the higher end of the age spectrum, and hence more expensive. As a result, we have lost about £10 million owing to the pernicious way in which the area cost adjustment works.

Only a few days ago, the Minister met a delegation from Norfolk. I know that he gave its members a fair hearing, listened to everything they said and considered their points about the area cost adjustment. I hope that he will be able to revisit the subject. I do not want to leave him in any doubt about how difficult things are going to be for Norfolk.

At the same time, I believe that Norfolk county council will be able to get through the year. Like many of my hon. Friends, I have received many letters from constituents, schools, parish councils and voluntary organisations. Many different bodies are extremely concerned that the education committee will have to save £1.6 million.

The cost of the teachers' pay settlement will be well in excess of 0.5 per cent. The education committee will have to bridge the gap. It will do so to some extent by cutting planned spending on non-school budgets by £3.9 million and transferring £2 million directly to schools to help them to meet the cost of rising pupil numbers.

The education committee will also reduce the planned nursery programme. There will not be a cut, but there will be a reduction in the committee's plans. There will have to be savings in the expenditure on school meals through contracting out and by increasing the charge by about 10 per cent., from £1.05 to £1.15.

These savings are sustainable and I can live with them. At the same time, however, the county council will have to rationalise bus routes, which will save about £100,000. That could have been done before, and it can be done now. There are proposed social services savings of £2.1 million. Quite a large part of those savings will have to come through higher charges, which will raise about £1.2 million. My hon. Friend the Minister will be interested to know that nearly £500,000 will be saved by leasing vehicles.

There will be some growth within the social services budget. An increase of 2.5 per cent. in the spending on home care will amount to £120,000. An extra £25,000 will be made available for the cost of foster-care places. There will be other improvements in the social services plans for the county.

The proposed savings in respect of planning and transportation amount to about £2.4 million. A considerable sum will be saved in departmental running costs—about £70,000. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will welcome that. About £240,000 will be saved in the transfer of the waste regulation function.

I have given examples of what Norfolk county council is doing. Its officers are working extremely hard to find savings. They have examined rationalisation and greater efficiency and produced sensible ideas. I am aware, however, that there will be difficulties for schools, social services and other organisations that are backed, to some extent, by the county council.

In the context of a tough public expenditure round, I think that Norfolk Members will grit their teeth and live with what is proposed, because they support the Government's wider economic policy. On the other hand, they look to the Minister and the Secretary of State to understand that Norfolk is making sacrifices because of economic conditions in the hope that its case will be listened to in future.

We hope also that next year Ministers will realise that there will be nothing further to cut, because everything has already been cut to the bone. I leave the Minister with that thought. I hope that he will take on board everything that I and others have said.

8.52 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I understand that I have seven minutes in which to speak.

It is a bit rich for the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham), living in his Norfolk castle, surrounded by his servants and champagne and shooting small furry creatures, to lecture local authorities, especially in areas such as the one that I represent, about the need to secure further savings. He continues to lecture them on their inability to deliver services. The hon. Gentleman should experience the problems that we have in the east end of London. I can only say, having listened to his litany, that we dream of having problems like that in the east end.

One of the features of the debate throughout has been the way in which Tories have been running scared of Liberals in the west country. It has been quite a lesson. To paraphrase some great words of Winston Churchill, never before have so many underpants been filled so often by so many.

It seems that no one really understands local authority finances these days. The formulae are complicated, arcane and, at times, semi-lunatic. Unfortunately, the debate will be given little coverage on the television and in the media generally. That is because journalists, especially, do not regard debates on revenue support grant as sexy. They are wrong, of course, because of the significance of the debate for every man, woman and child. From nursery schools

[Mr. Tony Banks]

to residential homes for the elderly, everything is affected by the terms of the settlement that we are discussing. All that provision will be seriously affected.

There was a time when central Government exercised little touch and only light control on local government affairs. It is now a hands-on approach. Unfortunately, the hands are effectively on the throat of local government. There is far too much interference, even now, by central Government in local government affairs. I accept that ministerial attitudes have improved since the rabid days of some years back, but there is still too much of a tendency for Conservative Members to perceive local authorities as enemies of the state and of democracy.

Local democracy and accountability have been almost fatally undermined by the persistent actions of Conservative Governments. We must remove the shackles from local authorities and allow democratically elected councillors to get on with the job for which they were elected by local people, which is to run local services for local people. They should be accountable to local people through the ballot box.

We all have our own whinges, because this is a whingeing debate. I shall have my whinge on behalf of Newham, but I acknowledge—I always want to seem to be fair to Ministers—that Newham has received considerable additional funding over the past couple of years from the Government and the European Union. City challenge at Stratford has objective 2 status, we have assisted area status, and we have received considerable sums from the single regeneration budget. I am grateful, as are all my hon. Friends from Newham, who are in their places.

Newham deserves what it has received because it is an area of acute deprivation. It is top of the poverty league, which is one league from which I would like to see Newham relegated at the first possible opportunity. Despite the Government acknowledging that Newham has problems, they have said in the House that it stands to lose an additional £20 million over the next three years as a result of standard spending assessment and rate support grant settlement.

A way out from Newham's point of view would be to include it as an inner London borough for financial purposes. Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney comprise the most deprived sub-region in the country. It is ridiculous that two of the boroughs are classified as inner London while Newham is outer London. That situation is based on historic administrative reasons, not on a financial regime.

As a group, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), I and my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms), with council officers and others, have asked Ministers for inner London status for Newham. I hope that our case will be considered favourably. I know that there will be problems with some Labour inner London boroughs, and we shall have to face them ourselves. We shall do so by arguing our case, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South has said, on the basis of merit. We are more than prepared to argue with our colleagues.

We are definitely disadvantaged in Newham by the needs indices in the SSA formula. Ministers should take that on board. Newham is ninth in the social index and in 10th position in the new economic index. When it comes to the urban conditions index, Newham is in first place. That index should be included in the SSA formula. Specific consideration should be given to homelessness in Newham. It is an incredibly pressing problem.

All hon. Members have said that we are faced with a tight settlement. More than that, it is a strangulation of a settlement. We are being pushed to the limits in Newham. The Government must recognise our case. The Minister should understand that the three Newham Members hunt in a pack. We shall be hunting at ministerial doors in the years to come.

8.59 pm

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): The financial settlement is indeed a tough one, but it is also well considered. I pay a small tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, whom I know well and have met on several occasions to talk about the settlement in Hounslow. He listens. He absorbs. He is a master of his brief, and he acts on the advice and information that he has.

I listened to the points made by Opposition Members. One would think that the Conservatives—particularly the Minister—are a group determined to inflict pain and suffering on a vast area of the countryside. Let us for a few minutes examine what the Labour party has been doing. We all know that the Labour party has not been in power—national Government—for the past 15 years. I think that I am correct in saying that the leader of the Labour party stated, in *The Spectator*, on 1 October 1994:

"I don't think the character of any party becomes clear until you're in power."

It has not been in power for the past 15 years, and the character of the Labour party in national Government may not be clear, but what is clear is that the Labour party has been in power. It has had control of vast areas of the country through the local government system. Let us look at that record to see what the character of the Labour party in power has been.

Even the *Tribune* on 15 May 1992, was forced to concede that Labour local government is

"lacklustre and incompetent . . . ineffectual or rotten Labour councils . . . have been a feature of political life for as long as anyone can remember."

Let us look at the council tax bills, band for band—bands C and D. The average charge for band C in a Conservative-controlled local authority is £429, but in a Labour-controlled local authority it is £560. For band D in a Conservative-controlled local authority it is £482, but in a Labour-controlled local authority it is £635. Why is it more expensive to live in Labour-controlled authorities? At this point, I ask my hon. Friend about something that has concerned me for some time. We cap local authorities—Labour and Conservative. By so doing, we do not expose the profligacy of Labour-controlled authorities to the tax payer. If we do not cap them, some will go completely over the top and will never be elected back into power. That is something that my more learned hon. Friends must think about.

Let us look at more figures. We know that some Labour-controlled local authorities are indeed in deprived areas, as the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, but does that mean that they cannot collect their taxes? If one look at the rate of tax collection in Labour-controlled local authorities, one will see that

Lambeth has collected only 48 per of its taxes, Hackney, 67 per cent., Islington, 67 per cent., Southwark, 73 per cent., and Newham, 73 per cent.

Let us look at rent arrears. Is it so difficult to collect council tax and council house rents? Why has Hackney collected only 31 per cent., Greenwich, 25 per cent., Newham, 24 per cent.—

Mr. Dobson: Give us the Ealing figures.

Mr. Deva: The hon. Gentleman is right. One Conservative-controlled authority—Ealing—has collected only 23 per cent., and I am sure that there are people who will do something about that.

Let us look at debt. Why do Labour-controlled local authorities have the highest debt in the country? Manchester has a debt of £1,326 million. Its total debt per head is £3,000. In Birmingham, it is £1,233; in Islington, £946 and so on. Why is it that those uncollected taxes and rents are in Labour-controlled local authorities?

Let us return to that great quote from the Leader of the Opposition—that the character of any party does not become clear until one is in power, because it is very clear indeed. Those Labour authorities have been in power for generations, for far too long, and some day their ratepayers will wake up and say, "This is no good. We have to do something about it."

In Hounslow, we have a Labour-controlled local authority that is more efficient than the local authorities that I have discussed. Its revenue support grant is about 0.5 per cent. more than last year. I know that this is a time to whinge, but I am not going to whinge. I merely put on record, as my hon. Friend knows, that we have to build two new schools this year, because our population is increasing faster than predicted, and we have a problem with refugees because of the airport. I know that my hon. Friend has taken that on board.

9.6 pm

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): I am grateful to my hon. Friends who limited their contributions so that I might have an opportunity to put briefly Warwickshire's case. I notice that the Minister has dashed away to his advisers—to listen all about Warwickshire, I assume.

Mr. Dobson: He is on the run.

Mr. Olner: Already.

Conservative Members and Ministers have been talking in two ways. They know very well that the cuts in the rate support grant settlement are real cuts to their communities. It really is no good the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) talking about the figures in the briefing for councillors, issued by Conservative central office. He really should show it to some of the Conservative councillors in many of the shire counties throughout the country. They are councillors, and political beings, as are the Liberal Democrats and the socialists, but they are representatives of their communities. Those councillors know full well that the rate support grant settlement will cut into services in their communities, which, as elected members, they hold just as dearly to their hearts as does each one of us. The hon. Gentleman does Conservative Members no good at all—

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a Member of the Labour party to use a brief specifically prepared for Conservative Members of Parliament?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is not a point of order for the Chair, as I think that the hon. Gentleman knows. He should not waste the House's time, which is limited.

Mr. Olner: I can produce another briefing, in case Conservative Members really expect to get any satisfaction from the Minister's reply. Many of them have referred to the 0.5 per cent. cap, which cannot possibly cater for the needs of communities; they have also referred to the extremely flawed SSAs. I advise those hon. Members—who have urged their Minister to act with haste—to listen to what their local authorities have said.

In 1989, Warwickshire county council embarked on an attempt to persuade the Minister and his civil servants that the county's SSAs were flawed and unrealistic, and did not take account of local needs. The same applied to the cap. The council persevered, making representations in 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994 and trying to persuade the Government to reconsider their SSAs and rate support grant settlement for Warwickshire. I have joined the council in its representations. We were listened to very politely, but at the end of the day nothing happened, although it was a Conservative-controlled authority that originally complained to the Government.

Some hon. Members have referred to councils setting expenditure limits above the cap, and then throwing themselves on the Secretary of State's mercy in an attempt to have the cap increased. I do not think that Warwickshire will dare to do that this year, unless the Secretary of State gives a sign that he is prepared to increase the cap before it sets its budget. If the Secretary of State does not take into account the amount by which the budget exceeds the cap, rebuilding that budget will cost another half a million pounds of council tax payers' money. Local authorities are being squeezed in a pincer movement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) mentioned a double whammy, but when councils can make no sense of the SSAs, cannot secure additional funds from the revenue support grant or a lifting of the cap and cannot even ask their council tax payers to contribute an extra 25p a week, it is really a triple whammy. Warwickshire's SSA is one of the lowest in the country, and should be reassessed. The 1995 cap will reduce school budgets in cash terms, and seriously damage the education of children in my constituency.

Last Friday, I went to a meeting in Leamington. Conservative Members are wrong if they think that they can hide the facts from their communities. More than 800 people attended the meeting—parents, head teachers, school governors and chairmen of governing boards, of all political persuasions. Those people know exactly where the blame lies, and that what has been done will lead to the demise of Warwickshire's education service.

A wonderful machine is now wheeled out on Saturday evenings. Numbers are drawn out of it. I think that it is called the national lottery. The SSAs are very much like that machine; the only difference is that it costs local authorities very much more than a pound to have a go.

[Mr. Olner]

It seems that, even now, the Government do not know how they constructed the SSA machine. For the same reason they do not know how to fix it, and the mess in which they find themselves will be to the detriment of everyone in the country.

9.13 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner). I am sorry that his party is so bereft of ideas and policies that he has been forced to use a Conservative party brief prepared privately for Conservative Members.

This is a tight settlement, which amounts to about 25 per cent. of the Government's total expenditure of some £43.5 billion, but it is 2.2 per cent. higher than last year's. My county, Gloucestershire, is to receive an increase of 2.4 per cent. overall. For some services, it will get an increase of 4.3 per cent. compared with the county average of 3.3 per cent. Therefore, it has not fared as badly as many other shire counties.

The Liberal and Labour parties form the ruling group in that shire county. On average, in every community charge band Labour charges £100 more than the Conservatives while the Liberals charge £50 more. Representatives from Gloucestershire council came to see my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration with a proposal to cut £7 million from the education budget—a cut of 4 per cent. That is a disgrace and it is unfair to the children in my county. Last year, Gloucestershire council threatened that there would be a loss of 150 teachers. In the event, six were made redundant and 111 were retired, but 165 full-time appointments were made.

Gloucestershire requires only two more grant-maintained schools to reach the magical 75 per cent. at which all grant-maintained schools will be funded by the Further Education Funding Council. I recommend any school in my constituency which is running into budget problems to seek to become grant maintained. It will then be funded nationally and the children in the school will not be disadvantaged.

Gloucestershire council spends £1,000 a day for computer consultants. It is advertising for a third PR man for its social services department to rectify the public relations disaster of funding a safari holiday in Africa for a child in a special needs school. The child was difficult and had committed crimes and, believe it or not, the council sent him to Africa for a holiday. That is the nature of the council which is controlled by the Liberal and Labour parties.

The council owns more than 5,000 acres of agricultural land and I have had serious discussions with it on how it could sell some of that land to reduce its debt. When the council was under Conservative control in 1986, its debt was £26.5 million. Today, under the Labour and Liberal parties, it has a staggering debt of £120 million. That is an increase of well over 1,000 per cent. since the Conservatives lost control in 1986, and it has occurred simply because the council cannot control its expenditure. Its budget is almost £300 million and it should be able to make efficiency savings. I know of no other business or local authority with a budget of that size which could not make some efficiency savings.

County hall in Gloucester has office after office. What do the occupants of those offices do? I have no idea, but I am sure that it is possible for the council to make savings. I shall give an example. There is a footpath through my land. Gloucestershire county council has no less than four full-time footpath officers. The footpath on my land has been walked perfectly satisfactorily for 20 years and those officers are perfectly happy to use my field gate. They now want to move the footpath just 10 yards so that they can walk through the middle of my orchard.

The council wrote to me stating that it would like a gate cut in my fence and said that it was prepared to do it for £60. I wrote back and said that I would be delighted to have people walking through the middle of my orchard. I wrote, "Please do it for £60, that is very good value for money." After a fortnight I got another letter. Goodness knows what it costs to send them all, but in that one the council said that it had had another look and that the job was not quite as simple as was first thought. The letter said that a special gate would be required and recommended that it would be cheaper for me to do the job myself. I wrote back saying that I would be perfectly happy to do it and that I would make the necessary arrangements.

That is a typical example of the wasteful expenditure of Gloucestershire county council, yet it sends a delegation to see my right hon. Friend. It whinges, complains and produces a magical budget whereby it wants to spend another £22 million, no less. It then complains to my right hon. Friend that it has a cut on what it would otherwise have liked to have spent.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: No, I cannot. I have less than a minute to finish my speech.

To all my constituents in Gloucestershire, I say that they have £300 million to spend. They should consider the best way of buying services, whether from the private sector or whoever, to ensure that all my constituents and, especially, the children in my constituency can benefit to the greatest extent.

Council officers or anyone else should not encourage the public to write and complain to me that the people of Gloucestershire are getting a bad deal from the Government. They are getting no worse a deal than many surrounding shire counties—in fact they are getting a better deal. The council should look wherever it can to provide a better service. I am sure that it will be able to do the job better than it is at the moment.

9.20 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): The House was entertained by the comments of the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) about his orchard, but I am not sure whether it was the most central speech today. It is a great shame that the House spends less than one day debating what is the most important thing that affects local government. Even the Secretary of State for the Environment made the point that local government is responsible for something like a

quarter of the funding that central Government provide. On that basis, I hope that we will have a much more lengthy debate in the future so that, if for no other reason, hon. Members on both sides of the House can have a little more time to make their points.

Confusion seems to exist between the two Government spokesmen. Just after the local authority statement was made in December, the Secretary of State wrote to hon. Members and said:

"Local authorities, like central Government, must play its part in restraining the growth of public spending . . . we are not asking authorities to do more than Government is itself having to do to control its costs."

As has been said by hon. Members on both sides of the House, that is simply not true. The record can be put clearly and simply. A number of hon. Members have made that point.

If we consider the settlement for local government, it is the Minister who is right. I do not think that he was speaking in a personal capacity when he said that he had been stuffed by the Treasury. He was expressing that view on behalf of local government, about which, I would be the first to say, he knows something. His view is rather different from that of the Secretary of State. Everyone knows that the settlement is bad for local government, which will have to make cuts of about £1.5 billion and increase the council tax across the board by 6 per cent. on average to stay within the settlement.

Local government has been given a cash increase of only about 0.4 per cent. in real terms, yet the budgets of other Departments of central Government are increasing—that of the Department of Health by 3.8 per cent., that of the Department of Social Security by 3.7 per cent., and that of the Department for Education by 4.1 per cent. That is happening at a time when the Secretary of State says that the schools budget can go up only by 1.1 per cent. That shows that central Government treat themselves differently from the way in which they treat local government.

The most significant budget increase involves the Secretary of State's former Department, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Its budget has increased by some 13 per cent. now that he has gone, but he has been able to achieve a paltry increase for the local government family. That is an indictment of Ministers.

If the Minister and his right hon. Friend really do believe that the SSA methodology is one

"upon which decisions are even handed, rational and based upon the most information available for all authorities"

he is out of touch not only with my hon. Friends, but with his hon. Friends.

We had a number of interesting speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans), for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), and for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), as well as by the hon. Members for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin), for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss), for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson), for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) and for Windsor and Maidenhead (Mr. Trend). They all complained about the methodology used for the SSAs. The Minister must accept that the methodology needs to be challenged.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Mr. Dobson) gave examples of the social index scores. I can give the House another example. Liverpool is one of the most deprived cities, not just in Britain but in the whole of western Europe, yet it is in 81st position with a score that suggests that it is less than averagely deprived. The City of London, that well-known centre of deprivation and urban squalor, is 19th in the list of deprived local authorities. If that is the index that the Minister is using, it really is time to look at this issue differently.

Local authorities up and down the land are being deprived because the index does not take proper account of the real statistics. For example, Surrey local education authority gains £8 million every year for the young people who live in the area, many of whom go to private schools outside Surrey. Surrey is a wealthy local authority and that £8 million is being provided at the expense of other authorities. The Minister must look again at the way in which the SSAs are calculated.

The jewel in the Government's crown, the authority around which the structure of local government finance is written, is the London borough of Westminster. We have heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Holborn and St Pancras, for Coventry North-East and for St Helens, North about how Westminster is treated so much more favourably than the rest of local government as to be nothing short of a scandal. The Minister should explain to the House not why Westminster is an efficient authority—we know that it is not—but what he intends to do about that running sore which will discredit him, the Department of the Environment, and the Government unless they are prepared to act.

The real losers in this year's settlement are not Members of Parliament but those whom we serve and who use the services in our local authorities. Let us look at the settlement for education. Many hon. Members have mentioned that. The hon. Member for Derbyshire, West said that it is ridiculous that local authorities have to set their budgets before the pay settlements are known. That is made even more ridiculous by the fact that this year the Government have given, even in their own terms, a cash increase of 1.1 per cent. in the education SSAs, while the practical reality is that teachers' pay increases are outside the hands of local government. The local authorities are expecting to face bills in excess of that 1.1 per cent. and will have to find that money at the expense of education.

We know that another 110,000 pupils are coming into our schools this year. Although we know that the pupil rolls will increase still further, it is only Education Ministers who believe that that will not be at the expense of the education of our young people. The number of pupils per teacher and per class in our primary and secondary schools is about 25. In Japan it is 17 and in France it is as low as 13.6. If it is good enough for children in Japan and France to have classes of that size, why is not it good enough for children in this country?

Mr. Don Foster: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lloyd: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not give way because time is short.

The House will be interested to learn of a letter that the Secretary of State for Education wrote to one of her Cabinet colleagues. She said:

"If teachers' pay increases by 2-3 per cent., then there will be a loss of 7,000 to 10,000 teachers"

in England. I hope that the Minister will comment on that. The decision whether to fund the teachers' pay round properly is in the hands of the Government. It is up to

[Mr. Lloyd]

them to decide whether local government should be properly reimbursed or whether they will take out that extra cost on every child in every school up and down the land. The children will face bigger classes and the educational consequences of that.

Let me deal with social services. The hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) talked about his county council. Gloucestershire county council's care programme is £1 million in the red in the current financial year and is providing emergency care only to people at risk. John Standing, the Conservative group's spokesman, said that

"community care began as such a good idea but it is no good if we do not have the funding to carry out the ideas."

That is a Conservative county councillor talking about what the Government have done to local government and community care.

In its recently published report entitled "Taking Stock: Progress on Community Care", the Audit Commission makes it clear that the community care system is under intense pressure. It states that it is underfunded, yet we know that the Government have de facto placed a freeze on the social services SSA for the coming year. In practical terms, that means a cut in funding for social services which, in turn, means cuts in services for the elderly and vulnerable. Those are the values of this Government—they are certainly the values that they have been pursuing for some years.

The hon. Member for Great Yarmouth has broken free from the constraints that once chained him and is now able to tell the truth. The implication of what he said was that there is a degree of hypocrisy among those sitting on the Conservative Front Bench, and it is not for me to disagree with him on this occasion. His was probably one of the better speeches that we heard from Conservative Members this evening.

Across the length and breadth of the land, county councils with social services responsibilities are saying that funding for the care in the community initiative is inadequate and that they cannot cope on the basis of the Government's settlement. It is no good the Minister saying that it is a good settlement when we know that his view is somewhat different—he recognised that the Treasury had managed to work one over on him and his colleagues.

It is important to get away from the idea that the debate is merely a competition in which Government supporters try to find Labour-run authorities to criticise and Labour Members are told that their own local authorities are nothing but incompetent. I shall refer to a number of local authorities where there has been all-party agreement on their approaches to central Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) said that an all-party delegation from Newcastle went to see the Minister to tell him that it was unacceptable that Newcastle had to cut its council tax and its services when the local populace wanted the services maintained. The Minister should respond to that point as we are told that capping is in the interests of local people.

The Minister should consider the borough of Havering, which sent a delegation to meet, I think, the Minister of State. The delegation was made up of members of all political parties on the council. They pointed out to him that it was invidious that the council had to make £17 million worth of cuts and, at the same time, increase the council tax by some 11 per cent. Perhaps the Minister can explain to Havering and the House why residents will have to pay more but get fewer services. Perhaps he can also explain why, despite the claim that the council was terribly inefficient while Labour was in charge, that Labour council was able to point out to him that it has cut about £30 million plus from the budget that it inherited from the previous Conservative authority. There has been no suggestion, even by the Conservatives, that it is a high-spending, loony left Labour council. It is a good, sound Labour council forced to cut services and increase the council tax because of the Government.

Let us consider Warwickshire. My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) and at least one Conservative Member said that there was a threat of the loss of some 200 teachers' posts there. Again, it is no good the Conservatives saying that that is scaremongering; that is certainly not the view of people of stature in the community, and not that of politicians. Mr. Seamus Crowe, the head teacher of St. Francis primary school in Bedworth, told a county-wide meeting at Leamington on Friday last week:

"Our argument is not with the County Council, it is with the Government".

Ordinary people involved in communities up and down the country are saying to the Minister, through us, that the Government have caused the problem and that it is for them to deal with it.

The Minister met an all-party delegation from Shropshire headed by a senior Conservative Member of Parliament and one of my colleagues. That delegation comprised councillors of all persuasions. They made the point to the Minister that Shropshire had been traditionally high spending on education under the Conservatives. That high spending had been maintained under Labour with the support of the Conservative group on the council.

Last night, the Conservative group on Shropshire council decided to support an attempt to go through the cap. I hope that the Minister will comment specifically on Shropshire, where his own colleagues in local government are saying that they think that the Government have got it wrong and that what the Government are doing is incompetent and ineffectual. I ask the Minister especially to note the comments of the leader and the deputy leader of the Conservative group. The leader said:

"Government needs to recognise the disaster it is heading for at the general election if it continues like this."

The deputy leader said:

"The Government in London is remote from the impact of their decisions. I have to tell them they have got it wrong and we have got it right."

Conservative local government is saying that the Conservative Government have got it wrong and that Conservatives in local government know better.

Mr. Knapman: The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) spent almost an hour telling us that Conservative councils—Westminster and others—had been favoured at the expense of others. Now the hon.

Gentleman is saying that Conservative councils are, as he would have it, in trouble in the same way. Both cannot be right, can they?

Mr. Lloyd: I hate to disappoint the hon. Gentleman. If he knew the political geography of this country, he would know that Shropshire is not a Conservative council, nor, indeed is Warwickshire any more. It is interesting that the last time that Warwickshire council was capped was when the Conservatives ran the council, which may also say something about the way in which Conservatives in local government increasingly see central Government.

I shall quote briefly from a report about Shropshire in this morning's paper in which Alan Cooper, head teacher of The Marches school in Oswestry—a school considered to be among the best, not only in the county, but in the country—said:

"It was not the fault of the county council, . . . but government spending curbs which limited central grant to Shropshire".

Up and down the land, the Government are being rumbled. People know that when class sizes increase it is because of the Government. People know that cuts in the social services budget, so that the vulnerable and the elderly cannot get the social services that they need, mean that the Government are at fault. People know very well that when they send delegations from their communities to meet the Minister, the answer may be sympathetic, but it is still no.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras made a rather interesting point that each Conservative council which was considered to have whinged too much, and went to see the Minister, came away with a budget cut. That is an interesting statistic which perhaps explains the rather more credible view of my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East, who told the House that the more secretive diplomacy of Westminster council was the way to get the Government to provide more funding.

We see the results all around us. We know that if the same favourable treatment which Westminster council received were offered to councils everywhere, few councils would not be able to reduce the council tax and few councils would not be able to provide better services. That is the reality of the modern Conservative Government. They are a Government who have no vision for local government, they see no future for local government, they let local government suffer further cuts for the foreseeable future and they treat local government in the most contemptuous and most corrupt way. The Minister should answer the charge. They are a Government who are not prepared to deal with the running sore of Westminster council. A Government who are prepared to reward Westminster council are, simply, not fit to be in charge of the future of local government.

9.38 pm

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): Right hon. and hon. Members have raised important issues and I shall attempt to address those broad issues tonight. If I do not deal with a specific point, I shall write to them to cover it.

I begin by repeating the question that I put earlier to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). He said that the settlement was inadequate. If that is so, there are only two remedies: the first is to raise the revenue support grant which is financed from central taxation and the other is to permit the council tax to rise. We need to know which remedy the Labour party favours.

Mr. Clelland: There is a third option. I explained in my speech that, because of its situation, Newcastle city council need only freeze the council tax at is current level and set its budget at that level; there would then be no need for cuts or an increase in the council tax. What does the Minister have to say about that?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman is not right. The question remains the same. If the settlement is inadequate, either the council tax must rise or the revenue support grant must be increased; either public expenditure must rise or the Government will have to provide further grants. That is the case even in Newcastle. We need to know which is the Labour party's policy and by how much. Labour Members cannot say that the settlement is not good enough if they are not prepared to say what would be adequate. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras will not say what would be adequate.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Curry: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I shall give way in a moment.

The Opposition claim that the methodology is crooked. Not one serious informed person believes that. Labour local authority leaders do not believe it, the local authority associations do not believe it and Tony Travers and Rita Hale do not believe it. They are the only two independent experts in this area.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Curry: I shall not give way, as I want to give the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras a little more evidence.

Tony Travers stated:

"It is small wonder that the allocation of such large sums of money to hundreds of local authorities should lead to accusations of political bias. Yet there is no evidence of such political intervention."

The Environment Select Committee, reporting unanimously with Labour Members agreeing, stated:

"We should like to place on the record our understanding that the Government's recent review of SSAs has been conducted in an open manner. DOE tested all of the options that it was asked to consider, and it has made data available in a readily usable form to interested parties."

The Audit Commission, which the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras intends to wheel into action as a Cooksey's cavalry to charge against local authorities which he thinks are spending to much, said:

"The determination of SSAs, being wholly formula based, is explicit and open to scrutiny. It is a more sophisticated system for equalising needs than any overseas system examined in this study and it is an improvement on its predecessor in many respects."

That is what objective people say about the methodology. Any suggestion that the methodology is rigged is sheer nonsense from start to finish. It is about time the Labour party understood that.

Let me illustrate that point. If it were rigged, it is curious that the SSA per head for Westminster is £1,278 with a total support grant of £1,023 while it is £904 for Wandsworth, £1,104 for Lambeth, £1,295 for Hackney and £1,535 for Tower Hamlets. There is nothing wrong

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with that. The important point is that the funds follow the areas of greatest need. They do that above all to the inner cities, and to the inner-city areas of London, most of which are Labour controlled.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Three and a half minutes ago, my hon. Friend said that there were two options. That is not the case. The third option is that counties like Lancashire should become more efficient and shed the staff they should not have. Lancashire has one member of staff for every 17 teachers. That is manifestly excessive. That is the third option which no Labour-controlled councils choose to take.

Mr. Curry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing that out to me.

I wanted to explore the point a little further. If we consider the SSA per head in terms of political control, in inner London we find that the Conservatives receive £1,030 while Labour receives £1,189. In outer London, the Conservatives receive £663 and Labour receives £856, and in the shires, the Conservatives receive £87 while Labour receives £106.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Curry: If that is fiddling, I have not done a very good job, and Labour councils are the ones that will benefit. I give way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I would be most grateful if the Minister would say to which hon. Member he is giving way.

Mr. Curry: With my customary generosity, I give way to the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), who is showing the most agitation.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The Minister selectively quoted the Audit Commission's evidence to the Select Committee. Does he recall that the Audit Commission actually proposed open ministerial decisions on the allocation of funds? It was questioned by Conservative Members, who asked, "Aren't you advocating a slush fund?" The reply was, "Is that not, in effect, what happens now?" Does the Minister recall that that evidence was given by the Audit Commission to the Select Committee?

Mr. Curry: Absolutely not. It is an open system. It is discussed with local authority associations. None of it is done by mad alchemists behind closed doors in the Department of the Environment. It is discussed fully and openly.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Curry: I wish to make some important points.

I make my next point with particular emphasis so that the Opposition understand it. The characteristics in the method which give support to Westminster are precisely the same characteristics which benefit Camden, Lambeth, Hackney and the other inner-city Labour authorities. If the Labour party thinks that it will get hold of a system and try to distort it to disadvantage Westminster, the first to suffer will be inner-city Labour authorities with the same characteristics.

I shall do something unusual and pay a mild tribute to Lambeth. It has at last freed itself from the scandal of Labour control and it is actually trying to make efforts to pull itself around. It recently appointed a new chief executive, Miss Rabbatts. She is paid more than the Prime Minister, but she will have to earn every penny of it.

The Liberal Democrats have been running a campaign. The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) was good enough to pop into the Chamber for a brief 15 seconds or so. He has been inviting all my hon. Friends to subscribe to a revolt of the west country. I have no doubt that the right hon. Gentleman's letter arrived on the desks of all the news editors before it arrived in my hon. Friends' postbags.

Mr. Mark Robinson: I confirm that the letter did arrive on the desks of news editors before it arrived on our desks. My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Mr. Don Foster *rose—*

Mr. Curry: The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) does not know the difference between a slogan and an argument.

Mr. Don Foster: Conservative Members have made criticisms in the absence of my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). The Minister and other hon. Members might wish to know that, in his capacity as leader of my party, my right hon. Friend has been involved in the developing situation in Northern Ireland, which has led to a ministerial statement, and the House has benefited from cross-party discussions on that matter.

Mr. Curry: The right hon. Member for Yeovil issued a call to arms in his letter, saying, "I hope that everybody will be there and vote on and discuss the issue." He has not done that. The Liberal Democrats wish to abolish capping—at least we know where they are coming from—and the area cost adjustment. I hope that they know what the consequences of that would be for some inner-city authorities, irrespective of what political control they are under, in terms of the impact on some of the most deprived people in the country.

Two subjects are of great importance, and I wish to refer to them briefly. On capping, there is genuine debate about the balance between central and local government funding. I acknowledge that there should be such a debate. However, as the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) said, local government spends 25 per cent. of public expenditure, and any Government must exercise ultimate control over that. A 1 per cent. relaxation of capping for education authorities would add £200 million to the public expenditure totals.

Equally, I am sensitive to the arguments about local accountability and the wish of people to differentiate themselves financially in order to differentiate themselves at the ballot box. We are specifically addressing that matter, and we have put before local authorities a series of suggestions under the private finance initiative which would allow local authorities to use their capital receipts in a better way. We have invited them to establish joint companies with the private sector, and to do that within the compass of central financial controls. We are hoping also to extend that into housing. That is the way to target

and mobilise all the community's resources to tackle problems, particularly deprivation, about which we are all concerned.

Methodology is always central to debates such as this, and I should like to deal with the area cost adjustment. I have said in previous years that the system is robust. I said last year that we needed to improve the methodology in the south-east, and we have done so. I also said that I would investigate whether we could find something that gave us what we needed to know, better.

I have told local authority associations that we are exploring whether we can apply a travel-to-work test to the whole country. We are having discussions with the Department of Employment about the necessary data. We are tendering urgently for research projects which would help us to hammer out a methodology. The system would have to work, and it would have to deliver what we need.

I cannot promise—I shall not give an impression to the House which could mislead it—that the system would be as robust as the present one, but I guarantee that we will pursue it with great energy to see whether it delivers more effectively. If it does, it will become part of a methodology in which we have consistently incorporated improvements.

Mr. Olner: What the Minister has just said will give some local authorities comfort. May I press him a little further? Will he tell counties such as Warwickshire that he will increase the cap this year to allow them to get out of their difficulties? That would be well received.

Mr. Curry: I shall return to the issue of capping in a moment, but the hon. Gentleman will know that we are determined to control public expenditure. We have not reached conclusions on the capping limits for this year, and they are still provisional limits. The hon. Gentleman must appreciate the constraints on public expenditure.

Mr. McLoughlin: My hon. Friend's announcement will be well regarded in those areas which are looking for a change in the system. How long will the research take, and when will my hon. Friend be able to publish its conclusions?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend will know that the sub-group in the working party with local authorities on SSAs will get into the final stages of any new system at the beginning of the autumn. Therefore, we would need that work to be sufficiently completed and subject to analysis from local authorities and ourselves by the time the House came back after the summer recess. That is the sort of time scale at which we are looking.

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): My hon. Friend the Minister has the great advantage of being one of the relatively few hon. Members who knows that the sparsity factor refers not to the scarcity of hair on the heads of Yorkshiremen but to the superabundance of acres in Yorkshire in relation to population—not least areas such as Skipton and Ripon. Is my hon. Friend aware that North Yorkshire is very worried that the sparsity factor is not given sufficient weight in the methodology, particularly in relation to the fire service and the police? Could he possibly press for improvements in the methodology relating to sparsity?

Mr. Curry: It is difficult to judge the right weighting for sparsity. Although local authority associations, particularly the Association of County Councils, complain about the existing weighting, they have not yet come up with a better idea. If they do, it will be examined rigorously and honestly.

This year, we shall continue work on the police SSA because we must move to a system that fully reflects the characteristics of each area rather than establishment numbers. We have additional work to do on fire SSAs, as I have always made clear. We have introduced a factor for the problems of coastal areas. *[Interruption.]* I am delighted to add my welcome to the enthusiasm which the right hon. Member for Yeovil has clearly evoked in the House.

We are also looking at how best to tackle the problem with regard to fire, because the pension scheme has a perverse incentive that, after 26 and a half years' service, people take early retirement through ill health and go immediately on to a full indexed pension. People recognise that that system creates problems. In the past, fire authorities may have been over-complacent—and complaisant—in conniving with that, and we must address the issue. We are trying to deal with it through the SSA methodology.

We shall look at the children's social services because we need better-quality information. The Department of Health expects to commission research to permit a reform, probably for two years from now, because it is a complex matter.

We shall also look at highways maintenance.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: No, I have very little time and a lot more ground still to cover.

We are also looking at the homelessness indicator in the SSAs. That is relevant not merely to the SSAs but to capital financing of the housing programme. It is important to have a robust methodology relevant to both those considerations.

That is not an exclusive list. Local authorities will want us to discuss other matters, which we always try to do in agreement with them.

The settlement must be seen in context. The Government must take account of the fact that local authorities spend 25 per cent. of all public expenditure. Typical budgets are: £620 million in Devon; £920 million in Hampshire; and £940 million in Lancashire. For big cities like Birmingham a typical budget is about £900 million, while the budget for Manchester is £430 million and, for Leeds, £500 million. We do not tell local authorities how to spend that money. It is the heart of the system that it is not hypothecated; they make their own decisions and allocate priorities. Nothing in our settlement compels people to penalise teachers. It is entirely up to them to decide where to allocate priorities, which is what local democracy is about and what local councillors are elected to do. The efficient councils will cope, inefficient ones will blame the Government and middling ones will probably try both. That has been the pattern in the past.

Councils can help themselves by looking at arrears in council tax collection and at whether they apply competitive tendering properly. They must put their own house in order. I acknowledge the fact that they have made progress. Many good authorities have come to grips

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with working properly and work in collaboration with the private sector to make life better for their communities. We must push that process much further.

We still need to know how much a Labour Government would spend, how much the council tax would go up, what would happen when they got rid of compulsory competitive tendering and what would happen when they put Unison back in control of the councils. All we have heard is the bizarre idea that we should send in the Audit Commission, not merely to go to high-spending councils but, according to the Opposition's remarkable new philosophy—Dobson's dictum—to attack councils that set low council taxes, because that is now undesirable. I can think of nothing dafter than to send in the Audit Commission to check councils because they are spending less taxpayers' money rather than more—thou shalt not set a low council tax. That is a funny way to run local authorities.

We know who the high spenders and municipal malingerers are. They are all Labour party local authorities. It is the old, eternal list of councils that are not making an effort, and that list must be sorted out. Labour's inefficiency is a tax on deprivation, a tax on the poor and a tax on those who are in greatest need. A half-baked, uncosted, knee-jerk solution will be a disaster for ordinary people who most need the services that local government provides. I urge hon. Members to have no truck with the Labour party's policy and to support us in the Lobby tonight.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 257.

Division No. 61] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Farsham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn

Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whitlingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Anderson, Ms Janet
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(N'c'tle upon T E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife N E)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Denis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Cartliss, Michael
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands E)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy, S E)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Macklinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan

Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1995-96 (House of Commons Paper No. 161), which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Questions necessary to dispose of the other motions relating to local government finance, pursuant to order [27 January].*

Resolved,

That the Special Grant Report (No. 12) (House of Commons Paper No. 162), which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

That the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1995-96 (House of Commons Paper No. 163), which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Gummer.]*

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 16th December, be approved.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

10.14 pm

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): I beg leave to present a petition to the House, signed by more than 200 of my constituents, most of whom live in close proximity of Woodside park.

The petition was organised by Mr. Poole, an indefatigable campaigner on behalf of the park. The petitioners seek to improve the park to a reasonable standard.

The petition states:

That the condition and maintenance and policing of Woodside Park have suffered from neglect for a number of years and that we, the undersigned, call on the Department of Environment to bring pressure on Castle Point Borough Council to bring the Park to a satisfactory standard and to prevent dumping in the Park and to cease the dumping of grave spoil in the Park, in order that residents and all users of the Park can enjoy its facilities, and that the Police should give proper coverage to the Park and surrounding areas, particularly at night, in order to prevent and discourage young people from causing a nuisance or being exposed to criminal activities and delays.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House do urge the Right Honourable John Gummer, M.P., Secretary of State of the Environment to intervene to ensure that Castle Point Borough Council take the necessary action.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

To lie upon the Table.

10.16 pm

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): For many years, Bedford has required a satisfactory infrastructure, and for more than 40 years we have had no bypass. Therefore, my constituents have come together and signed a petition, which has 16,345 signatures.

The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the undersigned people of Bedford in the County of Bedfordshire and elsewhere sheweth that: In order to boost Bedford's employment prospects, benefit the town centre environment, improve road safety and enhance the quality of life for those who live and work in Bedford, new and improved roads linking the A1 and M1, to the south of Bedford, and the Western Bypass are needed urgently.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge the Secretary of State for Transport, in conjunction with the County Council of the said County of Bedfordshire, to give Priority One status to the Great Barford Bypass, A421 improvements, Norse Road Link, and the Bedford Western Bypass (including the A6-A428 link), to include the schemes in an immediate roads programme and to implement them forthwith.

And your petitioners, as duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Scottish Homes (Housing Stock)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

10.18 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I thank Madam Speaker for allowing me this Adjournment debate, and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for being here tonight to chair it. I also thank my hon. Friends who are present to give me moral support, and the Minister, who kindly allowed me to give some of the questions in advance so that we would have a full and constructive debate tonight.

I am deeply concerned about the behaviour of Scottish Homes, and particularly that of Mr. Peter McKinlay, its chief executive. I support the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), who put out a press release on behalf of all the Scottish Labour Members of Parliament, stating that Mr. McKinlay and the rest of the board should be sacked. As a lifelong trade unionist, I never thought that I would see the day when I would want anyone to be sacked, but Mr. McKinlay is an exception to the rule.

The problem is that Scottish Homes decided to follow the Government's rules and unload its property, thus ceasing to be a landlord. Ironically, although Scottish Homes has many other functions, it has been an exceptionally good landlord. It seems to be a case of "if it works, fix it", and I think that Scottish Homes is doing a great disservice to Scottish tenants. It was not the present board but its many predecessors that made Scottish Homes a good landlord, helped by the co-operation and hard work of many tenants' associations throughout Scotland.

Scottish Homes also has a staff worry. I understand the position, but Mr. McKinlay has not asked but ordered his staff to do what he wishes. In October 1992, he announced that they should find tenants who were prepared to enter into joint ventures and form housing associations.

In my area, officers of Scottish Homes recently formed a housing association, along with certain tenants. The association is called Gemini, and it has bitten off a big piece of housing stock to chew. It intends to acquire properties from Westercommon and Maryhill through my constituency, across the east end of Glasgow, to Rutherglen and Cambuslang. As the Minister will know, the Government recently introduced legislation to change local government in Scotland, which means that the housing association will be trying to acquire property in two separate local authorities. Anyone who knows anything about community-based housing associations will be aware that it is vital for the community to be contained within a single authority, because it will depend a good deal on that authority.

My area contains the Carron, Balornock, East Balornock, Robroyston and Garngad schemes—a total of 1,373 houses, almost half the number of Scottish Homes houses that are to be disposed of. Even if we assume a modest transfer price of £5,000 per house—the houses are worth more than that, but they are being sold with sitting tenants—given that there are 2,286 Scottish Homes properties in Glasgow, Gemini will be required to borrow at least £11.43 million on behalf of Scottish Homes tenants. However, none of the newsletters that have been issued specify the amount that will have to be borrowed; only the small print mentions the requirement to borrow from the private sector.

That worries me. Some 16 Labour Members of Parliament attended a meeting in the Copthorne hotel during the summer recess. At that meeting Mr. McKinlay stated that he would peg rent rises to between 1 and 2 per cent. above inflation and added that after five years there would be no help from the Government or from Scottish Homes.

Not long ago, the interest rate was 15 per cent. If that happens again and my constituents and those of other hon. Members borrow about £11 million, and if the only way to get revenue to pay the building society or other lending authority is from rents, it is inevitable that after the five years tenants will have to pay the full interest charges and maintenance costs. Nothing is being said about that in the propaganda that is being put out by Gemini.

The Minister knows that some officers in Scottish Homes are clearly involved with Gemini. That creates a serious conflict of interest. The acting director of Gemini is Mr. Simpson, who is a senior official in Scottish Homes in Glasgow.

That is not all, because the Springburn Possilpark housing association, a local body which has been in my area for 20 years and has a good track record, does not want all the 2,000 plus houses that Gemini is seeking. However, it has been invited by Scottish Homes to make a bid for those houses in my constituency. Scottish Homes is being devious in extending that invitation to Springburn Possilpark housing association. It is merely pulling in the local association for window dressing. It must be that, because the Minister knows that when a joint venture or what Scottish Homes calls a new landlord, such as Gemini, makes a bid anywhere in Scotland against a local community-based housing association, lo and behold, the staff organisation always wins.

Mr. McKinlay and the apology for a chairman, Sir James Mellon, should come clean and say that Springburn Possilpark does not have a chance. A housing association that has served the community and Scottish Homes so well is being unfairly treated.

I spoke about banks and lending institutions being involved. It is stated in Gemini's business proposal document that multi-storey flats will cause problems when it comes to borrowing money to buy them. I have said in the House before that the Carron scheme in my constituency consists mainly of multi-storey dwellings. They are excellent and anyone would be proud to live in them. They are a credit to the tenants. If banks are already saying at this early stage that they may not be able to lend money to buy those dwellings, the Minister must say what will happen to my tenants. It would be extremely unfair to have ballots when people do not know their future in buildings that have been there for the best part of 30 years. Many tenants have been in them all that time.

It is proposed that ballot papers should go out. It should be made clear on ballot papers that tenants are taking on a heavy commitment in borrowing all that money. The Minister should instruct Scottish Homes to make it clear on the ballot paper that people are entitled to remain with Scottish Homes. All the propaganda that is coming from Gemini and the other associations that are on the

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

bandwagon gives the impression that there is no room at the inn to remain with Scottish Homes. That information must be put on the ballot paper.

The Minister has a responsibility to tell tenants that they have security of tenure. If the ballot is successful, even people who vote against or do not turn up and abstain will be required to sign up for a new tenancy agreement, which will make them assured tenants. They may have the right to buy—propaganda on that has been put out—but the fact that assured tenants are denied the right to go to a rent officer is hidden. Rents will no longer have the protection of a rent officer. The Minister knows that secure tenants in housing associations can go to a rent officer.

Mr. McKinlay told us at the meeting in the Copthorne—my hon. Friends will correct me if I am wrong—that, if the tenants decided to stay with Scottish Homes, he would introduce a private factor in relation to the property. That is unfair on those people, many of whom have been loyal tenants and have paid rent for 30 and sometimes 40 years. If they exercise a democratic right to remain with Scottish Homes, no official should take it upon himself to say that he will introduce a private factor. If people decide to remain with Scottish Homes, a team of officials should be able to look after their needs, instead of a private landlord being brought in.

I must give time for the Minister to reply. I have been involved with housing for 22 years, ever since I was a councillor in Balornock. Everyone, myself included, had a high regard for Scottish Homes as a landlord. Its houses have always been in high demand, whether they are back-and-front-door properties, multi-storey flats or tenements. The board is destroying something that has been built up over many years. I hope and pray only for the day when we have a Labour Government who will ensure that those tenants are given the rights for which they have fought for so long.

10.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) on securing this debate and on the spirited way in which he has put his points. I shall seek to answer as many of his questions as possible. I shall study the record tomorrow and, if I miss any of his points, I shall reply to him later.

The Scottish Office has every confidence in the Scottish Homes board and the chief executive. I hope that tonight I can convince the hon. Member for Springburn about the background and describe the transfer process. In particular, I want to emphasise that the Scottish Office's policy is centred on maintaining tenants' interests, which are of paramount importance. We have declared our intention of ensuring that these interests are fully protected.

The hon. Member for Springburn raised a number of specific issues which I would like to address at the outset.

On the question of Scottish Homes making options known to tenants—particularly the option of remaining with Scottish Homes—I am aware of information leaflets which are given to all tenants at various stages in the transfer process which make it perfectly clear that if the majority of tenants vote against a transfer, they will remain with Scottish Homes.

The hon. Gentleman has also expressed concern about staff involvement, particularly regarding Gemini housing association, and he has recently asked a number of parliamentary questions covering operational matters of this sort. Those are, quite rightly, a matter for Scottish Homes and I have replied to the hon. Gentleman saying that I have asked the chairman to write to him on those issues.

On the specific point of conflict of interest and continuity of employment, Scottish Homes operates a code of conduct designed to eliminate such conflicts. It is expected that under existing employment legislation Scottish Homes staff would be offered continuity of employment regardless of who may be the successful bidder.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Will the Minister bear it in mind that every organisation of this nature where the staff has been involved has always won the tender? That seems to be more than a coincidence.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am just coming to that point.

To avoid any conflict of interest, staff are required to state clearly to interested parties when they are acting on behalf of an organisation involved in developing proposals of Scottish Homes and not as representatives of Scottish Homes. In some circumstances, secondment of staff will be considered.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned management bids. It has been brought to my attention that, of the 18 proposals for transfer that have been approved by the Secretary of State, only one has involved a management bid. Scottish Homes' procedures ensure that all bids are treated objectively and even-handedly. The important point is that tenants should be aware of all options open to them and, ultimately, it is and will be for tenants to choose.

On the question of the initial disposal of Scottish Homes stock and subsequent resale—which would require the consent of Scottish Homes—the presumption is that all costs will be met by private finance.

With regard to rental policies, it is expected that tenants will transfer at their existing rent and will be fully aware of the rental regime proposed by the alternative landlord. This will be covered by tenancy agreements. The tenants will be aware of the terms of those agreements before the ballot. Scottish Homes will ensure through contractual arrangements that rental increases cannot be in excess of proposals put to tenants without its consent. Individual subsidies are, of course, available to tenants through housing benefit, of which £800 million is paid in Scotland.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned multi-storey flats. Scottish Homes is looking to mix multi-storeys with other traditional stock to make the housing package more attractive to lenders.

I appreciate the point made by the hon. Gentleman about the responsibility that tenants face when forming new organisations to take on a landlord role. However, Scottish Homes provides financial support to tenants to undertake training in housing management which is provided by staff from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations.

I understand the concerns that have been expressed by the hon. Gentleman and I should emphasise that the final decision on any transfer of stock is, under the present arrangements, a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I understand that, at present, Scottish Homes has received some outline proposals from interested parties regarding properties in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but discussions and consultation are at an early stage and no decisions have been taken.

I re-emphasise to the House the fact that the promotion of greater housing choice is one of the major aims of the Government's housing policy. There are a number of ways in which we are seeking to achieve this. The first is our encouragement of further home ownership, but we recognise that it is not necessarily the right option for everyone and that there is clearly a continuing and important role for the social rented sector. It is, therefore, important that people who choose to rent should be offered the choice to do so.

We are, therefore, implementing policies to encourage diversification of tenure and to make certain that tenants have a wider choice of landlords outwith the public sector from whom to rent in the future. Consistent with the policy of increasing choice for tenants, Scottish Homes has been working towards shedding its landlord role. Over the past few years, it has worked up a large-scale voluntary transfer policy and a forward programme under which it expects to dispose of the majority of its stock within the next five years.

It was expected that different solutions might emerge in different areas which would reflect the wishes of tenants—solutions which would allow them to benefit from improved services and better housing conditions and have greater say and control in relation to their housing stock. It was made clear that changes of this kind would occur only at a pace in line with tenants' wishes.

I mentioned a moment ago that tenants' interests were paramount when considering transfer of stock. That was emphasised in the guidance which my right hon. Friend issued to Scottish Homes in 1989 and on which Scottish Homes' subsequent procedures have been based. The guidance concentrated on three main areas—fair and open competition between potential purchasers; protection of tenants' interests; and value for money.

The Scottish Office would generally regard competition as preferable in most circumstances and would expect that to be the case for Scottish Homes transfers. It is only in this way that tenants will have full access to the proposals of all the alternative landlords looking to take over stock. These might include initiatives from staff or tenants, or a combination of both, or from a quite separate body such as a housing association co-op or housing trust.

Within this framework of general principles it is, quite properly, a matter for Scottish Homes as owner of the stock to establish appropriate arrangements to govern its transfer. For this purpose, it has published procedures that promote substantial safeguards for tenants and which are designed to provide equitable treatment for all parties interested in acquiring its houses. These procedures are subject to continual review and account is taken of the experience gained and lessons learnt from the substantial number of transfers that have successfully taken place since 1991.

One aspect that I must mention is how the procedures involve the establishment of local stock strategies. These are prepared in consultation with tenants and interested parties at local level in all areas where Scottish Homes holds housing stock. All of Scottish Homes' housing stock is currently covered by such strategies which provide a clear statement about what Scottish Homes wants to happen with its stock. These strategies define local aims and objectives for stock in specific areas and can be used as a framework to allow for the appraisal of outline proposals.

Within the local stock strategy, further breakdown of areas varies according to local circumstances and may reflect initiatives already under way or opportunities identified by tenants and areas where there may be an interest in transfer. Each local strategy was prepared in liaison with Scottish Homes' local development and housing management staff and involved consultation with tenants' representatives and potential alternative landlords and liaison with local authority housing departments.

Of course, one of the main benefits of allowing stock to transfer to a landlord outwith the public sector, such as a housing association, is that it involves the use of private capital. Promoting the use of private finance will ensure that public funds go much further.

On the specific point of transfer to local authorities, if it were to happen, the funds that the local authorities borrowed to finance the purchase of the houses would count as public expenditure and, unless total public expenditure were to rise, it would inevitably mean reducing public expenditure elsewhere. That could mean fewer resources available to improve other local authority housing. In short, by enabling people to transfer to new landlords such as housing associations, it is possible to lever in private finance and, in so doing, get more for the public resources available. That is an important point. I should mention that to date Scottish Homes has attracted more than £40 million of private finance. If that sum had come not from the private sector but from the public sector other important proposals would have been awarded lower priority.

There are, of course, other benefits to private finance. Involving banks and building societies introduces private sector skills and disciplines to the transfer process, alongside the best traditions of the public sector. That can introduce new approaches and perspectives and boost effectiveness. They can help ensure that the new landlord starts off on a sound and sensible footing, with a properly thought-out business plan, dealing with key issues such as rent levels and repairs provision. We can be pretty sure that a financial institution will lend money only to good landlords. That, of course, is good news for the tenants who share a common interest, with the private lenders, in wanting a landlord who is efficient and effective.

There have been suggestions that the arrangement of only one alternative is too restrictive. I do not believe that to be the case. It should be recognised that Scottish Homes will be consulting tenants throughout the transfer process and tenants will have access to free, independent advice to ensure that they are fully aware of all the options, including the proposals of all alternative landlords open to them. In that way, tenants are able to inform and influence the decision-making process under which Scottish Homes offers an alternative for the ballot paper. It is only when that whole process has been completed and tenants are in a position to take a

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

well-balanced view and make informed decisions on the question of the future landlord that they will be balloted on a transfer proposal.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have much to say in reply to the hon. Member for Springburn.

If at the end of the day the majority of tenants wish to stay with the public sector, they will have the opportunity of doing so by voting to remain with Scottish Homes. If the majority vote to transfer, all tenants should transfer. It would not allow for practical management of the stock if the minority vote against transfer were allowed to remain with Scottish Homes. I mention to the hon. Member for Springburn that out of 19 ballots, involving more than 12,000 tenants, a majority of 61.5 per cent. were in favour of transferring. So a decisive majority has been in favour of transfers.

I have already answered the point about staff. It is to be expected that there will be many instances when existing staff will wish to promote initiatives, in many cases in conjunction with tenants. Many of Scottish Homes' staff will have been part of the housing management structure of the Scottish Special Housing Association and Scottish Homes. It is natural that they will wish to promote their employment opportunities and it would certainly be unfortunate if their expertise were lost.

Even in cases where tenants take the lead themselves, in many cases they welcome the active participation of Scottish Homes' staff, which is largely on a voluntary basis. There is clear evidence that this can be highly successful as in the case of WESLO Housing management in West Lothian. That is an independent organisation which incorporates—

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): What about Waverley?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: That case was at the very beginning of the whole process. There has been improvement in procedures since that time. What is significant about Waverley is that the interests of tenants were treated as paramount and the accusation was not that tenants had been exploited, but that they had had too good a deal—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 2 February 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for consideration read.

To be considered on Thursday 9 February.

QUEEN MARY AND WESTFIELD COLLEGE BILL *(By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 9 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

Government Expenditure

1. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the amount of identifiable Government expenditure per head for each of the four constituent parts of the United Kingdom.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Identifiable Government expenditure per head in 1993-94 was £3,458 in England, £3,913 in Wales, £4,185 in Scotland and £4,781 in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Viggers: Although we English are happy, in present circumstances, to support the Scots—indeed, I even married one—does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the substantial subsidy for the Scots and others might be different if there were a tax-raising Parliament in Scotland? Does he agree that the Scots may face the double jeopardy of a Scottish tax from Edinburgh and reluctance from London to pay the present 20 per cent. subsidy to Scotland?

Mr. Clarke: As my hon. Friend says, Scotland receives a considerable subsidy from England, but that is based on the Government's judgment of needs in the various countries, and we judge that to be the correct level of spending. My hon. Friend is certainly right that it is proposed that the Scots should have a Parliament with the ability to raise 3p in the £1 on income tax. Why one should be taxed more heavily for working in Scotland than for working in England, I am not sure; nor am I sure what advantage it would bring to the Scots. The English taxpayer might ask why, if the Scots have 3p in the £1 to spare, he should continue to shift so much money north of the border.

Dr. Bray: Do those figures include mortgage interest relief, defence procurement expenditure, transport subsidies and similar matters that are directly budgeted for as Government expenditure?

Mr. Clarke: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is identifiable Government expenditure, but the aspects of expenditure that he describes are all for the benefit of the United Kingdom. We are talking about identifiable Government expenditure on public services. The hon. Gentleman will have heard the warning from my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers): that there is a risk that the Scots will have an extra 3p increase on their income tax, which would have a very damaging effect on living standards for the average inhabitant of Scotland.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider updating the Welsh and Scottish budgets that were published in the early 1970s, which gave attributable revenue as well as expenditure in Scotland and Wales and which showed clearly, irrespective of any additional taxation that might be imposed by a Scottish or Welsh assembly, an adverse balance in expenditure?

Mr. Clarke: I shall certainly consider the possibility of doing so. As my right hon. Friend says, there is an adverse balance. Scotland receives more by way of expenditure than it pays in taxation, but that is entirely right if a United Kingdom Government and a United Kingdom Parliament decide that it reflects the needs of the population in certain areas. I cannot understand why it is proposed by some that if one works in Scotland one should pay 3p in the £1 more in income tax than if one does the same job in England. I can only imagine that that is likely to be damaging to the Scottish economy.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Will the Chancellor remind the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) that the big difference between 1971 and now is that we are members of the European Union and that there have been great changes? As someone who favours European integration, he will know that the small nations and regions of Europe that have developed in the past 20 years have been those such as Catalonia, which is now seen as one of the driving forces of changing performances in Europe. Why does he not recognise that the people of Wales and Scotland should be given the same opportunity for the same constitutional arrangements as every other small nation and region in Europe?

Mr. Clarke: When I attend the Council of Ministers in Europe, I do not sit down with representatives of Catalonia, Galicia and so on, whose people have an identifiable local nationality but are represented by the Spanish Government. The four countries that comprise the United Kingdom have a more powerful voice in Europe because they are members of the United Kingdom. It would be a mistake for any part of the United Kingdom to start equating itself with Catalonia and thinking that we would be able to play the same part in European politics as we do at the moment—or as we could at the moment.

Mr. Jenkin: Are not the major transfers between the different regions of the United Kingdom necessary to

maintain the economic cohesion of the United Kingdom under the single currency of the United Kingdom, the pound sterling? Would not, equally, huge transfers be required to maintain a single currency across the European Union? Does not that vindicate the Government's scepticism about a single currency?

Mr. Clarke: We opted to have a straightforward choice on a single currency, which we shall exercise if and when the proposal is put to us. Meanwhile, it makes obvious sense to take part in the preparations for economic and monetary union so that we can make a better informed choice when we have a sensible debate on it. It is not inextricably linked to political union. I recall that political union between Scotland and England occurred many years before monetary union. Rather than relating it to Scotland, we should consider the case for and against economic and monetary union on its merits.

Home Owners (Benefit Entitlement)

2. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact that the restriction of benefit entitlement on home owners who become unemployed will have on the housing market.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Sir George Young): The growth of private insurance should reduce repossessions and improve the stability of home ownership. At present, two thirds of home owners would not qualify for help if they lost their jobs and many of the remaining third would be disqualified by receiving redundancy pay or an early retirement package. Our proposals aim to encourage home owners to insure against those risks.

Mr. Hoyle: Does the Minister not realise that the folly of his Department in cutting support for home owners will lead to mortgage lenders seeking more repossessions and to more homeless people? Whatever happened to the Tory promise of creating a property-owning democracy?

Sir George Young: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's premise. As he knows, repossessions have already fallen by some 36 per cent. and we hope that that trend will continue. It makes sense to try to remove an obligation of about £1 billion on the social security budget and reposition it through the insurance market on those who benefit—home owners. That will lead to a more stable system, which will cover more people than the current system.

Mrs. Peacock: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that about 40 per cent. of borrowers take out insurance and that, traditionally, it was always accepted that any borrower should? Will he please encourage the other 60 per cent. of borrowers to do the same?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. The 40 per cent. of new borrowers are paying not only for themselves, but, through the taxation system, for the other 60 per cent. It would be fairer if we moved from a taxpayers' subsidy to an insurance-based system.

Ms Primarolo: Why should someone who loses their job face losing their home too because of the Government's planned changes to the benefits system? Will not the £18 million saved by the Government in the first year increase the mortgage payments of every new home owner by £20 per month? Since mortgages are already rising, why do not the Government withdraw that proposal and help home owners, not undermine them?

Sir George Young: The figure of £20 per month, to which the hon. Lady referred, or the figure of £12 to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security referred in last week's debate, must be put in the context of a reduction of £140 per month in the cost of an average mortgage since 1990. Against that background, the figure mentioned is not a high imposition.

Mr. David Martin: Does it not stick in my right hon. Friend's craw, as it does in mine, that Labour Members have been posing as the champions of home owners, when all their policies, in and out of government, have been not only discouraging but positively hostile to the interests of home owners?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If Labour Members felt so strongly about these measures, they would have given an obligation to repeal them, but of course they have not done so.

Disabled People (Access)

3. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider the introduction of tax relief to small businesses for the purposes of providing access for disabled people.

Sir George Young: Capital expenditure incurred by businesses for providing access for disabled people may be eligible for tax relief under normal capital allowance rules. There are specific Government programmes to assist disabled people such as the access to work programme, which was introduced in June 1994. This provides a wide range of practical help to overcome barriers to employment faced by disabled people. For example, the programme can provide alterations to premises or a work environment and communicators for people who are deaf. By December 1994, more than 5,000 people had been assisted.

Mr. Barnes: The Minister should realise that civil rights for disabled people are good for business: they increase sales and the tax take and they reduce the need for benefits. Therefore, can further measures be taken to encourage some entrepreneurial zip among small businesses so that more disabled people can be taken on by them?

Sir George Young: The whole House has much sympathy with the objectives suggested by the hon. Gentleman. The Disability Discrimination Bill, which is now before the House, requires an employer to make a reasonable adjustment to the working conditions or premises where that could overcome a practical barrier to a disabled potential employee.

Sir Donald Thompson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, to achieve that entrepreneurial zip, capital will need to be expended? If the Government are going to say exactly how that capital should be spent, they should carefully consider tax benefits for those who are willing to spend it.

Sir George Young: Depending on the nature of the expenditure, if it is revenue expenditure, it can all be set

against tax. Depending on the nature of the capital expenditure, there may be allowances for that also. In addition, grants are available under the access to work scheme, through the disabled person, to pay for some of the adaptations.

Ms Armstrong: Are not the tax issues with which the Minister is dealing currently dealt with by Inland Revenue tax inspectors? It is estimated that more than £2 billion of tax is not being collected, so how does the Minister justify sacking 6,000 tax inspectors? Would it not be better to have tax collectors collecting tax and not the dole?

Sir George Young: No one is suggesting that 6,000 tax inspectors are going to be sacked. We have made it quite clear that we hope to achieve our proposed reductions without compulsory redundancies. In the past three years, the number of Inland Revenue staff has reduced by 10,000, with only 80 redundancies. That is the progress that we want to make.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the entrepreneurial zip would be taken out of small businesses if local councils were again given the right to charge the business rate, as proposed by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is quite right. The uniform business rate, set by Government with guarantees that it will not rise by more than the rate of inflation, is a real benefit to small businesses, particularly to those that were previously confronted with large rate increases by Labour-controlled local authorities.

Living Standards

4. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on prospects for living standards in the coming year.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: One possible measure of living standards is real GDP per head. On that basis, my Budget forecast implied a rise of about 3 per cent. over the coming year.

Mr. Heppell: If housing costs are taken into consideration, the real income of the poorest 10 per cent. of the population has fallen 17 per cent. since 1979, whereas the income of the richest 10 per cent. has increased by 62 per cent. What does the Chancellor propose to do about the growing gap between rich and poor, which is the largest gap since records began?

Mr. Clarke: The figures that the hon. Gentleman quoted are the most misused figures in public debate. Close analysis of figures on the so-called lower 10 per cent. shows that they are not the poorest in society and that they include many people who declare no income but who are high spenders. The comparison that the hon. Gentleman makes is, with the greatest respect, practically valueless.

Next year, as a result of strong and sustained growth and our powerful performance in export markets, we expect average personal disposable incomes per family to rise by about £5. Low-earning families will benefit in particular from what I announced on family credit, which is now being taken up. The welcome fall in unemployment, which is half a million below its peak already, will also benefit less well-off people. The figures quoted by the hon. Gentleman are misleading, and the present position is encouraging for people on all levels of income.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Bearing in mind the fact that since 1979 living standards under this Conservative Government have risen right across the board, will my right hon. and learned Friend have talks with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security on the possibility of itemising the compensation for VAT on fuel on the pension book, so that pensioners may fully understand the help that the Government have given?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is quite right. Living standards generally are almost half as high again as they were when the Government first came to power. His suggestion about itemising the compensation received inside the pension book is interesting and worth while, and my right hon. Friend may consider it.

It is certain that the amounts added to the retirement pension, over and above the ordinary uprating, will more or less compensate the average pensioner for the extra VAT on fuel, which, at the rate at which we have left it, will now be paid only by those of working age who are not receiving means-tested benefits in full.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Does not today's interest rate rise represent a double blow to living standards, making an already insecure Britain even more insecure: first, because every time we expand—even out of recession—we cannot sustain that growth, reflecting the underlying economic weaknesses which the Chancellor refuses to address; and, secondly, because with the cost for a typical home owner rising by £800 this year—a 25 per cent. rise—millions of people will see a fall in their living standards? Are not the Government guilty of a betrayal of their promises to every home owner in Britain, just as they are guilty of a betrayal of their promises to every taxpayer in Britain?

Mr. Clarke: Last year, we had 4 per cent. growth and the lowest inflation since the war, which had beneficial effects on the economy and greatly reduced unemployment by half a million. The key thing, delivery of which would be beyond the hon. Gentleman and his party, is to keep the recovery at a sustainable level, to keep inflation down and to keep our competitive position, which is enabling us to do so well in export markets. The hon. Gentleman shows that he has learnt nothing from the history of past Labour Governments, or indeed of any other Government. He would throw it all away, lose our present competitive position, take risks with inflation and put us back in difficulties again.

Growth Prospects

5. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about future growth prospects for the United Kingdom economy.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I receive a large number of representations about prospects for the economy.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. and learned Friend welcome this week's survey by chambers of commerce throughout Europe, showing that Britain has the best job prospects of any country in Europe? Does not

that prove the folly of the trade union-sponsored Opposition policies, which call for the implementation of the social charter in this country?

Mr. Clarke: I wholly agree. Last year, we achieved a big fall in unemployment, and the labour force survey showed a big increase in the number of jobs—particularly, I am glad to say, in full-time jobs—in the British economy. We have a far better record than has been achieved anywhere else in the EU. One reason for that is the firm monetary policy and strong fiscal policy of the Government, and a second reason is that we do not put unnecessary burdens and costs such as the social chapter on to employment, and we have no intention of doing so. That would damage our job-creating record.

Mr. Radice: Will the Chancellor tell the House why he has put up interest rates, as he has not said so?

Mr. Clarke: To deliver my stated objective of sustained growth with low inflation. We still have a buoyant economy, and surveys show that price expectations are still there. There has been a big increase in commodity prices, and producer prices are rising a little. I judged it timely to make a further increase today to ensure that growth is sustained without the recurrence of inflation.

I am not sure what the Labour party would do—it seems to say the same old stuff when it comments on the issue—but I strongly suspect that, at a crucial stage of the recovery, it would throw it all away by not taking the necessary steps to protect us against a recurrence of inflation.

Mr. Mark Robinson: My right hon. and learned Friend probably knows that I have not been the greatest fan of Treasury forecasting, but will he comment on the forecasts of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who said in the debate on the autumn statement in 1992 that the balance of payments would worsen—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask a question that addresses ministerial responsibilities.

Mr. Robinson: During consideration of my right hon. and learned Friend's ministerial responsibilities, will he examine the forecasting of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, who said in the 1992 autumn statement debate that the balance of payments would worsen and unemployment would rise and that the economy was generally on a downhill trend?

Mr. Clarke: In carrying out my ministerial responsibilities it is important that I maintain a healthy scepticism for forecasts of all types. I readily acknowledge that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has a history of disastrous forecasts. I forecast that if he were in my position, he would have voted against all my tax increases and public spending controls, he would not have raised interest rates and this country would still be an industrial disaster. He still carps about the remarkable performance that we achieved in 1994 by ignoring his advice and forecasts.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Chancellor accept that raising interest rates every six weeks does not constitute an economic strategy? Does he further accept that Britain needs investment? In the light of last week's CBI survey showing that investment is at an all-time low, does he accept that interest rates are likely further to depress investment in the economy, which will undermine our growth prospects?

Mr. Clarke: I realise that a Liberal Democrat Government would never put up interest rates, but would put them down every now and again. In the real world, however, investment depends on people's confidence that the Government will deliver sustained growth with low inflation. The fact that people are in no doubt about our determination to deliver low inflation will make them confident that they can get the return that they require on investment if they make it now.

Home Ownership

6. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will identify those proposals in his latest unified budget which are intended specifically to promote home ownership.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): My right hon. and learned Friend's most recent Budget included measures to double grants to help council tenants buy homes and Housing Corporation programmes, worth £208 million, to extend home ownership.

Mr. Winterton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that response and I recognise the basic strength of our economy, but does he accept, however, that for many decades it has been Conservative party policy to encourage home ownership? Does he accept that recent Budgets have provided a disincentive to home ownership and that the housebuilding sector of our economy is critical to our economic success, as so many other sectors of manufacturing depend on it? Does he also accept—I say this with some regret—that the latest interest rate rise is thoroughly undesirable and will thoroughly depress the building sector?

Mr. Nelson: Let me assure my hon. Friend that the Government remain firmly committed to home ownership, which, since we took office, has increased by 4.3 million to 15.6 million. On the interest rate increase, there can be no doubt that the health and prospects of the housing and construction markets rely on a period of sustained low inflationary growth. It is my right hon. and learned Friend's judgment that that is most likely to be achieved if we continue to bear down on inflation. We have no interest in setting interest rates higher than is necessary to achieve that objective.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is not one of the great problems with our economy the fact that so much future prosperity is based on property prices?

Mr. Nelson: It is a wholly natural instinct and a desirable objective for many people to build up a financial interest in their home—to be reliant on that asset, to enjoy it and to be responsible for ownership. That is what this party has always supported when in government and we shall continue to do so. The changes introduced in successive Budgets, to mortgage interest relief or other areas, should not damage the long-term prospects for home ownership. The figures demonstrate that that has increased and the prospects for it being maintained lie in a gentle revival of that market, which today's action on interest rates should sustain rather than undermine.

Bank Rates

7. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will next discuss with the Governor of the Bank of England the level of bank rates.

10. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors are taken into account when decisions are made regarding bank rate changes during his discussions with the Bank of England.

Mr. Clarke: I held one of my regular meetings with the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss monetary developments this morning. The factors that I take into account in decisions on monetary policy are set out in the medium-term financial strategy, and the minutes of my monthly meetings are now published.

Mrs. Winterton: In his discussions with the Governor of the Bank of England earlier today, did my right hon. and learned Friend say that moves towards a single currency in Europe are anathema, not least because of our bitter experience of the exchange rate mechanism, when bank rates were at an unsustainable and intolerably high level, afflicting both business and home owners alike?

Mr. Clarke: I will not argue history with my hon. Friend, because inflation and interest rate increases began well before we joined the ERM. While we were in the ERM, we began the steady and sensible process of reducing both interest rates and inflation. I commend to my hon. Friend the speech by the Governor of the Bank of England recently on the subject of economic and monetary union. I have been urging for some time that we have a more sensible debate in this country on whether economic and monetary union might be of advantage to this country. I was delighted that the Governor of the Bank of England decided to participate in that debate. He was good enough to show me a copy of his speech before delivering it. It is excellent and I commend it to all those with a serious interest in the subject.

Mr. Foulkes: Does the Chancellor realise that his cosy tête-a-têtes over the past five months with the Governor of the Bank of England have resulted in an increase of £45 a month in the average mortgage? How does he expect the ordinary wage earner—not Sir Iain Vallance or Cedric Brown but the people whom they employ—to pay the extra that he has imposed?

Mr. Clarke: I am sometimes accused of having cosy tête-a-têtes with the Governor of the Bank of England and, at other times, unavailing struggles against him in our titanic clashes. *[Interruption.]* This country is simply not ready for open government. The minutes of the meetings that we publish show that we are both firmly agreed on delivering sustained growth with low inflation. As a leader in *The Times* recently acknowledged, by doing that last year we succeeded in producing the strongest economy in Europe and arguably the healthiest economy in the developed world.

Mortgage costs are now far higher—lower—*[Interruption.]* Mortgage costs are far lower than they were in 1990 when they last reached their peak. If I took the advice of Opposition Members and lost control of inflation, mortgage costs would rise to great heights. When inflation and taxation are taken into account, the average person's living standards are expected to rise in 1995.

Mr. Yeo: Will my right hon. and learned Friend ignore the mindless chants from Opposition Members, whose thinking on interest rates has not advanced from the point of saying that they should be 1 per cent. below whatever level they happen to be? Does he agree that it is in the long-term interest of all borrowers, both corporate and personal, that interest rates increase from time to time, as that helps to achieve the long-term inflation objectives that he has set out?

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am afraid that he accurately describes the level of discussion with the Opposition that we usually have on interest rates. The key judgment that must be made is how to sustain this recovery. That involves taking the necessary decisions to ensure that inflation does not get back into the system. Small business men, house purchasers, and people in the real industrial economy, whose interests are at the forefront of my mind, would suffer most if I lost control of inflation at a time when our recovery is doing so well. This recovery will last. We shall not return to boom and bust, and that involves ignoring the flippant advice of the Labour and Liberal parties on how to set interest rates.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Would it be wise Government policy to continue increasing interest rates in advance of a general election?

Mr. Clarke: I have already given one description of the usual political debate on interest rates. I have deliberately made monetary policy more transparent to try to stop interest rates being treated as such a knock-about political subject. People will stop regarding interest rates as a knock-about issue and allowing political considerations to intrude when they see us continuing to deliver the sort of growth rate, falling unemployment, new job creation, high standards of productivity and high export volumes that we have so far delivered. If we keep on delivering those to an election, the views of any of the Opposition parties on interest rates will be regarded as totally irrelevant.

Mr. Elletson: What effect would there be on interest rates if we removed spending controls on local authorities and created a new tier of local bureaucracy with regional councils? Is that not another example of Labour policy that would cost billions of pounds and destroy jobs?

Mr. Clarke: It certainly would. But as my hon. Friend acknowledged in passing, it is only one of many policies to come from the Labour party which would undermine our control of public spending and would lead either to increased taxation—as the Liberals claim—or to increased borrowing, which would have a destructive effect on monetary policy. It is the very combination of sensible control of public spending, tight fiscal policy and a sensible and consistent monetary policy that has created the financial conditions that currently make us one of the wealthiest economies in the industrial world.

Mr. Darling: Can the Chancellor confirm that a typical householder will pay £800 a year more as a result of today's interest rate rises? Is not it true that, because of that, before too long, the Chancellor's political instincts will start to dominate consideration of changes in interest

rates and override the advice from the Governor of the Bank of England in order to placate Conservative Back Benchers?

Mr. Clarke: First, I do not believe that a half per cent. rise could produce an £800 a year difference, as the hon. Gentleman said. Secondly, as far as I am aware, no building society has announced that it is putting up its rates, although it might—I have no control over that. As I have already said, next year, taking account of inflation and taxation, the average family can expect an increase in its personal disposal income and average earnings should rise by about £5 a week. The overall living standards of this country are best protected by sensible economic policies. We can look forward to increasing prosperity and more secure employment for our people as long as we keep on the successful track that we mapped out last year.

EC Convergence Criteria

8. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the United Kingdom economy meets the EC convergence criteria; and what is the corresponding position with the performance of other EC partners.

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): Ireland and Luxembourg are currently the only countries which are deemed to meet the convergence criteria.

Mr. Duncan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he accept that there may well be a moment when various national economies are roughly in balance, but that later, they might not be? Does my hon. Friend accept that if, in the meantime, a single currency had been imposed, business risk and differing conditions would merely have shifted to areas other than the exchange rate? What, then, are the Government's divergence criteria?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend makes the good point that the temporary convergence of the economies of Europe would not provide good conditions for a single currency because subsequent divergence of economic performances by the national economies of Europe would create intolerable strains within that single currency area. That is one of the reasons why the Government believe that the timetable for monetary union laid down in the Maastricht treaty is unrealistic. That is also why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister ensured that the protocol to the treaty requires a subsequent Act of Parliament and the consent of the House before the United Kingdom moves in that direction.

Mr. Andrew Smith: In the light of the answer just given, and now that the Secretary of State for Employment speaks for the Government in Davos and elsewhere on such matters and the civil war in the Conservative party is so damaging to this country that the Chancellor chose to come to the Dispatch Box earlier and refer, not to the role that this country is playing in Europe, but to the role that this country "could" play in Europe—the Chancellor's word—have the Government ruled out the United Kingdom participating in economic and monetary union by the 1999 deadline in the Maastricht treaty—yes or no?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We play a full and constructive role in Europe, but that does not mean that we are required to sign up to a single currency now, as the Opposition parties would. We are quite content to leave that final decision to a future Parliament. I cannot help but observe that the Opposition parties which are most keen on a single currency are the most unlikely ever to deliver the economic criteria which would make that possible.

Manufacturing Industry (Investment)

9. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to meet the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss investment in manufacturing industry.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor regularly meets the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss the prospects for inflation and the current state of the economy, including developments in manufacturing investment.

Mr. Bellingham: Is the Chief Secretary aware that business investment is forecast to grow by a staggering 11 per cent. this year? Is not that a complete vindication of the Government's economic policies? Is he further aware that throughout the past year the Labour party have consistently attacked the Government about the lack of investment in manufacturing industry? In light of those figures, should not the shadow Chancellor eat his words, admit that he was wrong and congratulate the Government?

Mr. Aitken: I would certainly share my hon. Friend's relish in seeing the shadow Chancellor eat his words, but the meal would be so gargantuan that I do not think that it is a very likely outcome.

My hon. Friend is correct to refer to the fact that the Confederation of British Industry has forecast that manufacturing investment will rise by 11¼ per cent in 1995. The manufacturing sector in this country is buoyant and in a strong competitive position. In the three months to November, output was up by 5 per cent., productivity was up by more than 6 per cent. and unit wage costs were down by more than 1 per cent. That is a record of success of which the Government and the country can be proud.

Mr. Sheerman: If the manufacturing sector is to be truly successful in this country and win back home markets as opposed to export markets, is not it about time that the Chancellor and the Bank of England encouraged our financial institutions to think about long-term investment in British manufacturing capacity, rather than engaging in short-termism?

Mr. Aitken: I am sorry that, judging from the tone of the hon. Gentleman's question, he does not acknowledge the tremendous success story of British manufacturing industry in export markets. It has been faring extraordinarily well. His charge of "short-termism" is unfair. Anyone who has ever run a business will know that at this point in the economic cycle it is normal for companies to restructure their balance sheets and build up their profits. Investment is expected to improve at the turn of the cycle, and that is why the CBI is forecasting an 11 ¼ per cent. increase in manufacturing investment.

Mr. Forman: If British manufacturing industry is to retain its competitive edge in highly competitive world

markets, does my right hon. Friend agree that investment in human capital is every bit as important as investment in plant and equipment? Are the figures for investment in human capital as encouraging as the figures that he has given already?

Mr. Aitken: There is certainly continual investment in human capital in the form of the large training budgets allocated by the Government and private industry. I acknowledge my hon. Friend's point that human capital is important. However, I also draw his attention to the fact that unemployment is now falling by a rate of 2,000 per day, which shows that human capital is being well deployed in the continuing success story of British industry.

Endowment Mortgages

11. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he proposes to take to regulate the market for endowment mortgages.

Mr. Nelson: The sale of endowments is regulated under the Financial Services Act 1986. The new requirements for disclosure of charges and commission will help consumers decide whether endowment mortgages best suit their circumstances.

Mr. Denham: Is not it a fact that four out of five homebuyers in the 1980s chose endowment mortgages because they were told that their investments would not only pay off their mortgages but give them a large lump-sum payment? Does not the decline in the market now mean that many of those bonuses will disappear, and in some cases the investment will not even pay off people's mortgage? Is not that another example of the failure of regulation under the 1986 Act to protect people and their investments?

Mr. Nelson: No, it does not. Although it is true that far fewer people are entering into endowment mortgages than in the 1980s, they still remain an attractive and flexible means of mortgage repayment for many others. The Office of Fair Trading is currently examining repayment and endowment mortgages, and there has been significant tightening-up of the regulatory regime, to prevent mis-selling. Therein lies security for people for whom such mortgages are appropriate and who decide to enter into them.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that house purchase and the associated endowment mortgage are both long-term investments, and that many people who entered into such mortgages have lived to rejoice the day that they did, because they have achieved substantially better returns than inflation and other investment vehicles?

Mr. Nelson: My hon. Friend is right. Endowment mortgages may continue to be the best means of repaying mortgage obligations for many people. It is true that the lapse rate of many such products has been high, particularly in early years. It is consummately to be hoped that the new commission disclosure regime and the greater protection that has been introduced will in future give greater reassurance and encouragement to prospective investors.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Waterson: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the goal of a peaceful settlement in Ulster is worthy of the courage and patience that he has demonstrated? Will he continue to assure the people of the Province that any final decision will always rest with them?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I believe that there is a communal will not to be distracted from the goal of a peaceful, permanent and agreed settlement in Northern Ireland. I am happy to repeat the assurance that I have given in the past—the outcome of the political talks, after the main constitutional parties have met and agreed the outcome, will be put to people in a referendum before further action is taken. It is they who will decide, and nothing will be imposed on them.

Mr. Blair: On Northern Ireland, the Prime Minister has our full and continued support. On interest rates, however, perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will confirm as a matter of fact that after mortgage rises, the cutting of mortgage tax relief and the imposition of the new home insurance tax, the typical home owner will have been paying an extra £800 a year since last April.

The Prime Minister: As to the first part of the right hon. Gentleman's comments, I appreciate the support of the official Opposition and of other parties as far as Northern Ireland is concerned. It is a strength of the process that there is such widespread support for it.

Of course, I appreciate the impact of interest rates on home owners, but what would be most damaging to home owners would be for inflation to take off in the way that it did on past occasions. Interest rates are there to ensure that we have a recovery that curbs inflation. The policies repeatedly advocated by the shadow Chancellor would lead to inflation taking off—and the worst losers from that would be home owners. As a result of our policy on home ownership, the cost of mortgages has fallen dramatically from the peak in interest rates. The right hon. Gentleman is well aware that that is the case.

Mr. Blair: I notice that the right hon. Gentleman does not deny the figures. What type of recovery peaks when for millions it has barely even begun? The right hon. Gentleman and his Ministers will scrabble around in vain for the feel-good factor when mortgages, taxes and industry's costs are up, and when people feel more insecure precisely because they know that they are worse off under the Tories.

The Prime Minister: I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that he has a cheek to deny history in the way in which he just did. The level of interest rates that we have reached today is the level that was the lowest achieved at any stage under the previous Labour

Government in five years of Government. The average was far higher. They also had negative interest rates and were robbing savers of their savings by devaluing the currency. *[Interruption.]* It is because of that sort of irresponsibility that no one will ever again trust the Labour party to run the economy. It is determined to take the short-term option and to ignore the long-term interests.

Q2. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Couchman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the 40 per cent. of American and Japanese investment in Europe that comes to the United Kingdom is essentially dependent on our membership of the European Union? Does he further agree that if we cease to be at the heart of Europe those investors will rethink their European operations locations?

The Prime Minister: Yes. It depends on two points: both our membership of the European Union and the conditions of our membership of the European Union. Certainly, the fact that we are members has helped attract a great deal of investment into this country, but it would be lost if the conditions of our membership were to include the social chapter. *[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) does not agree, perhaps he could ask the chairman of Daimler-Benz. He had something to say about the social chapter. This is the right hon. Gentleman on the social chapter who thinks that it will cost jobs. He admitted it at one stage. Now he denies it.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister accept that, for as long as he puts the peace of Ireland first, he will command the overwhelming majority of the House and the country? Does he also agree that those who would put in jeopardy the peace of Ireland in order to pursue either narrow sectarian agendas or internal party power struggles, will meet the opposition of the House and earn the contempt of the country?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his support. There is nothing in the peace process that any party in this House need fear. There can be no slippery slope in any process that first requires the agreement of all the parties and then after the agreement of the parties has been obtained subsequently requires the agreement of the people of Northern Ireland themselves. I think that that is a categorical safeguard for all those who are concerned about the development of this process, and I hope that it will be accepted as such by people across ever strand of opinion in Northern Ireland. I hope that everyone will join actively in the search for a lasting settlement, a better future for the Province and a certainty that never again will we go back to the sort of atrocities and horrors that we have seen in Northern Ireland over much of the last quarter of a century.

Sir Michael Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, on Britain's role in Europe, much of the debate currently in the media is simply sensationalist and trivial? Does he further accept that the time is right for the House to have a full debate on that particular topic, so that we can steer the country in the direction in which we believe?

Mr. Blair: Which manifesto?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman asks which manifesto we will debate. He might well ask whether we will debate the policy on Europe of the Opposition Front Bench or the policy of Labour Members of the European Parliament. He might ask whether we will debate his policy or that of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East; the policy of the Labour Front Bench or the policy of the Labour Benches below the Gangway. There certainly is ample scope for a debate on Europe, but I say to my hon. Friend that we would need several days to debate the varied policies of the Labour party.

Q3. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Tipping: Will the Prime Minister ask his colleagues at the Department of Health why they have not yet resolved the case of Mr. Tony Ruffell, the former chief executive of the Nottinghamshire family health service authority? Following more changes in the health service, Mr. Ruffell has been sitting at home on a salary of £66,000 since last September. Should not there be more focus on patient care and less on bureaucracy?

The Prime Minister: Of course there should, and that is why we are repealing a whole tier of bureaucracy in the health service—I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support us—and why we oppose the devolution of so much health to unwanted regional authorities throughout the country which would add to bureaucracy. On the detailed point, of course I will ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to refer to the hon. Gentleman, but if he had really wanted an answer he would have contacted my right hon. Friend.

Mrs. Gorman: Has my right hon. Friend seen reports in the newspapers that half the Treasury building is to be rented out to the private sector? Will he confirm, for a suspicious person such as me, that that has nothing to do with Mr. Santer's call for the abolition of our national currency?

The Prime Minister: I can undoubtedly give my hon. Friend that assurance. On the substantive part of her question, I think that the action taken by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor sets an example across Whitehall and beyond.

Q4. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Chisholm: Given that Lord Wakeham privatised electricity and then moved to the board of Rothschild, which had carried through that privatisation, what will the Prime Minister be saying to him following today's news that Rothschild is to be the merchant banker for the sell-off of Railtrack? Will he be telling him to keep his

seat warm for the Secretary of State for Transport as a pay-off for this disastrous and deeply unpopular privatisation?

The Prime Minister: I have no doubt that, over time, it will be as effective and popular a privatisation as those that we have had in the past. I know that the hon. Gentleman would still prefer to be subsidising the old industries by £50 million a week rather than taking in £50 million a week to the Exchequer for the good use of the public at large. That undoubtedly is what would have happened had we not privatised those industries in the past. As to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, it does not merit a reply.

Q5. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Garnier: Will my right hon. Friend confirm his Government's commitment to preserving the front-line strength of our armed forces, and will he contrast that with the Opposition's only defence policy, which is to cut, cut and cut again?

The Prime Minister: We are committed to stability for the armed forces. I promised that at Camberley recently and I made it clear that the big upheavals in the armed forces are over. The level of front-line manpower has been set and we do not intend to reduce it. My hon. Friend can be reassured of that. Nor do we intend to adopt Labour's policy of scrapping nuclear defence, or a fresh defence review bringing uncertainty to each and every area of the defence services.

Mr. Home Robertson: What is the Prime Minister's reply to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross), who has said that the Prime Minister's Northern Ireland initiative is dead and buried? Would it not be an affront to all the soldiers and civilians who have been killed and buried during the past 25 years if that initiative were to be jeopardised as a result of a malicious partial leak of a draft document? Is the Prime Minister aware that all our constitutents are becoming weary of the ancient refrain of "Ulster says no", which is still being parroted by some Unionist members, but, thankfully, only some Unionist members.

The Prime Minister: I believe that there is a wish right across the House—including among hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland—to find a satisfactory way forward. I have not a shred of doubt about that. We have all watched with dismay the activities of the past 25 years; hon. Members who represent Ulster have lived through that in a way in which the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) and I have not.

I have no doubt, from my contact with hon. Members from Northern Ireland—in regard to points on which we agree, and points on which we do not agree—about their sincerity in seeking to bring to a conclusion the miseries of the past 25 years. What I would ask of all hon. Members is that they wait for the framework document; that they study that document in its entirety; that they examine what it will mean; that they recognise that it is there for consultation; that they then consult on it with other constitutional parties; and that if they agree, they then agree—as I do—to abide by the will of the majority of people in a referendum.

Mr. Skinner: To what end?

The Prime Minister: The end—the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) keeps shouting about it, as he did yesterday—is a very straightforward and simple one. It is to end the horrors of the past 25 years, and to ensure that never again are people killed month after month after month after month as they have been in the past 25 years. I would have hoped that even the hon. Member for Bolsover would support that enterprise.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us next week's business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 6 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the Agricultural Tenancies Bill [Lords].

TUESDAY 7 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day (4th allotted day). Until about 7 o'clock, there will be a debate entitled "The threat to schools from the 1995/96 financial settlement" followed by a debate on passenger services under rail privatisation on Opposition motions.

WEDNESDAY 8 FEBRUARY—Until 2.30 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Until 7 o'clock, motions on the Welsh revenue support grant reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Followed by motions on the Children (Northern Ireland) and the Children (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Orders.

THURSDAY 9 FEBRUARY—There will be a debate on the White Paper on the future of the BBC on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 10 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 13 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day (5th allotted day). There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Liberal Democrats. Subject to be announced.

I am not yet able to give even a provisional indication of business on Tuesday and Wednesday of that week, but it may help the House to know I expect the annual debate on the Royal Navy to take place on Thursday 16 February on a motion for the Adjournment.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that information. He will recall that last week I asked for a debate on the civil service, not least because of the Government's failure to make a statement in the House on their response to the White Paper on the code of conduct. In view of the evidence presented to Lord Nolan's committee this week about the rights and obligations of civil servants, is not the need for a debate on the code of conduct in particular now becoming more urgent? Can the Leader of the House give any further information on his plans?

In view of today's announcement of 600 job losses in the Inland Revenue, and the consequent revenue-raising implications of the loss of an estimated £1.5 billion to £2 billion that will be written off in uncollected tax, when will the House have a chance to debate the full implications of both developments?

One of the issues still to be determined following the change of Budget date and the Jopling report is the timing of full-scale economic debates. I am aware that the Procedure Committee is still considering the issue, but today interest rates have been raised for the third time in six months. That increase will leave mortgage payers reeling. What plans can the Leader of the House announce to ensure that we have a full-scale economic debate in Government time as soon as possible?

Finally, we shall shortly have the Second Reading of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes). Will the Leader of the House give an assurance that the Government will not try to block that Bill on Second Reading?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady's first two questions are linked—her further request for a debate on the civil service and her comments on the information about the Inland Revenue. While I would not for a moment accept the inferences that she drew from the latter, I acknowledge the continued pressure for a debate on civil service matters. I shall continue to bear that in mind, even though I am not in a position to say anything more definite today.

Similarly, I cannot give an immediate undertaking about a particular date or plan for a large-scale economic debate. However, I am aware that there has been a great deal of talk about that ever since the unified Budget was introduced. I shall, as always, look constructively at the matters that the hon. Lady has raised.

On the hon. Lady's point about the private Member's disability Bill, my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People will make the Government's position clear during the Second Reading debate. Of course, on Second Reading of the Government's Disability (Discrimination) Bill he made it clear that, for a number of reasons, he would be asking the House to support the Government's Bill, not that of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes).

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the legal opinion produced by Compassion in World Farming, which refutes the view expressed by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that it would be illegal for Britain to impose a ban on the export of live animals for slaughter?

As this is clearly an important issue and as it would be a shame if we could not debate the merits because the Department was hiding behind a legal smokescreen, will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate, with Law Officers present, so that we can clarify the legal position?

Mr. Newton: I am, of course, aware of the opinion to which my right hon. Friend referred, but he will be aware that in a substantial statement yesterday announcing action on a number of fronts to achieve our aim—to end the production of veal from calves in veal crates not in this country, where it has already been ended, but elsewhere—my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food clearly set out the careful and thorough legal advice that he has received. I note the request from my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), but I cannot give the immediate undertaking that he seeks.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the Leader of the House take note of early-day motion 527, which has now been amended and is endorsed by hon. Members on both sides of the House, which welcomes BRAKE, the campaign for safer lorries?

[*That this House, noting the terrifying cases of death and injury caused by defective heavy goods vehicles, welcomes the campaign BRAKES; and demands that the Secretary of State for Transport takes urgent action to protect the general public by extending the powers of traffic commissioners to allow the impounding of defective vehicles, by increasing the fines for companies running defective vehicles and by increasing the frequency and effectiveness of enforcement of the road traffic regulations.*]

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the senior traffic commissioner has already warned that if the 20 to 25 per cent. cut in the inspectorate goes ahead, the result will be appalling—not only because of the damage caused to property by heavy lorries, but because of the large number of people who are killed or seriously injured? Does he accept that there is all-party concern on this matter and that it deserves an early debate?

Mr. Newton: While I cannot immediately accede to the hon. Gentleman's request, I certainly acknowledge that anything connected with the safety of heavy vehicles and the possible consequences if they are defective is of concern to all hon. Members and to the public. My right hon. and hon. Friends will carefully consider any recommendations put forward by BRAKE.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): May we have a debate on the leak of information about the talks on Northern Ireland? Does my right hon. Friend agree that although it is certainly the role of newspapers to expose the truth, it is a matter of public concern that *The Times* may have allowed itself to be used for propaganda purposes in an attempt to wreck the talks that have been taking place?

Mr. Newton: The implicit comments in my right hon. Friend's remarks are perhaps all the more telling in that he is a former employee of *The Times* newspaper, going back far enough, and therefore I give great weight to his remarks. Beyond that, I can tell the House that the Cabinet Secretary is making inquiries into where the leak may have come from. Obviously, I do not want to comment further this afternoon.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Will the Leader of the House ask the Home Secretary to make a statement in the House on the consequences of implementing the 64 recommendations of Sir John Woodcock in relation to the Whitemoor prison escape? As those will cost £150 million, will the Home Secretary tell us whether cuts will fall on other sections of the Prison Service, on the victims of violent crime, or on Streetwatch?

Mr. Newton: I am sure that, just as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is considering carefully the recommendations of that report, and will consider carefully anything that emerges from the other reports that have been set in hand, he will bear in mind the balance of cost and advantage, and take account of the sort of points that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): If no time is available for a general economic debate next week, may we have a debate on the much narrower subject of the explosion of house and mortgage prices among socialist house owners because, on the basis of the question asked by the Leader of the Opposition alleging that £800 had been added to the average house owner's costs this year, he and his friends have mortgages of £160,000? That must be a considerable problem and burden to them.

Mr. Newton: My safest course is to hope that the Opposition Front Bench team will take note of my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): The Leader of the House will be aware that Bromley council has forbidden the parishioners of St. Edmund's church, Beckenham to park their cars outside the church after 9.30 on a Sunday, because they interfere with the trolleys that are going into Sainsbury's next door. As that is not in the spirit of Sunday trading as enunciated by the Home Secretary, will the Leader of the House arrange for the Home Secretary urgently to come along next week and assure us that churches will not be closed so that shops may stay open?

Mr. Newton: I have to admit that I was not aware of Bromley borough council's decision. I shall certainly bring the matter to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, who I am sure would not wish churches to be impeded in any way because of proper Sunday trading.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): May I support the call of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) for a debate on leaking and on all matters that appertain to it? Surely all hon. Members believe that leaking information on critical and confidential discussions in Government or local government is counter-productive to the operation of government. The House should debate this as a matter of seriousness and of urgency.

Mr. Newton: Personally I share my hon. Friend's view about the difficulties caused by leaks, of whatever kind. I am not sure that his view would be universally shared by all Opposition Members, but the extent to which it is shared in relation to the leak that has caused the difficulties in the past 48 hours has been clear and heartening.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House ensure that another statement is made next week on Northern Ireland and on the framework document, so that we may ascertain precisely the Tory Government's end game in relation to resolving the problem of Northern Ireland and to ensuring lasting peace? We are all in favour of that. What we are concerned about is that, when the talks began, a united Ireland was neither ruled in nor ruled out. It seems that, as a result of the statement yesterday, a united Ireland has been ruled out, so it is important that we know exactly what the Government plan is. Where is it leading to? Surely we should now be told exactly what are the proposals of the Government to achieve that lasting peace.

Mr. Newton: I do not for a moment accept the way in which the hon. Gentleman asks that question. He was apparently attempting to put a similar question to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister towards the end of the exchanges a few minutes ago. I thought that my right hon. Friend had made the position absolutely clear—the overwhelming majority of hon. Members thought so—and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not seek to cause any further difficulty in this matter.

Sir Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): May I return to the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler)? Does the Leader of the House agree that a free, responsible press is absolutely essential to the functioning of a democracy but that an irresponsible press can undermine democracy? May we have a debate on the general issue of the freedom and ethics of the press?

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what I said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N.

[Mr. Newton]

Fowler) and another colleague, but I shall bear my hon. Friend's request in mind. I think, and hope, that the points, which have now been made by three colleagues, will be firmly registered by those responsible for printing the story in question.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): Is the Leader of the House aware of a recent report published by the Single Homelessness in London organisation which revealed that there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of places for homeless people in direct access hostels in the capital and that there is growing pressure on the dwindling number of places that are available? Will he arrange for an early debate on the problems facing homeless people in London?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise an early debate, but I can point out that my right hon. and hon. Friends have in recent years devoted a great deal of effort, with considerable success, to reducing the problem of homelessness in London. I shall, of course, draw the hon. Gentleman's point to their attention.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of us on the Tory Benches would like an early debate on the constitutional and territorial integrity of the United Kingdom? As Unionists, we want to make it quite clear that we support the Union and apologise to no one for that.

Mr. Newton: I see no need for my hon. Friend to apologise for that. He will know that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear during the previous election campaign the importance that he attaches to the matter.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May we have a debate on parliamentary procedure and, in particular, ministerial replies to parliamentary questions? May I have an assurance that by the time that I give evidence to the Nolan committee next Thursday all the questions that I have tabled in recent weeks in relation to lobbying, especially those tabled to the Department of Trade, will have been answered in full?

Mr. Newton: Without knowing the detail of the very large number of questions that I know the hon. Gentleman has tabled and the difficulties involved in answering them I cannot give him such an undertaking off the cuff. I know from the effort that I have put into answering the questions that he has put to me that every effort is being made to answer them and I am sure that every effort will continue to be made.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent early debate on the implications for jobs and taxation levels of the reimposition of trade union control and the policy of public ownership which will exist in the Labour party despite the rewriting, recasting or scrapping of clause IV?

Mr. Skinner: If only it were true.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman's comment on my hon. Friend's important point was filled with nostalgia. I cannot promise an early debate, but it would certainly be an interesting issue to discuss.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): May we have a debate on junior doctors' hours? Does the Leader of the House agree that, in view of the fact that the wife of British Telecom boss Iain Vallance earns £19,000 a year for two days a week as chair of St. George's Healthcare Trust, while junior doctors work up to 100 hours a week and earn £12,000, her husband's recent remarks showed gross ignorance and crass insensitivity?

Mr. Newton: I could see considerable merit in a debate on junior doctors' hours, which would enable my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to set out strikingly the progress that the Government have made in reducing those hours.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on the welcome news that the provision of travel passes for London's pensioners and disabled people has been confirmed for the forthcoming year to cover bus, tube and rail travel for the first time? That debate would inform people in London and around the country that their passes are safe once more and will not be undermined by the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats?

Mr. Newton: That was another very good point from my hon. Friend. I draw his attention to the fact that the Department of Transport is answering questions on Monday during which he may usefully find a way in which to underline that point.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): As the Minister responsible for transport and road safety today announced a further swingeing cut of 20 per cent. in vehicle inspectorate staffing, and as the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) pointed out that BRAKE, the national campaign for safer lorries, was launched today, may we have a debate next week on the number of deaths on our roads due to ill-maintained lorries, including the 40,000 lorries estimated to travel on our roads without licences, which clearly concerns people more than the Government's dangerous rush to deregulation?

Mr. Newton: I have already made a couple of points relevant to the hon. Lady's question. First, the Department of Transport will answer questions on Monday and, secondly, returning to a point made by one of her hon. Friends earlier, of course the Government are ready to consider any recommendations made by BRAKE.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Has my right hon. Friend seen the text of recent speech by the Governor of the Bank of England on the economic impracticalities of a single currency? Is it not therefore important to have a debate on the single subject of the single currency, not least because I am aware that, while the Leader of the Opposition constantly dreams about a single currency, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the foreign affairs spokesman, talks about it being a nightmare? In that spirit, may we have a debate and a free vote?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will have heard the responses of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to a similar request in Prime Minister's Question Time, in which my right hon. Friend drew attention to the myriad of views among Labour Members on those matters. I shall not seek to add to that.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate on children's rights in Britain? He must be concerned, as we all are, by last week's report of the United Nations committee—

[*Laughter.*]—that Britain was continually violating the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. I am sure that he considers it serious, even if his hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) does not.

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise an early debate, but I am sure that the hon. Lady will be aware that, given the extensive improvements in the rights of children through the Children Act 1989, the suggestion that the Government are in any way neglectful of the rights and interests of children would, indeed, be far-fetched.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 527.

[*That this House, noting the terrifying cases of death and injury caused by defective heavy goods vehicles, welcomes the campaign BRAKES; and demands that the Secretary of State for Transport takes urgent action to protect the general public by extending the powers of traffic commissioners to allow the impounding of defective vehicles, by increasing the fines for companies running defective vehicles and by increasing the frequency and effectiveness of enforcement of the road traffic regulations.*]

I urge my right hon. Friend to find time for a debate on that important subject so that Transport Ministers may inform us of the efficiency that they expect of the Vehicle Inspectorate executive agency, and point out that the Government would find any cut in inspections totally inappropriate, as it is essential that they are continued? There is a difference between wanting an organisation to be more efficient and wanting it to cut services.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend makes an important point which I hope will be registered on the Opposition Benches. On the main issue that he raised, I cannot add to what I have now said twice: of course the Government would look very carefully at any recommendations in that area which seemed relevant and necessary.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Is the Leader of the House aware that, since the last general election, Scottish Members have been denied an opportunity to question the Minister with responsibility for health in Scotland because he is not a Member of this House? Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Minister to make a statement next week to the Scottish Grand Committee so that he can explain, for example, why Forth Valley health board continues obstinately to refuse my reasonable request to hold at least one public consultative meeting so that the public can voice their objections to the proposed closure of Lochgreen hospital?

Mr. Newton: If I may take the primary thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question as being a representation about a particular hospital matter in Scotland, I will of course draw that matter to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister in another place.

On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I will bring his request in relation to the Scottish Grand Committee to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. However, I must point out that nothing has changed—the same applied before the general election—in respect of the inability of this House to question Members of another place and the inability of Members in the other place to question Ministers in this House.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I remind my right hon. Friend that European Standing Committee B debated the data protection directive some weeks ago. Is he aware that, despite being condemned by both sides of the Committee as being ludicrously bureaucratic and over-regulatory, that directive is likely to be approved by the Council of Ministers, partly because the Foreign Office simply has not given the directive the priority that it deserves on the United Kingdom Government's negotiating list? Is it not time that we did something about the way in which we scrutinise European legislation so that it is more accountable to the House and time that we brought the legislative system in the European Community more under control?

Mr. Newton: I have to say to my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour that I do not accept his comments about the position of the Foreign Office. Beyond that, I would certainly wish to draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends who will be concerned with proceedings in the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On the issue of building confidence in the Irish peace process, will the Leader of the House answer a question of which I gave his office prior notice today? Do the Government intend to renew the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the orders linked to it?

Mr. Newton: Yes. The Act is due for renewal by 22 March and I expect to bring forward the necessary motion in due course.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate on regional government during the course of which we could express the resentment of the people of Kent in respect of the proposal that they would have to pay increased taxation to sustain a vast and interfering bureaucracy at Reading, which is the Labour party's proposal?

Mr. Newton: Once again, I find myself increasingly tempted by the requests for such a debate because the whole country, not simply the House, would like to hear from Opposition Front-Bench Members how they would justify the extra bureaucracy and the associated additional costs of some of the proposals that they appear to have in mind. However, the first thing to do would be to clarify just what it is that they have in mind.

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to make a statement and have a debate on the future of the Forth rail bridge? I have tried on numerous occasions to ask the Secretary of State—whom I gave notice that I was raising this matter today—to answer questions about the inquiry. I have visited it with my hon. Friends the Members for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). The Forth rail bridge is the property of the people of Scotland and they are worried about its maintenance,

[Mr. Eric Clarke]

safety and future. The matter should come before the House for discussion and I hope that the Leader of the House will give it the priority that it deserves.

Mr. Newton: I begin by reminding the hon. Gentleman of what I said either last week or the week before. Responsibility for the Forth rail bridge rests with Railtrack. However, as a result of representations made by hon. Members, my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for education and housing in Scotland has made inquiries with Railtrack about the maintenance of the bridge. My hon. Friend is here this afternoon to hear further representations, and I am grateful to him for that. He tells me that he will write to the hon. Members concerned shortly.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to a written reply which I received from the Maritime Safety Agency on Monday, which disclosed that it was unable to declare precisely what proportion of the British fishing fleet is in Spanish hands. The industry believes that up to 30 per cent. of the British fishing fleet is Spanish owned, but now—under European regulations—the Maritime Safety Agency is unable to supply that information. Does my right hon. Friend think that that would be a suitable topic to raise during the debate on the Royal Navy, given the responsibility that the Royal Navy will have in protecting the British fisheries fleet? Should there be a separate debate on the issue, or should the matter be raised during the debate on the Navy on Thursday week?

Mr. Newton: I see you, Madam Speaker, looking as puzzled as I am regarding the latter question, which is of course a question for you and not me, I am glad to say. No doubt you will offer what advice you can about what will be in order during the debate on the Royal Navy.

The right thing for me to do is to say to my hon. Friend that I will bring his point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who I am sure would wish to communicate with him about it.

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): In view of the pleas made by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and the statements made last week by the Secretary of State for Social Security that Ministers do not earn enough, could time be made for a debate on this matter, particularly as the Secretary of State for Social Security suggested that Back Benchers' salaries should be reduced to enable them to take jobs elsewhere? Does not that create an interesting constitutional matter in relation to the role and responsibilities of those of us who are honoured to be elected to serve in the House and to represent the rights of our constituents?

Mr. Newton: In recent times, the House has had a number of opportunities to debate the pay of hon. Members and Ministers, and I have no immediate expectation of providing a further opportunity.

Sir Michael Marshall (Arundel): My right hon. Friend will have heard the exchanges earlier with the Prime Minister in respect of the debate on Europe. Does he recognise that there is a specific question on the timing of when the House can express a view, given that the ministerial summit was proposed to take place originally at the end of January? Will he ensure that the House is given a full opportunity to express its views in proper time before that summit is confirmed?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will have heard my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply to him during questions. He will no doubt be aware of some comments which I made on the subject either last week or the week before. The working group which is working preparatorily to any summit of the kind that my hon. Friend has in mind will be carrying forward its work later this year. However, I will bear in mind the request for a debate, although I am not sure whether this is the appropriate time.

Ms Judith Church (Dagenham): Further to the important questions asked by my hon. Friends the Members for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell), will the Leader of the House make time for a debate next week on executive pay and pay relativity, in view of comments of the chairman of British Telecom, Sir Iain Vallance, to the Select Committee earlier this week that he would find the work of a junior hospital doctor more relaxing? That matter is raised in early-day motion 531.

[*That this House notes with disdain Sir Iain Vallance's comments to the Employment Committee on 31st January suggesting that a National Health Service junior doctor's job might be more relaxing than his current position as Chairman of BT; notes particularly the results of a recent survey which showed over 50 per cent. of junior doctors worked beyond the recommended 72 hours on pay as low as £12,500 a year; believes this compares dismally with Sir Iain's current £663,000 BT salary including a bonus of £185,000 and other benefits of £13,000; further notes that Sir Iain's non-executive directorship on the board of the Royal Bank of Scotland brings in a further £50,000 for one-and-a-half days a month, a weekly rate of £1,371; considers this vastly over inflated salary is neither fair or just reward but a breeding ground for resentment—particularly within his own company—especially if one compares the weekly pay of various grades in BT, notably a domestic cleaner on £162.99, an operator on £193.48, and a clerical assistant on £190.91; and reminds him that it is thanks to the efforts of the workforce, especially CWU members, that last year he pocketed a performance bonus of £185,000, an increase of 105 per cent., whilst the workforce settled for 2.9 per cent. and that since privatisation in 1984 CWU members wages have risen by 80 per cent. whilst his have rocketed by 687 per cent.*]

Mr. Newton: It appears that there is some kind of effort by Opposition Members to continue to raise this matter. I understand that and I do not complain about it, but having now commented on it twice, I will not try to have a third shot.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Would not it be futile to follow the right hon. Gentleman's advice on asking questions next week about reducing lorry dangers, as the Government have already told me that they have no intention of beefing up the MOT certificate procedure, which was the cause of the lorry problem in Sowerby Bridge where a tragedy occurred? The lorry involved had a forged certificate. Is not it true that the MOT certificate system is corrupt? A debate is essential so that we can expose the fact that the Department of Transport indirectly employs the lorries used in building the second Severn crossing and, of the 190 lorries involved, one third

were found to be unlicensed and illegal. We need nothing short of a debate to expose the cowboys who are killing 700 people every year.

Mr. Newton: I have already drawn attention to the attendance here next Monday of the Transport Secretary and his Ministers and have given two or three assurances that the Government will consider any recommendations made by BRAKE. I do not think that I can add to that answer now.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): Further to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke), will more serious aspects of the Forth railway bridge be taken into account, so that we can have a full debate? My hon. Friend and I visited the bridge, walked across it and took a boat in between the structures and it is clearly in a desperate state. It requires immediate attention and it requires more than my hon. Friend was offered in the reply. Will the right hon. Gentleman insist that the Scottish Office takes seriously the concerns that we are expressing about the structure? Given its importance—I understand that it is the eighth wonder of the world—perhaps he will treat the matter seriously and arrange time for a debate on the bridge.

Mr. Newton: I resist the suggestion that I have shown any sign of not taking the matter seriously. It is fair comment that the very fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton)—the Minister to whom I referred—has taken the trouble to be here, expecting that those matters would be raised, demonstrates the seriousness with which he takes the matter. He will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said and I am sure that he will consider it carefully.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I hope, Madam Speaker, that you noticed how dangerous it is up here, sitting between two beefy Scotsmen with flailing arms. May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 430?

[*That this House notes that the annual Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals which give details of the number of animal tests carried out in 1993 has still to be published; calls on the Home Office to take action to speed up the process of publishing annual statistics showing the number of animals used in scientific procedures; and demands that the statistics for 1993 are published immediately.*]

Will he join me in sending the condolences of the House to the family of Jill Phipps, the young woman who was tragically killed outside Coventry airport, protesting about the export of veal calves. The right hon. Gentleman obviously understands the intense revulsion for that export trade throughout the country. Notwithstanding statements by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, may we have a debate so that the temperature and feelings of the House can be heard, not only in Government, but in Brussels?

Mr. Newton: The first thing that I want to say, which I am sure that the House would want, is that we all share the hon. Gentleman's desire to send sympathy to the family of the woman killed at Coventry airport. On the rest of his question, the West Midlands police force is investigating the matter, under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority, and it is right, certainly for me from the Front Bench, to await the outcome of that process.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Earlier this month, the Secretary of State for the Environment launched a policy document, "Air Quality—Meeting the Challenge", which proposed a number of policies, including those designed to increase the use of public transport and reduce car usage. Is the Leader of the House aware that, on Monday, British Rail commuters face fare increases that are massively in excess of inflation? Londoners, who pay the highest commuter fares in western Europe, are especially hard hit. Will he find time next week for both Secretaries of State to come to the House to explain the apparent conflict in Government policy?

Mr. Newton: I have adverted several times to the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will be here to answer questions on Monday. The hon. Gentleman may have an opportunity to put that question to him then. However, it has been made clear by both my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that the aim of the Government's policy for the railways is to make them more attractive for people to use and, therefore, help stem the relentless decline in the use of the railways which has been taking place for more than a generation.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The Leader of the House has undoubtedly seen early-day motion 466 in support of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.

[*That this House notes that the second reading of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill on Friday 10th February 1995 is an historic opportunity to introduce full citizenship rights for the United Kingdom's 6.5 million people with disabilities; further notes that the Bill has the sponsorship of Right honourable and honourable Members from nine political groups in the House; recognises the support the Bill also has from the Rights Now Consortium, the TUC and many other groups and individuals; welcomes the Bill's inclusion of a Disability Rights Commission so that comprehensive anti-discrimination provisions can be activated and advanced on the same basis as those designed to tackle discrimination on the grounds of gender and race; and further welcomes the Bill's measures aimed at increasing accessibility to voting and to polling stations as the vote is the fundamental building block for the operation of democracy and civil rights.*]

That Bill is now supported by hon. Members from all 10 political groups in the House, includ from the two Conservative parties. Will the Minister clarify the answer that he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), in which he said that the Government would support its own Bill, the Disability (Discrimination) Bill? Does that mean that they will oppose the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill on 10 February?

Mr. Newton: I thought that I had made the position clear by referring to what my hon. Friend the Minister for Disabled People said on Second Reading of the Government's Disability (Discrimination) Bill on 24

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January. I may not have made it clear that I was quoting his words from column 153 of *Hansard*, to which I refer the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to make a statement on the shocking revelations made on Scottish Television yesterday evening that thousands of British families who were formerly living in Northern Ireland have been driven into exile by kangaroo courts of paramilitary organisations during the period of the troubles? Why have none of the organisations, such as Families Against Intimidation and Terror, a non-sectarian group representing those who have been oppressed, been asked to be involved in discussions on the future of Northern Ireland? They must be involved if the real people of Northern Ireland, not the paramilitaries, are to decide how that structure will come about and people can return from exile to their homes.

Mr. Newton: I did not see the interview to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but I make the obvious point that avoiding such a position is among the objectives of the Government's efforts to ensure future peace in Northern Ireland. I imagine—obviously, I cannot know—that many of those involved in the organisations to which he refers are, in some way, members of political parties in Northern Ireland, and they clearly have a part in the process.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): In the light of the prison fiascos at Whitemoor and Parkhurst, may we have an urgent ministerial statement on the report of Judge Tumim into the privatised prison at Blakenhurst, which showed inefficient management, insufficient and untrained staff, and lack of control of prisoners? Does he agree that privatised prisons are not only an expensive folly but a dangerous folly?

Mr. Newton: I shall simply say that the difficulties experienced at Blakenhurst are of the kind often experienced when a completely new prison is opened, whatever the arrangements under which it is opened. I understand that those difficulties have now been resolved. The hon. Gentleman did not refer, as I would, to the fact that the chief inspector praised the quality, high motivation and enthusiasm of the Blakenhurst staff.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I thank you, Madam Speaker, for leaving me until last.

Madam Speaker: Of course, I recognise that, but Front-Benchers are always left until the last, in my mind.

Mr. Foulkes: But the exercise is particularly welcome as well.

On a more serious matter, may I assure the Leader of the House that Scottish Members of the United Kingdom Parliament would welcome more time to debate issues concerning London, particularly Westminster city council. May we have a debate to discuss not only the gerrymandering but the recent revelation, surprisingly—or perhaps not so surprisingly—in the *Daily Telegraph*, that £30 million was wasted on housing repairs? That brings disgrace not just to Westminster, but, as Parliament is situated within that London borough, to the whole country. Should not we be given time to debate that matter fully and have an explanation from Ministers?

Mr. Newton: After that, I do not think that I can say that I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for calling the hon. Gentleman. However, I shall bring his representations to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Points of Order

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I had evidently misunderstood the reply of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to my request for a debate. We should have an opportunity in the House of debating the issue of whether there was a legal impediment on banning the export of live animals for slaughter. My right hon. Friend referred to a statement by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food yesterday. I searched in vain in *Hansard*, looking through written answers and everything else, but could find no trace of a statement. I understand that the statement was made outside the House. May I ask you, Madam Speaker, to confirm that a statement outside the House is no substitute for a debate within it?

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making that point. I often, from this very Chair, say that any statements that are made should first be made in the House and to hon. Members. I am glad to have the support of the right hon. Gentleman in that. I see that the Leader of the House wants to make a further point and, although I will not allow a debate on the subject, I think it only right to allow the Leader of the House to answer.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) knows that I would always want to consider carefully such a point when it is made by him. If I misled him in any way—and certainly if I implied that there had been a statement in the House—I give him an unqualified apology. I think that it is well known that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food yesterday set out fairly fully the legal advice that he had received. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing would want to acknowledge that.

Madam Speaker: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will table a parliamentary question, so that we may all know the legal advice that has been received.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I share the concern about statements made outside, rather than inside, the House—we have suffered from that for years.

I seek some guidance. I understood that it was the tradition in the House that, if an issue affecting a region was raised, a representative of that region would be called. I had Question 10 on today's Order Paper and began to rise in my place when Northern Ireland was mentioned in the first question. I was not called although four other right hon. and hon. Members were called and were able to speak about Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) even mentioned my colleague, the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross)—I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was advised in advance about the reference. Significantly, the hon. Member for Londonderry, East also failed to catch your eye, Madam Speaker, on Tuesday last. My I have some guidance on the matter?

Madam Speaker: Yes, of course. It is almost impossible for the Chair to call an hon. Member simply because his or her region, town or constituency has been mentioned in Question Time. Of course, during a debate, I would hope that hon. Members would give way and allow an intervention. But if the occupant of the Chair were always to allow such an intervention during Question Time, I am afraid that we would seldom make any progress through the Order Paper. Hon. Members can see the layout of today's Prime Minister's Questions on the Order Paper. I saw the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) stand up, but he had tabled question 10 on the Order Paper and I could not call him in advance of that question.

As for matters yesterday, if the hon. Gentleman looks at *Hansard* he will see that, not only were a good cross-section of English, Scottish and Welsh Members called, but all the Northern Ireland parties were called to question the Secretary of State. I kept the Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box for almost an hour to ensure that a cross-section of the House questioned him properly.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance about the conduct of Business Questions. Is it not correct that some time ago you ruled that there should be no duplication of questions during Business Questions? This afternoon there were four questions on precisely the same subject—lorry safety and the BRAKE campaign. There were three orchestrated questions relating to Iain Vallance and two questions relating to the Forth bridge.

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for bringing that to the attention of the House. We do not want repetition because it means that Business Questions go on for much longer than necessary. At the same time, if there are two or three questions on the same subject it indicates to the Leader of the House and to the Government the strong feeling that there is in the House about a certain matter.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance. During Prime Minister's Question Time misinformation was given to the House about the appointment of Rothschilds by the Department of Transport. In fact, Rothschilds have been and remain advisers to Railtrack, and no new appointment has been made. What remedy is available to hon. Members to set the record straight about that matter?

Madam Speaker: I think that hon. Members might pay particular attention to the Order Paper and put down either an early-day motion or a parliamentary question to the appropriate Department so that the matter may be corrected, if indeed it needs correcting.

BILLS PRESENTED

Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) (Northern Ireland)

Rev. Ian Paisley, supported by Rev. William McCrea and Mr. Peter Robinson, presented a Bill to prohibit, in Northern Ireland, discrimination against disabled people on the ground of their disability; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 17 March 1995, and to be printed. [Bill 43.]

Orders of the Day

Social Security

4.20 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. William Hague): I beg to move,

That the draft Social Security (Incapacity Benefit) (Transitional) Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss motion No. 2:

That the draft Social Security (Incapacity for Work) (General) Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

The regulations provide for the introduction of the new incapacity benefit, which will replace sickness benefit and invalidity benefit from 13 April 1995. The Social Security (Incapacity for Work) (General) Regulations describe the own occupation test and the new all work test of incapacity and how they will be applied. The transitional regulations describe the arrangements for preventing cash losses when current invalidity benefit and sickness benefit recipients transfer to incapacity benefit.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way so early in his speech; he is very patient. Is he aware that no fewer than 160,000 people in Wales are dependent on invalidity benefit, largely as a result of the old industrial structures and the industrial diseases that went with them? Will he give a categorical assurance that none of them will be out of pocket as a result of the changes? If he cannot do so, will he say what proportion of those 160,000 people will lose out?

Mr. Hague: I can certainly give an undertaking that there will be no cash losses at the point of change; the Government have explained that on many occasions and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is familiar with our undertaking.

People may be tested subsequently under the all work test—although about half the current recipients will be exempt from the test—who will not receive incapacity benefit in future because they are found to be capable of work, just as people are discovered to be no longer eligible for invalidity benefit after a certain period. They will be entitled to receive other benefits, and I shall describe some of the arrangements that will be made. I assure the hon. Gentleman that there will be no cash losers at the point of change.

The hon. Gentleman asked how many existing recipients may not receive incapacity benefit in future because of the operation of the new test. I have published a figure of 220,000 for the whole country for the first two years of operation. I am not sure whether figures are available specifically for Wales, but if they are I will give them before the end of the debate.

It is important to remind the House of the background to the changes. Invalidity benefit is the fastest growing contributory benefit. The number of people in receipt of it has doubled in the past decade from 740,000 in 1983 to 1.6 million in 1993, and expenditure has more than doubled in real terms in the past 10 years from £3.1 billion to £7 billion in 1993-94. That dramatic growth has occurred at a time when the nation as a whole is becoming healthier. There is widespread concern that invalidity benefit now goes to people for whom it was never intended originally. No responsible Government could allow that growth to continue unattended. If we did so, spending could increase to up to £10 billion by the end of the century. That is why the provision of invalidity benefit was the first area that we examined in our long-term review of the social security system.

The Social Security (Incapacity For Work) Act 1994 introduced the Government's reforms to incapacity benefit provision. It provides the structure and powers for creating a more coherent, affordable and sustainable system of incapacity provision, with better targeting of benefits on those who are genuinely incapable of work because of their medical condition.

The tests of incapacity for work set out in the draft Incapacity For Work (General) Regulations 1995 will be used to determine entitlement to incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance and the disability premium in the income-related benefits, where paid on the grounds of incapacity.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): As the transition, the new test and the 32-page application form for new claimants will require considerable staff training and patient explanations to applicants, will the Minister give a categorical assurance that there will be no repeat of the shambles that accompanied the introduction of the disability living allowance?

Mr. Hague: The Department recognises the great difficulties that accompanied the introduction of DLA, from which a good many lessons were learnt. Much of the expertise gained in resolving those difficulties is being put to use in preparing for incapacity benefit. Much time and effort is being devoted to the matter, and the hon. Gentleman will find that the administrative and other procedures will work efficiently and properly, as the House intended. I will spend a good deal of my time ensuring that they do.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I understand that 140,000 appeals are expected in the next few months. Will the same speed and efficiency that the Minister claims for adjudication and testing apply to the appeals procedure?

Mr. Hague: Appeals will be largely in the hands of the independent tribunal service. It is well aware that there is likely to be a considerable increase in appeals and is preparing for that eventuality. I hope and intend that appeals will be considered expeditiously.

In most cases, for the first 28 weeks of sickness a person's capacity will be judged, as now, against their ability to do their own job. After 28 weeks, the new all work test will apply. Consideration of all work is not new. In the current system, after a reasonable period, capacity is assessed against a wider range of work. The new all work test is the key to our reforms. Our main objectives are to focus provision on those who are genuinely unfit for work, to provide a simpler, fairer and more objective assessment of incapacity and to meet the expressed concerns about the current role of general practitioners as gatekeepers to the new benefit.

The all work test is the culmination of an extensive programme of development work undertaken over nearly two years. After initial in-house studies using nearly 1,000 case studies and open consultation with a wide range of

interested parties, a panel of 80 experts was convened to assist the development work. The group consisted of experts in fields relevant to incapacity for work—practitioners from various disciplines in medicine and occupational health, academics specialising in disability issues and members of disability organisations. The panel took part in a series of exercises to help establish an accurate means of measuring functional impairment and gauging its effect on capacity for work.

The data that emerged from the panel's work were used to devise a method of assessment that was tested in two evaluation exercises involving nearly 900 existing invalidity benefit claimants. The sample of volunteer claimants used was broadly representative of the normal flow of cases called for medical examinations. The Government are most grateful to the members of the expert panel for their help in designing the detail of the all work test. All the data that they produced were taken into account in the final proposals.

In developing the mental health assessment in the new all work test, we were advised by and have carefully taken into account the views of representatives of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. We are grateful for that help and intend to keep in touch with the Royal College of Psychiatrists about the new test when it is implemented.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I am interested to hear that the Government set up a panel of experts to look at changing the system of benefits, and that they are investigating people who, it was suggested, were not sick. Is the Minister aware that there are two different classes in our society? Some people have to work for a living and do not get paid if they do not attend. Many of them finish up on invalidity benefit when they are sick. Can the Minister tell me how many of the experts who sat on that panel ascertaining whether a working man or woman was fit or unfit for work were those who had to work for a living, and whom do not get paid if they do not attend? If a Member of Parliament does not come to work, he or she still gets paid. If a miner does not go, he does not get paid. I find it more than odd. It is hypocritical that the Government chose that group of people, as probably none of them has experienced the problem of having to work hard, suffer losses and claim invalidity benefit. Yet they are the very people who decide what kind of benefits are given to those wealth creators. How many?

Mr. Hague: Let me clarify something about the panel. The purpose of the panel was not to decide who was sick or incapable of work but to help in drawing up a test that would be fair and objective and to take into account the expertise of people on that panel. Many members of the panel would resent the suggestion that they have never had to work hard—

Mr. Skinner: I did not say that.

Mr. Hague: At one point I think that the hon. Gentleman said that.

The hon. Gentleman asked a specific question about the way in which members of the panel were paid for their regular employment. I am not familiar with the way in which each member was paid, but if information is available on that I shall certainly let the hon. Gentleman have it. I am sure that he will be extremely interested in it.

I am trying to show that the development of the new test has been an open process. We have consulted widely. We have involved outside experts—

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hague: I shall give way once more, but then I must make some progress with my speech.

Dr. Bray: The consultation and treatment of the mentally ill has been continuing, as the Minister says, and I hope that it will continue. Is he satisfied that the manuscript addition of a mental illness in regulation 10 is the only amendment required to cover the ground that he has been discussing with the Royal College of Psychiatry, or are there other amendments on, for example, the disqualification for misconduct and so on, which seem to overlap with other legislation on the treatment of the mentally ill?

Mr. Hague: I believe that the insertion of severe mental illness in that regulation is the only change necessary, but no doubt if the hon. Gentleman manages to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he may have other changes to advocate, and I will listen carefully to what he has to say.

The all work test will assess the effect of a person's medical condition on his or her ability to carry out work-related functions. It will focus on medical factors alone—the only relevant consideration of medical incapacity for work. Non-medical activities, such as education, skills and experience, may affect the ability to get a job, but they are not a cause of medical incapacity. It is the medical condition that distinguishes the long-term sick from the unemployed. To include non-medical factors in the assessment would reintroduce the problems of the current system. It would mean that incapacity benefit would be paid to people because they are unemployed rather than incapable of work. We have protected the position of the most seriously ill and disabled by making them exempt from the test. We have consulted leading disability organisations on the list of exemptions. Again, I am most grateful for the help that we have received.

We have recognised the particular problems caused by mental illness by designing special procedures for claimants with a mental health problem. Those with a severe diagnosis will be exempt. Those with a mild to moderate problem will be interviewed by a Benefits Agency medical services doctor who will have received special training in this area. There are arrangements to ensure that the claimant's own doctors will be able to give full relevant information on each case, including, if relevant, the possible effects of being found fit for work. We have also made provision for the small number of conditions where incapacity cannot be measured functionally. The arrangement here will cover such things as people awaiting major surgery or who could be suffering from a previously undiagnosed condition or who have an uncontrolled or uncontrollable condition.

In most cases, claimants will be able to give their own assessment of the effects of their medical condition in a questionnaire. Their doctors will be asked to provide a statement of diagnosis and of the principal disabling effects of the condition. If necessary, we will ask doctors to provide further information. I want to make it quite clear that any information given by claimants' own

[Mr. Hague]

doctors will be taken fully into account in the assessment, but we will no longer ask the GP for an opinion on capacity for all work. That change meets the concerns that GPs and others have expressed about their current gatekeeper role.

The majority of claimants will be asked to attend an examination by a Benefits Agency medical services doctor, who will have been fully trained for his crucial role in the assessment. An independent adjudication officer will weigh all the evidence—from the claimant, his doctor and the Benefits Agency doctor—and will apply the all work test to find out if the claimant is capable of work.

We will ensure that there are effective sanctions for those customers who do not comply with the requirement to return the questionnaire for the all work test or to attend a medical examination, if this is necessary. If they fail without good cause to do either, they will be treated as capable of work. There will be six weeks to return the questionnaire and at least seven days' notice of an examination unless they agree to a shorter period of notice. However, we will ensure also that no one will be disallowed where good cause exists.

We recognise that sick and disabled people may have difficulty in complying because of their condition. Good cause is not defined in legislation, but existing case law explains that consideration should include any facts that probably would have caused a reasonable person to act as the claimant did—for example, the claimant's knowledge of the social security system and information that the claimant has received or could have obtained.

In addition, regulation 9 of the general regulations introduces a requirement, when considering good cause, to include whether the person was outside Great Britain at the relevant time, the person's state of health and the nature of their disability.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The Minister explained that many of our unemployed constituents have managed to get themselves on to this benefit. Many of us know that before the 1987 election there was an enormous drive in employment offices to get people off unemployment benefit and on to this benefit so that the electorate could see falling unemployment rolls before they went to the polls. The advantage of our constituents drawing this benefit is that not only is it slightly higher than they would otherwise get, but it allows their wives to work and therefore to raise family income.

The Minister has told us of the savings that he expects to make, largely as a result of kicking unemployed people off this benefit roll. Did he ask his Department to undertake a similar calculation of what would be the fall in the number of beneficiaries if the Government managed to reduce unemployment to its level in 1979 when they took office?

Mr. Hague: As we have seen during recent months, the Government are making huge progress in reducing unemployment. In the past year, an additional 220,000 people have taken up full-time work. Employment in almost all or all regions is substantially improving.

That does not get us away from the fact that invalidity benefit and incapacity benefit, as it is to be from April, is intended for people who are medically incapable of work. The reforms are designed to reassert that and to assure that for the future. The Government believe that that is what we have to do if the budget for incapacity benefit is not to run out of control and if taxpayers are to be assured that the money is being properly used.

Mr. Frank Field: The Minister has not answered my question. We accept the line that he is putting to us, but might he not achieve his objective of a fall in the number of claimants if unemployment fell substantially—back to the level of 1979, when the Tories took office?

Mr. Hague: If we agree, as I think we do, that some people are now receiving invalidity benefit because they are unemployed rather than because they are medically incapable of work, an improvement in employment—particularly one on the scale of the current improvement—would have an impact on the number of recipients of invalidity benefit as it is currently designed. We are discussing a long-term reform of the system, however, and we cannot anticipate every future movement in the economic cycle. We may be entering a period of much better prospects in the employment market, which will help the overall budget, but we cannot be sure that economic developments occurring several years later would not produce the contrary effect. We cannot base the future of the benefit on the calculations that the hon. Gentleman encourages me to make.

The detail of the test is laid out in part III of the general regulations, and was also set out in a report entitled "The Medical Assessment for Incapacity Benefit", which we published in September. I do not propose to dwell on the detail of all the provisions in the regulations, which are explained in the guide "Notes on Regulations". The regulations describe the circumstances in which the two tests will apply, the information and evidence required in connection with the test and the structure and scoring system. There are, however, a number of provisions that I wish to cover in some detail.

Part II of the regulations introduces the exemptions from the test for claimants who are terminally ill or suffering from one of a specified list of serious conditions. The exemptions ensure that the most severely disabled—in whose cases incapacity for work can never be in doubt—will not be subject to the test. I make it clear that the exemptions cover people suffering from severe mental illness. It was always our intention to exempt them, but because of the varying nature of some of the conditions we originally intended to achieve that procedurally. We have now decided to put the matter beyond doubt, and to include severe mental illness in the list of exemptions. That is why we withdrew the original draft of the regulations and submitted new ones early this week.

Mr. Miller: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hague: I have already given way generously, and many hon. Members wish to speak. I may give way before the end of my speech, but I must make some progress; otherwise I shall take up a lot of time. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) is anxious to speak.

Part II also makes provision for claimants to retain incapacity benefit while doing a limited amount of therapeutic work on doctor's advice, doing voluntary work or serving as a member of a disability appeal tribunal or the Disability Allowance Advisory Board. We have made arrangements to ensure that the hours limit

does not apply to certain people undertaking therapeutic work, and that when the limit does apply it can be averaged over a number of weeks. I know that those arrangements have been welcomed by hon. Members and by many people outside the House who have worked actively for the introduction of such provisions. With the associated improvements in disability working allowance, they demonstrate our desire to provide help for those who want to try to return to work.

Much concern has been expressed, in the House and elsewhere, about the potential for a "black hole" or "twilight zone", as some have called it, between incapacity benefits and benefits for the unemployed. I wish to reassure the House on that. The threshold for benefit in the new all work test is not the point at which a person can do no work at all; it is the point at which a person should not be expected to work. We all know of people who are blind or use a wheelchair, but who are perfectly capable of, and do, full-time work. We do not think that those people should be required to register for work if they need to claim social security benefits. We think it important, however, that disabled people should have a choice: there will be special arrangements to ensure that people who are judged incapable of work by the test, but who choose to register as unemployed, can be deemed capable.

Let me reassure the House that a decision on capacity will apply across the social security system. If a person is judged capable by the new test and then chooses to register as unemployed, the adjudication officer in the Employment Service cannot then decide that that person is not capable of work. A claimant must, of course, be available for and actively seeking work to qualify for unemployment benefits. That does not mean that claimants must be able to do every possible type of job; minor impairments that restrict ability will be recognised within the system and accepted by the adjudication officer. Everyone looking for work will be offered an initial in-depth interview with an Employment Service client adviser. A person who had some difficulty walking, for example, would not be expected to take a job as a postman.

Mr. Miller: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hague: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman once more.

Mr. Miller: I am grateful to the Minister. Before he leaves the subject of this complicated series of procedures, may I take him back to the question of definitions? What is the definition of severe mental illness? Would, for example, a schizophrenic who could not get a job because employers—regrettably—treat such people as unemployable be considered to have passed the test? How are such people expected to find their way through the reams of regulations that the Minister has described?

Mr. Hague: The severity of such conditions can differ greatly from case to case, but those concerned must be diagnosed as suffering from a severe mental illness. I do not think that we shall encounter any difficulties, because those people will be exempted from many of the arrangements; and procedures have been carefully set out for people who suffer from mental illnesses but do not fall into that category, so that they are properly and sympathetically assessed.

Our overriding aim is to ensure that no one on sickness or invalidity benefit will experience a reduction in benefit at the point of change. When incapacity benefit is introduced on 13 April, existing sickness and invalidity benefit claimants will be transferred to short-term and long-term incapacity benefit respectively. Claimants will retain entitlements to allowances paid under the sickness benefit and invalidity benefit schemes. For those who were in receipt of invalidity benefit, the benefit will continue to be upgraded annually, with the exception of the earnings-related additional pension, which will be frozen. In addition, the incapacity benefit paid to those who were in receipt of invalidity benefit will not be subject to income tax.

The regulations provide for the entitlements of nearly 2 million people. They are necessarily very technical and complex, to ensure that there are no cash losers when incapacity benefit is introduced. Part VI of the regulations contains provisions for the new all work test of incapacity for work to be applied to existing cases.

The process will take place over a period of two to three years. It would not be right to exempt all existing cases from the test when there is widespread concern that some people are capable of work and should not be receiving invalidity benefit. Those people are in the minority, and the new test will identify such cases fairly.

The new arrangements may create anxiety among people currently on invalidity benefit who are genuinely unable to work because of their medical condition. Some have been on the benefit for many years. Let me reassure them. Regulation 31 introduces an exemption from the test for existing claimants continuously in receipt of invalidity benefit since 1 December 1993—the date on which the changes were announced—and aged 58 or over on the day on which the new benefit comes into force. That is in addition to the exemptions from the test that are set out in the general regulations, to which I have already referred.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hague: I will give way for the last time.

Mr. Duncan: Does not the introduction of the all work test allow my hon. Friend to give some reassurance to general practitioners who, in the past, were the unfortunate judges of whether their patients should be eligible for benefit? The all work test is a great improvement on the previous system.

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The current test has placed GPs in an invidious position on many occasions; under the new system, their views and information will still be taken very much into account, but they will no longer be in that difficult position.

I was referring to the exemptions from the test set out in the regulations. The exemption in regulation 31 of the transitional regulations reflects our recognition that loss of benefit would inevitably cause greater difficulties for people who are near to pension age. In choosing the age of 58, however, we also had to take account of the growth in the number of people aged over 50 who were receiving invalidity benefit, and the evidence that the benefit was being paid to some who were not medically incapable of work.

[Mr. Hague]

Nearly 50 per cent. of existing claimants will not be subject to the new test. Of those who do take it, we believe that the majority will satisfy it. We shall ensure that no one will be found capable of work by the new test without first having had, or been offered, a medical examination by a Benefits Agency medical services doctor. There will be, of course, a right of appeal against any decision to disallow benefit after the application of the new test. In any appeal where the all work test is in question, the social security appeal tribunal will be assisted by an independent medical assessor. Those facts should help to reassure people who are currently on invalidity benefit and who are genuinely incapable of work.

The reforms that we have introduced represent a major change to the way in which we make provision for people who are incapable of work. Implementing such a change is a major undertaking involving complex computer programmes, thousands of civil servants and hundreds of departmental doctors. However, it also involves about 2 million of our fellow citizens.

I wish to emphasise the Government's continuing commitment to a contributory, income-replacement benefit, paid to those who are unable to work because of sickness or disability. It is only by focusing resources on those people who need them most that we can provide an affordable system that will be sustainable into the next century. The regulations before us today would ensure that that aim and commitment can be met and I commend them to the House.

4.51 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): The Opposition social security ranks often labour apparently in vain. Therefore, I shall allow myself a small indulgence and congratulate my hon. Friends who serve on the Committee considering the Jobseekers Bill who today achieved a concession from the Government. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) moved an amendment to ensure that carers in receipt of invalid care allowance will get credits so that when they cease caring they will almost certainly be entitled to the—admittedly rather reduced—jobseeker's allowance. Carer groups have been pressing for that concession for a long time, so I congratulate my colleagues on the Committee on their success.

The regulations deal with an area of real difficulty. I am not one of those who would pretend that it is a simple matter to strike the right balance. It is clear that a great deal of thought has gone into the matter, not just in the Department—although it has reached some mistaken conclusions—but among the many groups of people who have been involved in the consultations and debates.

I hope that the Minister will not make the mistake of assuming that because people of genuine expertise and good will have had the staying power to remain in the panel system that reviews these matters—despite the fact that they might have fundamental disagreements with it—in the hope that they might at least wring some improvements out of the process, that in some way means that they endorse the principle of what we are discussing. I hope that the Minister understands and accepts that point.

One of the problems with regulations is that they come on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. All that we can do tonight is to state our concerns during the debate and underline the strength of them in the Lobbies. In doing so, we are reflecting a good deal of unhappiness and the wide sweep of informed opinion.

The simple starting point—I speak only for myself—is the belief that the change has been designed purely to exclude from benefit people who have previously enjoyed entitlement to it. In some cases, there will be victims who should not be victims. The casualty list will be lengthy and the wrong people will be on it. If we look objectively, there can be no argument about that.

The Minister and I are at one on some of the figures; it is always satisfying to be able to quote his figures for the scale of the problem. Over the next two years some 220,000 people currently receiving invalidity benefit will lose entitlement because they do not measure up to the new incapacity test. Some 55,000 new claimants over the same period will fail the test, although they probably would have been entitled to invalidity benefit under the present regulations.

I say genuinely to the Minister that I am not trying to raise unnecessary fears, but there is no doubt that there is a great deal of anxiety about this matter. Although I get many letters to which I think I can honestly respond that I believe it unlikely that the right to benefit is threatened, there are many cases where I cannot do that. I know from personal experience that the issue is causing a great deal of worry and anxiety.

I recognise that the exemptions are important. The last figure I was given for that was 850,000. I accept that that represents a substantial and important group of people. A large number of people aged over 58 in receipt of invalidity benefit on 1 December 1993—on an almost continuous, if not continuous, basis—will be relieved of a great deal of worry. There are other specialist groups and I welcome their inclusion, but the figures that I have just quoted will not entirely relieve public anxiety and concern.

Mr. Rowlands: If some of the guesstimates are right, the problems could be much larger than we already fear. One local assessment is that only about one third of those currently in receipt of invalidity benefit are aged 58 and over. I find difficulty in reconciling that figure with the claim that about half the recipients of invalidity benefit will be excluded from the process.

Mr. Dewar: There is a great deal of room for debate, discussion and local variation in the process. We will not know all the results until the system shakes down and we can call on what I fear will be bitter experience. My hon. Friend represents a south Wales constituency and I suspect that there are very specific problems in that area. One hon. Member earlier quoted the figure of 160,000 people on invalidity benefit; figures I have been given suggest the number to be nearer 175,000. Whichever figure is right, it is well above what we would usually expect on a population-per capita basis. We are all aware of the problems of the mining industry, which is a particular characteristic of people on invalidity benefit in my hon. Friend's area.

The test is meant to be a narrow gate. It is easy to mock it and its descriptors; it is easy to make fun of the new numerical totting up system. I do not want to do that, but there are problems. For example, I find it rather quaint

that we are told that if someone cannot raise one arm above his head to reach for something, he is entitled to no points on the scoring system. If someone has no problem with reaching, not surprisingly he is entitled to no points on the scoring system. That appears to be redundant information and there are other similar examples.

However, rather than making fun I believe it to be more important to examine the general principle. We are concerned that there is a confusion between capacity for work and a loss of facility. Of course, medical condition is an important component, but the Government admit that other matters are also important—for example, age. Research produced by the Department suggests that once someone has passed 50, the aging process becomes a conditioning and important practical factor. I would be prepared to give personal evidence about that, as, no doubt, would some of my contemporaries.

The selection of the age of 58 is arbitrary. It was plucked out the air for no obvious reason. Nevertheless, age is a factor. Also, if there is no work that a person can reasonably be expected to do, in the real and practical world that factor cannot be entirely ignored.

There is still great concern about whether the test will be sufficiently sensitive and flexible to take account of diseases where remission is a problem or where pain is a presenting problem. There are the problems of describing severe as distinct from other forms of mental disability.

There are hon. Members in the Chamber who took part effectively in the Second Reading debate. I remember being annoyed when the Secretary of State—who is something of a stranger to our debates these days—said:

"Our new test has already been welcomed."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1994; Vol.236, c. 38.]

He managed to give the impression that if people were not exactly burning bonfires outside the offices of Disability Alliance, the Disablement Income Group and other such organisations, they were near to that. It was not a fair impression.

The Secretary of State prayed in aid one witness, the National Back Pain Association. It had happened to write to him and he had interpreted its views as being very much in favour of tests. As the association was the one example that the Secretary of State gave, I took the trouble to contact it a couple of days ago. It could hardly be described as a hostile witness, given that it was the only friend that could be produced in court on the original occasion. It may interest the Minister to know—it is not the most stringent of criticisms, but it is interesting given the source—that the association

"is concerned as to how the assessors will measure pain as a functional limiter. We feel that many chronic back pain sufferers will have difficulty in sustaining the level of activity necessary to return to work—pain is invisible and not always observable. A back pain sufferer could perform the test satisfactorily but at what cost and is it sustainable?"

I make that point because it is typical of many of the points that have been made by organisations with experience in the matter. I was glad, therefore, to return to them for further thoughts. I remind the Minister that, despite the nice ruled lines and dried ink, and the dotting of the i's and crossing of the t's in the Department, genuine concern still exists outside in the real world.

One should not argue these matters in terms of hard cases. I became a little irritated—I am sure that some hon. Members here will remember it—with the level of some of the debate on Second Reading of the Jobseekers Bill. The Secretary of State told us about the case of someone on invalidity benefit being caught cleaning the windows of the Benefits Agency office from which he received his benefit. We were told about javelin contest winners who were on invalidity benefit. The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) conclusively established the Government's case with the rather curious fact that the man who waved the flag at the Grand National was on invalidity benefit. I do not think that any of that does any service to these difficult issues.

No doubt exists that one of the reasons why we are in this position is that the Government believe that the health of the nation is improving and that, therefore, we should be able to do without many of the people on invalidity benefit. The famous phrase from the Prime Minister was that the figures "beggar" belief. Complicated attempts were made to suggest that, because the number of peptic ulcers in society had halved, a similar reduction should be seen in invalidity benefit. I remember having exchanges with the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) about the Policy Studies Institute report.

To remind the House, it is interesting that the institute's analysis was that about 29 per cent. of the increase in the number of people on invalidity benefit arose because pensioners were staying on invalidity benefit after retirement age to enjoy the fact that it was tax free; if they took the same money under pension eligibility, it would be taxed. Most hon. Members with the persistence to stay for the debate will know that that choice has been removed in the legislation, and that many pensioners will have increased tax bills as a result. No doubt the Government will say that they have reduced invalidity benefit figures substantially because those people will have lost that right. Another 16 per cent. of the increase was due to the increase in the number of women in the labour market. Those factors have nothing to do with fraud or abuse. I hope that the Government accept that.

One of my worries relates to the problem of the black hole or twilight zone, as I think the Minister called it. Inevitably, a large number of people will be displaced. They will become dependants in their own homes. They will live on savings, if they have any. If they do not, they will be thrown on to non-contributory jobseeker's allowance, or, before that comes into being, on to income support. The Government's current estimates are that in 1995-96, 95,000 people will be displaced from invalidity benefit by the changes. In 1996-97, the figure will be 190,000 in 1996-97. Those people will have to sign on. Almost inevitably, they will end up on means-tested benefits because they are unlikely to have a contributions record that will allow them, even for the six months, to claim what is left of jobseeker's allowance.

The Government have been critical of the growth in means-tested benefits and of the damage and dangers of those benefits. I find it a strange inconsistency that so much of what they are introducing in terms of incapacity benefit and jobseeker's allowance will significantly force up the number of people on means-tested benefits. More important, it will create in many communities a bitterness, a feeling of failure and a hopelessness, which will not be good for morale, and which will lead to many personal problems.

I think too of single men who may be especially vulnerable—or single women; but let us take single men for the example. If they are on their own, they may have

[Mr. Dewar]

to fall back on basic income support. They will be in a position that is an odd reversal of the normal career because they will be on basic income support for 10 or perhaps 12 years and their income will improve only when they retire, because at least they will then have the pensioner's premium. For that long period, we are creating a substantial social problem and making no attempts to deal or to wrestle with it.

May I turn briefly, as I recognise that many of my hon. Friends wish to speak, to the interesting and important point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller). Administration has been the bugbear of much of the change in the social security sector. I am concerned about some of the figures that are already beginning to emerge because of the changes made in the administration of incapacity benefit. To illustrate that theme, I want to use the example of growth in appeals.

To take one criteria, let us consider what has happened since 1993. The House will remember that, in that year, the Government announced that there would be improvements—an interesting term—in medical control arrangements and that they hoped to save £240 million over a two-year period. In 1991, 4,852 appeals were decided and the number rose in 1992 to 53,088. In 1993, when the new regime was introduced, the number jumped to 9,422. The latest figures show that, in the first quarter of 1994, the number continued to grow, with 4,005 appeals decided. I know that this matter is open to argument about interpretation, but the success rate of appellants has increased from 49.6 per cent. at the beginning of the period to which I referred, to 58 per cent. It is worth remembering that, back in 1979, it was 21 per cent. There is a tale there and some deductions can be drawn from it.

It is not just the past trend that is worrying; the continuation and perhaps dramatic acceleration of that trend also worries many of my colleagues. Just before I came into the Chamber, I obtained a briefing note from the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. It said that its offices in many parts of the country were being inundated with people who were worried about their position vis a vis the changes that have not yet come into effect. A real danger exists of administrative chaos.

In 1993—these are the most recent figures that I could find that have a statistical base—23,105 appeals on incapacity benefit were lodged. The Minister told me the other day that he was expecting 140,000 in 1995-96. That is a quantum leap. I know that he will say that the Government have put more money and resources into the medical advisory service; he will tell us that they are all geared up to deal with it. I hope that he does not think that I am a cynic, but if he is right in his expectations—on all experience, he is probably in the right ball park—the system will seize up under that strain and under the other administrative problems that are reflected in the expected dramatic jump from 23,000 to 140,000. That is a measure of the problems that we may face.

My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) referred to the nightmare of the introduction of the disability living allowance. We must be concerned about what is happening.

Mr. Miller: Did the Minister in the same conversation tell my hon. Friend the expected cost of the increased volume of appeals? I should imagine that it will be horrendous.

Mr. Dewar: I cannot tell my hon. Friend. I should be able to give him some relevant information but I have forgotten it. I myself received an answer to the effect that the added expenditure on the Benefits Agency's medical service was, I think, £3 million or £4 million. The Minister may be able to help later. In any event, I hope that I have made the point fairly.

When I was first involved in these debates—they seemed to have begun long ago—I referred to a "petty change" producing "minimum savings" for the Government. I was rapped over the knuckles by the Secretary of State on Second Reading of the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994. He compared my approach to that of the late John Smith who had launched a fierce attack on the whole issue. As we now know, John Smith was right and the rap on my knuckles was well justified but no one who now considers the scale of the financial switch and the number of people who will be displaced could possibly argue that it is a petty change. It is a major change and one which I think will cause major problems for the Government.

Let us consider the impact of the test alone, leaving aside the difference in benefit levels. The savings are expected to be £210 million in 1995-96, rising to £700 million in 1996-97 and to £1 billion in 1997-98. That is a great deal of money to take out of this particular budget.

The test must be seen as part of a package. How will that package be perceived by the public? There are other adjustments involving many examples of how the rate of benefit will be lowered for those who are on the new incapacity benefit as against those who remain on invalidity benefit—the basic rate will be lower between 29 and 52 weeks, the age-related increases will no longer exist and the adult dependency increases will be lower in the middle period and, even when restored after 52 weeks, will be available only to those looking after children or who are over 60. The many changes will be noticed because people notice nothing more particularly than the shortage of the pennies that they want to count in their purse or pocket. My fear is that other people's fears are real and growing. One tries to reassure but it is often difficult.

I happened to be in south Wales last night—as hon. Members can probably imagine, it was rather quiet. I attended a public meeting and was struck by the fact that, at the end, more people came to me to discuss their worries about incapacity benefit and the changes than asked questions about something which to an observer would have been the big issue of the meeting which, the Minister will not be surprised to know, was the Child Support Agency.

I fear that there may be a parallel between the CSA and incapacity benefit. The trouble with the CSA is that it is perceived to be unfair and unjust. Despite all that the Minister has said, I believe that there is a real danger that the new incapacity benefit system will in the end be seen as unfair and unjust.

The Minister will no doubt say that once the transitional arrangement has run its course and the reviews have all been carried out there will be no unfairness, but the answer that he will receive is that it is very little consolation to be told that the system is uniformly unfair, which I think is how people will regard it. In other respects, it will be seen as arbitrary as well as unfair. It will be easy to find two applicants in the same town who are comparable in terms of finance, family circumstances, physical disability and loss of faculties but who may receive different levels of benefit because of the date of their first application. Of course, they will also be subject to dramatically different tax treatment. That is not a happy prospect and I think that the Minister has greatly underestimated the problems and trouble that it will produce.

When the system is fully operational, we shall be taking a total of £1.5 billion from the present budget. It cannot be a painless process because it is not simply a matter of administrative reform. Many people will be hit, and hit hard. It can only reinforce the Government's reputation, of which they should not be proud, for introducing change that is unrelated to the needs of the people whom the system is supposed to be helping.

On Second Reading, the Secretary of State, who is not here today, said:

"The Bill is not an attack on the sick and disabled; it is the very reverse. It is designed to protect their benefit against those who abuse it."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1994; Vol.236, c.35.]

I do not believe that abuse is the test, but, in any event, very few people will agree with the sentiment that the Act is a way to protect and help the sick and disabled. Once we have experienced the Act, no one will believe it. I predict that Ministers will have to rethink their position and I hope that they will be prepared do so before too much damage is done.

5.15 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) reminded us of the Second Reading debate on the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994 just over a year ago on 24 January 1994. Looking back at *Hansard*, I noted with some embarrassment that I had made an inordinately long speech, so I shall not today rehearse in detail all the reasons why I am unhappy about this measure and the regulations that flow from it, which we are now invited to approve.

I make no complaint about—indeed, I applaud—the Government's determination to retrieve and bring back into balance our public finances. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor on the progress that he has already made. What I cannot, however, approve is the fact that the cost of continuing this process should be borne by members of our society whom we must recognise as disadvantaged and in need of our help. Whatever the reasons may have been, it was certainly not the fault of the long-term sick and disabled that in the second half of the 1980s we allowed expenditure and inflation to take off; nor was it their fault that we then deflated the economy so severely and ran up the borrowing requirement.

Under this legislation, it is people who should have a special claim on public support who are asked to make the biggest sacrifice relative to their means and opportunities. The device whereby people are to be selected to make this sacrifice—the so-called "all work test"—is a contrivance that I cannot believe satisfies the rigorous and fastidious intellects of my right hon. and hon. Friends. As I have argued before, the proposition that there can be an objective medical test of capacity for work—for all work—is fundamentally misconceived.

My right hon. and hon. Friends know very well that an individual may be capable of some kinds of work and not others. They know that a person's capacity for work is a function not only of his state of health but of factors such as education, training, skills, experience and, of course, the jobs on offer and their accessibility. All those factors should be weighed together, as they have been since the Conservative Government introduced invalidity benefit in 1971.

The notion of an all work test is a fig leaf for the Treasury's determination, regardless of near-term distress or long-term cost, to cut planned expenditure. I am not interested in—I am deeply opposed to—gaining tax cuts at the expense of the long-term sick and disabled. I suspect that many voters share my view.

The long-term sick and disabled are not very good at organising protests and making their voices heard. The media gave no coverage at all to the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill when it was going through Parliament, yet the Act and the regulations are major legislation in terms of their fiscal and human implications. The Government expect to take £410 million from the social security budget in the forthcoming year and £1,720 million by 1997-98 by dint of, among other things, excluding from incapacity benefit 220,000 people who at present can claim invalidity benefit.

Let us be clear about the fact that these people are disadvantaged. A few claimants may indeed be abusing the system, and I do not condone that. But the Department's own research reveals that by far the greater number are poor and—surely my right hon. and hon. Friends will agree—deserving.

Under the medical test which we are asked to approve, one has to score 15 points to qualify for incapacity benefit. Someone who is partially sighted and cannot see well enough, even when wearing spectacles, to discern a friend on the other side of the room, scores 12. If she lives in a rural area without buses, she certainly could not drive to work. She would receive invalidity benefit now, but if she were under 58, she would not receive incapacity benefit under the new system.

A person with myalgic encephalomyelitis—ME—who has problems with gross and fine motor control, cannot bend down and then straighten after picking something up, and cannot tie his shoelace scores only 13 and does not qualify. It used to be thought that polio and multiple sclerosis were hysterical conditions. Is that still the view of the Department and the Benefits Agency medical service on ME?

What clarification has been given, to enable us to understand the implications of our vote this evening, as to the calibration under the test of cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis? Which sufferers from those conditions will qualify for incapacity benefit and which will not? The principle of objectivity presumably means having the facts on the table.

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

I hope that the House will tolerate my once again quoting Dickens, because he would undoubtedly have had something to say about the all work test and the 80 experts whom my hon. Friend the Minister mentioned. The House will remember chapter two of "Hard Times":

"Thomas Gradgrind . . . A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over . . . With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, Sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic."

There was also Mr. Gradgrind's utilitarian colleague:

"A mighty man at cutting and drying, he was; a government officer."

The Department of Social Security certainly produces facts. I commend my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his willingness to publish research even when the findings do not validate his policy. Research report 20, a longitudinal study of new recipients of invalidity benefit by Bob Erens and Deborah Ghate, demonstrated that the great majority of new recipients of invalidity benefit were poor and earned in their last job, in 1991 or 1992, between £2 and £5 an hour. They were likely to have been manual workers. The most common causes of their invalidity were industrial diseases and other work-related factors. Only 17 per cent. of them had stayed in full-time education beyond the age of 16, and 48 per cent. had no educational qualifications at all. Once over 50 years old, their chances of returning to employment were very poor indeed.

Those recipients of invalidity benefit are the victims not only of injury and ill health but of recession—all too often, people in poor health are the first to be made redundant—and economic change. Where are the jobs in today's economy for people in their 50s with little education, few skills and a poor health record? They have paid national insurance contributions to provide precisely for the contingency in which they find themselves. Indeed, my right hon. and hon. Friends and the House have recently increased the contributions of those people by 10 per cent; yet, by way of these regulations, we would lessen or even remove that benefit altogether. It is not a good thing to do.

My hon. Friends are invited to believe that invalidity benefit has been a wholesale rip-off. It is pointed out, in the relentless repetition of propaganda—my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People said it again this afternoon—that the cost of invalidity benefit has been soaring, even as the health of the nation has been improving; so, we are supposed to conclude, claimants have been swinging the lead.

I am glad that, overall, the health of the nation has been improving, but averages are deceptive, as we might have been told in an interesting essay, had it not failed to appear in the new edition of *Social Trends*, and as we have just been told by the school of advanced urban studies in Bristol. The health of the nation is chequered geographically and correlates with the unevenness of socio-economic factors. Poorer people, particularly in the older, industrial areas, experience worse health.

The growth in claims, as the hon. Member for Garscadden reminded us, has been analysed by the Policy Studies Institute. It found, as the hon. Gentleman said, that 29 per cent. came from claimants choosing invalidity benefit rather than the pension, as they were entitled to do; 16 per cent. from the increase in women in the labour market paying national insurance contributions; and 13 per cent. from the increase in disabled people in relevant age groups. Some 42 per cent. was due to the growth in the number of genuinely disabled people. The key to that is that they could not get off benefit because there were no jobs for people with their disabilities and skills, or lack of skills. There was no evidence to suggest that they did not want to be in work. Their benefits were a poor substitute for their earnings. The system has provided no feather bed for idleness. Four out of five claims questioned by officials of the Benefits Agency medical service were, indeed, made by people who were incapable of work.

What will happen to the existing claimants of invalidity benefit? The most severely ill have rightly and properly been exempted from the test. My right hon. Friend is allowing recipients aged 58 and over to be passported through to incapacity benefit. However, he estimates that about 220,000 people will be found to be capable of work over the next two years.

I welcome his assurances that there will be a right of appeal, that those who are found capable of work and decide to register as unemployed will have a full advisory interview and receive special guidance and help, and that additional places on programmes are being funded with extra resources given to the Employment Service and to the placing assessment and counselling service.

To do all that is, of course, right, but I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will think carefully and sympathetically about the requirements under the rules of the job seeker's allowance for people suffering from long-term sickness and disability—conditions all too real, although not severe enough to score 15 points—and especially older people. I apprehend that only a fortunate few—very few—will get jobs. It may take them a long time.

Only 41 per cent. of all men aged between 55 and 64 are in employment. The long-term sick and disabled will be competing with people in good health for jobs which, despite all the Government's good efforts to promote job creation, are far too scarce. Let us please refrain from imposing insensitive requirements on them, which will be hard for them to bear, through jobseekers' directions. Let us think very carefully about what requirements in terms of actively seeking work ought to be imposed on the long-term sick and disabled. Let us be as positive as we can, for example, in accommodating a commitment to voluntary work, which many people with a degree of disability will willingly and most valuably undertake on a part-time and flexible basis.

What about the appreciable number of people who will not qualify for incapacity, but who, because of their disability, will not be able to satisfy the more rigorous qualifying conditions for the jobseeker's allowance? My hon. Friend the Minister sought to offer reassurance, but I remain fearful that some—too many—will disappear into the proverbial black hole which he mentioned. It would not be acceptable were that to happen.

Those people are the victims of circumstances beyond their control. They have been unlucky in their health. They have been dispossessed of work opportunities by the colossal changes wrought by technology and globalisation, the restructuring of the British economy and

the widening of inequalities in our society. But they are members of our society, fragmented though it is, and we cannot wash our hands of them. We should not for a moment wish to do so or consider doing so. It is fine for the Conservative party to encourage talent and success, but it can be no part of our ideology—I am sure that it is no part of my hon. Friend the Minister's ideology—to let the devil take the hindmost. We cannot neglect the responsibility articulated by the Tory party long ago to elevate the condition of the people—all the people. We must not abandon those who, under the present proposals, will lose entitlement to benefit.

At a cost that we could well afford, we could passport through from invalidity benefit to incapacity benefit all existing claimants over the age of 50. In a parliamentary answer on Monday, my hon. Friend the Minister of State told me that it would cost an extra £45 million in 1995-96 if all claimants over 50 were exempted from the test on the same basis as claimants aged over 58. My right hon. Friends should soften their rigour to that extent. Our economy is quite strong enough to sustain that concession. If they are unwilling to do that, they can at least extend the exemption to people aged over 55—the people who we know have the poorest prospects of finding work—for a cost of only £15 million.

The greater the insecurity of the world in which we live, the more we have a duty to offer care to the vulnerable. That should be a principle common to all parties in the House. As it is, the regulations express a policy which cold-shoulders the vulnerable and I cannot support them.

5.30 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): It is a rare, if not unique, occasion for the Member of Parliament for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney to rise and say that he rather wished that he had made the speech that the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) just made. It was a privilege to listen to the sensitivity combined with close reasoning that the hon. Gentleman brought to the debate.

I do not want to engage in a general debate. I want to tell the Minister what I fear will happen in the communities that I represent as a result of the proposed changes. I seek a basic, simple and fundamental assurance from the Minister and I hope that he will be able to respond to my comments at the end of the debate.

Irrespective of the national average figures, the Welsh figures, and particularly the figures for the communities that I represent, are of a different order from those that were presented to the House as the norm. According to written parliamentary answers, 10 per cent. of the male population of working age in Wales receives invalidity benefit. That is 2 per cent. higher than in any region in England.

In addition, the 1991 census figures revealed a frightening, disturbing and continuing pattern of ill health in households in the valleys constituencies. Of the top 12 constituencies with the highest ratio of limiting long-term illness in households, 10 are south Wales constituencies. They have the highest ratios in the country. Poignantly, the constituency at the bottom of that league is Wokingham, the constituency of the Secretary of State for Wales.

That gulf is a sad comment on us all. After 50 years of post-war effort, there is still an enormous gulf—which is partly historic and continuing—in respect of the social divisions reflected in the figures to which I referred and in the number of recipients of invalidity benefit.

I am most concerned about the figures. I am worried that they are guesstimates. I do not know on what they are based. As I understand it, the Minister rested his case on the fact that half the existing recipients will be excluded from the process. One of the problems is that benefit districts in relation to invalidity benefit do not coincide with constituencies or local authority districts. However, I understand that in respect of the benefit district area that covers my constituency and beyond it—the Merthyr, Cynon and Rhymney district—24,000 people receive invalidity benefit. I am literate, I hope, but I am not very numerate. I am therefore worried about the figures and I would be grateful if the Minister would confirm them.

If 24,000 people are in receipt of invalidity benefit in that benefit district, that represents a much higher percentage of the population of working age in receipt of that benefit than any of the averages about which we are talking. The Welsh average is between 7 and 10 per cent., but the percentage in that benefit district is infinitely higher. A much higher percentage of the people in the area that I represent receives invalidity benefit than the Welsh or English averages.

As I understand it, only about 8,000 of those 24,000 people are aged 58 or over; that means that one third would be excluded from the total. I would be grateful if the Minister would confirm my figures. In addition, we must consider those who would be excluded who would qualify under the exemptions; they would account for 16,000 of the 24,000. I have great difficulty in believing that an additional 4,000 fall into that category. That would mean that half the recipients in my area were exempt.

I hope that I am wrong. I hope that the figures can be qualified, altered and changed in a way that allows me to go home and tell the communities which I represent that at least the Minister is arguing that half the existing invalidity beneficiaries in my areas would be excluded from the process. At the moment, on the guesstimates, I believe that rather fewer than half—and perhaps significantly fewer than half—would be excluded.

I want now to consider the implications of a written answer that the Minister sent me about where the savings are to be made. In the reply, it was admitted that 41 per cent. of this year's savings, and 48 per cent. of next year's savings—we are talking about huge figures—are to come from disallowing existing recipients from the benefit. The savings will not be made as a result of new claimants or tax changes. In year two, 48 per cent. of the savings will result from withdrawing and refusing benefit in respect of those who are already receiving it. By any standards, that is a huge withdrawal of financial support from families and communities.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon took us back to Dickens. I do not want to go back even to the 1930s. The qualitative difference between recession 1930s-style and recession 1980s-style in Merthyr Tydfil is that we still managed to spend in the 1980s. Consumption collapsed in the 1930s and that is what led to the absolute deprivation of the 1930s.

[Mr. Ted Rowlands]

The relative impact of the 1980s recession was cushioned in post-war Merthyr Tydfil, which had enjoyed a reasonable degree of permanent or full-time employment for the lifetime of one generation, and people had qualified for occupational pensions and for contributory benefits. When the redundancies occurred in the 1980s, with the double whammy of the collapse of manufacturing and mining, there was, fortunately, a cushion of occupational pension rights, redundancy rights, payments rights and contributory benefits rights for a generation of people who had been "shaken out" of the economy.

In many respects, the figures conceal the true depth of economic inactivity. In my area, about 40 per cent. of men of working age are economically inactive. About 20 per cent. of them are registered as unemployed—depending on which bands we consider. If the 1991 census figures are to be believed, another 20 per cent. are economically inactive. Within that 20 per cent. are a very large number of people who receive invalidity benefit.

We are not talking about taking £1 or £2 away from people; we are talking about taking £60, £70, £80, £90 or £120 from people, because the benefit is earnings related. It is related to one's contributions and to one's earnings. We are talking about taking between £60 and £120 a week from the family budget. Almost at a stroke, the decision of an adjudication officer will mean that those people will spend months trying to appeal against the loss of benefit.

Let us take a conservative estimate, and say that perhaps 5,000 of the 24,000 people who are in receipt of invalidity benefit lose that benefit within the next two years as a result of the changes. If those people lose on average some £70 a week, we are talking about a loss in the purchasing power of the local economy of £15 million to £18 million a year. There will be serious consequential effects, not only to individual families but to the prosperity of the whole economy.

The contributory benefits which came as a result of the reasonably permanent full employment which lasted from the late 1940s through into the 1970s saved local economies and communities of the kind and character I represented during the 1980s. Much of that money was immediately recycled back into the local economy.

I can think of many families where the man or woman who is in receipt of invalidity benefit probably props up an unemployed son, daughter or married couple for insurance, clothing and a host of the other expenditures which occur in relatively close-knit communities of the kind I represent. Among those communities, invalidity benefit has played a very important social and economic part. Withdrawal of the benefit on the scale proposed worries me, as it could have a serious effect on not only individual families but the collective purchasing power of the community.

I do not believe that Ministers have thought the measure through. They will say to me that people can apply for unemployment benefit, the new jobseeker's allowance or income support. I suspect that a large proportion of those who lose benefit will be people in their 50s who, because of redundancy, have left work. They will not have made the contributions necessary for them to be able to claim unemployment benefit, or the job seeker's allowance from next year. They may not be able to claim income support either, because they have modest lump sums left over from their redundancy money and a small occupational pension which takes them outside the limit. They will, therefore, not only lose the benefit but not qualify for any other benefit.

Should those people bother to sign on for the jobseeker's allowance? They will have to do so to keep their credits for their pensions, and they will have to try to fill the hole left by the loss of benefit. As the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon said forcefully, they will have to compete for the same pathetic collection of jobs with younger adults and the long-term unemployed, of whom we have a rather large percentage. People in their mid-50s who have a disability of one kind or another and who will be shaken out by the new test will be competing for the pathetic, poorly paid jobs available at my local jobcentre. Let me tell the Minister what I am talking about. Someone brought to my attention a job as a security guard that was advertised as paying

"£1.80 an hour—bring your own dog".

We are talking about pathetic rates of pay, and I am not exaggerating.

I do not understand where the national income averages come from, as I have searched in vain through the jobs advertised in the local newspapers for one salary which matches the average income. A considerable differential in earnings has been occurring during the past decade in communities such as mine.

The Secretary of State for Social Security gave a most interesting and, I thought, sensitive lecture in Northern Ireland a few weeks ago, in which he drew attention to the social consequences of what he called the disparity of earnings. He was talking about the social consequences of that disparity, while at the same time introducing regulations which will drive thousands of people in their mid-50s into the labour market to compete with other adults and young unemployed people who have been waiting and hoping for a job.

Mr. Duncan: I have been following the hon. Gentleman's argument closely, and I am perplexed. He seems to be in favour of keeping those people on benefit, rather than letting them compete in the labour market. Even if that is not his view—frankly, it seems that it is—he also seems to be at odds with the Disability Discrimination Bill, which wishes not to discriminate against such people in their search for a job.

Mr. Rowlands: One consequence of the measure will be to drive people who had virtually accepted that they were in retirement—men and women of about 57—and who have been in receipt of invalidity benefit for two or three years back into the labour market. My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) made an effective intervention, when he described what happened during the 1980s. The Government understood and approved of invalidity benefit as being part and parcel of a whole process which allowed people almost to go into semi-retirement in their mid-50s, rather than scrambling for a job that they were not fit enough to do. The Government are now bringing in a new objective test with a huge retrospective character which will force people back into the labour market.

I must tell the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) that a large number of people in their mid to late-50s have accepted that they are unable or likely to go back into employment. The loss of benefit will force

them into the labour market. They will not feel deprived of their rights—that is the hon. Gentleman's argument—but they will most certainly feel deprived and angry as a result of the retrospective character of the test that is proposed in the regulations.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): My hon. Friend is making an excellent case against the measure. Does he accept that those people will also be angry when they find the levels of wages of the jobs for which they will be told to apply? Is he not making a strong case for a national minimum wage to end the obscenity of slave labour rates?

Mr. Rowlands: I shall not be tempted by that topic, as you might stop me if I pursued the argument of a minimum wage, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We can have those arguments elsewhere on other occasions. I am simply trying to describe what I fear will be a consequence of the regulations, and the impact they will have on families and communities. I am also concerned about the impact which the measure will have on local purchasing power, which has sustained communities such as mine during two major recessions within a decade.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon produced some fascinating figures. He said that, for merely £45 million, the Government could exclude everybody over the age of 50. That is an astonishing figure. It may turn out to be incorrect and, in communities such a mine, we may find that the regulations have a disproportionate effect. We have heard the assuring figures that more than half the people concerned will be exempt and that the majority of them will have their benefit maintained. That brings us down to about a quarter of existing claimants losing their benefit, as opposed to the rather more serious figures which we fear. If our more worrying and draconian view of the regulations turns out to be true, will the Minister review them?

It was right and proper of my hon. Friend the Member for Garscadden to speak about the experiences of the Child Support Agency and the disability living allowance. We have been through those administrative problems, although we accept that Governments occasionally cannot analyse in detail what the direct consequences of their actions or legislation will be. I fear that the number who will lose benefit will be larger than the Minister suggested. My mental arithmetic worked out that he implied that only about a quarter of those currently in receipt of invalidity benefit would lose it. I hope that, if those figures turn out to be inaccurate during the next one or two years, he will promise to undertake a fundamental and urgent review. I also hope that we do not end up with people suffering as a result of the Government's economic mismanagement, as we fear.

5.49 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I will not follow the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and his anecdotal evidence about the advertisement for a security guard which stated "Bring your own dog". It would be no good if it were my dog—his idea of intimidating an intruder is to lick him to death.

I shall be brief as I certainly do not have the depth of knowledge of my namesake on the Opposition Benches. First, I must declare an interest, which is not in the Register of Members' Interests, as I am the president of the Isle of Wight branch of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. My concern is that, although the pain, stress, fatigue and variability of the condition will be taken into account, the questionnaire to be completed before examination by a Benefits Agency doctor does not appear to provide for describing the effects of a variable condition such as MS, or for the effects of fatigue after performing some function.

Severe and progressive neurological diseases are exempt from all work tests. I want to know precisely how claimants who fall into exempt categories will be identified. As I am sure the Minister is aware, multiple sclerosis is a complex and unpredictable condition. It takes different forms, which include relapsing, remitting and chronic progression. Doctors are unable to provide a prognosis for the path that someone's MS will take, so how will agency staff determine whether a claimant's MS is severe or progressive enough to exempt them from the test? Will someone automatically fail if his or her MS is in remission at the time? Will the right of appeal be available for those who are not exempted, but who believe that they should be?

I broadly support the Government's thrust to reform social security legislation and this is an important part of the reform. I simply remind the House that one of our former Members of Parliament, Mr. Rob Hayward, was an MS sufferer. Happily, I understand that the condition was dormant and he fought the by-election in Christchurch. I am sure that among the fraternity of Members of Parliament no one would suggest that fighting a by-election would make one unfit for work, yet those of us who know about multiple sclerosis and are aware of the ways in which the disease can progress, know that it can suddenly accelerate and make someone incapable of work. I see my hon. Friend the Minister nodding—in agreement, I hope.

Fatigue is also associated with that horrible disease. Those of us involved in the Multiple Sclerosis Society hope that, before long, someone will not only discover the reasons for this terrible disease but a cure—the same is true of cancer. In the mean time, I hope that when I vote with the Government tonight I can do so knowing that the Minister will keep a careful eye on this matter. All our regulations and statutes—everything that the House does with the printed word—have to be in black and white, but I hope that the Minister will remember these few words of mine and will ensure that the regulations are implemented with a sensitive and human touch.

5.53 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): As other hon. Members have said, the medical test for incapacity benefit is crude and unfair. It is crude because it tests functional ability only and a task that is done once, not over and over again, which is what many people have to do when they are employed.

As has been said, we need a proper definition of work—the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) mentioned that. I know that the other place tried to change the ruling. I want the legislation to include the definition of work used by the private insurance industry:

"that to which someone is suited by education, training and experience."

The Bill would benefit from the inclusion of that definition, but the Lords amendment was defeated by 124 votes to 107.

[Ms Liz Lynne]

The Bill is also unfair because people have been paying national insurance contributions. The benefit is based on one's national insurance contribution record, which is extremely important—as it is with the jobseeker's allowance. People are being asked to pay more national insurance, but services are being cut and they are receiving less in benefits.

The Bill is also unfair because the Government are changing the rules and people will get less money than they do at present. It will be the same for the first 28 weeks—£43.45 a week—but, between 28 and 52 weeks, invalidity benefit is £57.60, whereas incapacity benefit will be £52.50. That is a saving of £5.10. The measure is a means to claw back tiny amounts to try to save the Treasury money, but when one adds it all together, it amounts to a considerable sum.

The full rate will be payable after 52 weeks and the terminally ill will not be included, for which I am grateful. The Government are also clawing back money from age allowance and dependence allowance, and so it goes on. They are reducing the age bands from three to two and the full rate will be payable after 52 weeks and not 28. At present, the under-40s receive an extra £12.50, those between 40 and 49 an extra £7.60, and those between 50 and 60, an extra £3.60. With incapacity benefit and the change to two bands, the under-35s will receive £12.15 extra, and those between 35 and 45, an extra £6.10. There will be nothing extra for anyone older.

As has been said, with incapacity benefit, the adult dependant will have to be over 60, or looking after children, whereas age is irrelevant with invalidity benefit. Claimants will also receive less money. One can claim invalidity benefit for five years after retirement, but that is not the case with incapacity benefit, which is available until retirement age only. Invalidity benefit is not taxable, whereas incapacity benefit is. The list goes on and on and the changes are totally unfair.

If the Minister taxes incapacity benefit, will he introduce a proper benefit or allowance for those with special needs? The Disablement Income Group estimates that it will cost £87 a week for special needs and I hope that he will take that into consideration.

The Minister estimated that 50 per cent. of claimants might have to be reassessed. The Government said that it was likely to be 85 per cent. He also said that it was thought that about 220,000 would be deemed fit for work after the tests, which I find extraordinary. The Department of Social Security has initiated some sort of test and says that one in four of those on invalidity benefit will be deemed fit for work.

The new test will be the same as the current test for the first 28 weeks, whether it is for sickness benefit or new incapacity benefit. But after that, claimants must complete an unwieldy questionnaire of some 72 pages. They will need a considerable amount of help to fill it in and citizens advice bureaux are already receiving many inquiries about problems with it. Their case load will increase dramatically. Members of Parliament, too, will be inundated with people coming to see them about their problems, just as we did with disability benefit and child support. In six months or a year's time, the Minister will have to come back to the House to announce changes in the Act, just as happened with the Child Support Act 1991. I hope that the problem does not go that far, but I fear that it will. Conservative Back Benchers will complain to the Minister, just as we are complaining now.

The tests are also unfair. For example, a person who can carry a 5 lb bag of potatoes is awarded eight points; and a person who can turn on a tap with one hand is awarded 6 points. But many disabled people overestimate what they can do and do not want to admit that they cannot do certain tasks. So those filling in the questionnaire may say that they can do something whereas they cannot.

I welcome the fact that the Minister said that people with severe mental illness will be excluded. But the section on "mental disabilities", as the Government call them, is still woefully inadequate.

The section on the partially sighted is also woefully inadequate. Will the Minister reassure me—I know that he has had representations about this in addition to the incapacity benefit and medical test—that the wording of the test will be changed so that it says that partially sighted people should be able to read on a sustained basis, rather than just be able to read words? He may have reached some agreement on that, but will he say something about it when he sums up tonight? The medical test should also include the ability to scan and focus areas of text and the words

"functionally useful field of vision".

If claimants manage to fill in those forms, many of them will be seen by doctors from the Benefits Agency medical service, but those doctors will not know the patients. The Government may say that that is a good thing as it will ensure that the system it not open to abuse, but if doctors do not know the patients they will not know the patients' real history or the problems that they have experienced. Furthermore, will doctors who must review cases be trained in the relevant specialities, for instance, in mental health? Under the industrial injuries compensation review, many doctors are brought in from specialist fields. I know that that would be expensive and I doubt whether the Government will take the suggestion on board, but they should be aware of the various specialities. A doctor should not simply be asked to say whether someone with mental illness or a disability is unfit for work. They must have been trained in a particular speciality.

Filling in the questionnaire will present great problems for the mentally ill, many of whom will not bother to fill it in and claim benefit. Some of them are unable to concentrate or have given up their jobs because of panic attacks. Imagine a mentally ill person presented with all those questions. They will make him or her panic even more.

Some people will fall through the net between the incapacity and jobseekers benefits. In a written answer, the Minister of State, Department of Employment said that the problem will not have a great effect and will be taken into account under the new jobseeker's allowance in a similar way to unemployment benefit. But citizens advice bureaux already say that people are falling through the net as a result of the new medical test on invalidity benefit. They try to get unemployment benefit but end up getting no benefit whatever. I can imagine the arguments at the Benefits Agency about what should be excluded from the "area of work", because that point is being argued already. I hope that the Government will think again about the medical test. They seem to be simply clawing back money for the Treasury.

Another key point is that many people will seek advice. If the Government think that people can rely on citizens advice bureaux, they must ensure that the CAB are given the funds and wherewithal to deal with all the cases that are brought to them, or the Government will have to provide an alternative.

I wish that the Government had decided to simplify the invalidity benefit rather than complicate it and introduce a benefit that would advantage disabled people. The incapacity benefit simply penalises disabled people. Disabled people's organisations throughout the country and hon. Members on both sides of the House want the Minister, even at this late stage, to change his mind and review the medical test and, if possible, the incapacity benefit.

6.6 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me once again. I have sat across the Floor from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) in many social security debates and was, unusually, gearing up to pay him a compliment. I am sorry that he is no longer in his place to witness it. The manner in which he has approached this matter has been fair-minded. He is always a master of detail and I always learn something when he speaks. He makes broad and encouraging comments in addressing the overall problem of social security and an ever-rising budget. He said in 1992:

"The Labour Party recognises the inadequacies of the present system . . . any government is entitled to review policy and spending patterns".

So they are. He also said on the television series "On the Record":

"I certainly don't take the view that the answer to the problems of the Social Security Department is just spending more money within the framework of the present system".

Indeed, and I commend the hon. Gentleman for both those observations.

Our problem, however, is in moving from those generalities to specifics and I regret that, even before we had a chance to study the details of the Bill, he dismissed it simply as a conspiracy to undermine the welfare state. It is not a conspiracy to do so. Rather, the reforms before us tonight, and the specific matters in the statutory instruments that we are debating, address and fit well within the context of the long-term problems of social security with which Governments must wrestle.

On Second Reading, the Secretary of State said:

"The Bill has three objectives: first, to ensure that the huge and rising sums devoted to sickness benefits are properly focused on those who are genuinely too unwell to work; secondly, to ensure that the cost is affordable; and thirdly, to provide a more rational structure of benefits."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1994; Vol. 236, c. 35.]

That is a good rule of thumb for almost any reform to the social security system and is in tune with the issues with which the Select Committee on Social Security has dealt.

The current structure, which has been changed by the regulations, is inadequate. It is complicated and running out of control. There are currently two main benefits for people who are away from work for short periods because of sickness—statutory sick pay and sickness benefit.

When we consider long-term incapacity we find that most people who have been entitled to either statutory sick pay or sickness benefit become entitled to the contributory invalidity benefit after 28 weeks of incapacity until they claim state retirement pension or are able to work again. They have to provide evidence of incapacity—normally to their own doctor. The invalidity benefit currently consists of an invalidity pension paid at the same rate as retirement pension, an invalidity allowance—an age-related addition that is paid to people qualifying for invalidity pension who become incapable of work more than five years before pensionable age—and an additional pension that is based on people's earnings between 1978-79 and 1990-91. The Government have already reformed the additional pension so that no further entitlement arises on earnings beyond April 1991. That measure was part of the package introduced from 1991 to improve the balance of incapacity benefits.

The existing severe disablement allowance is non-contributory and goes to those people who are incapable of work for more than 28 weeks. But the flaws of the existing structure became completely overwhelming and there was increasing and widespread concern that benefits for those incapable of work have been going to people for whom they were never intended. There has been a rapid growth in invalidity benefit at a time when the nation's health has been recorded as improving. The number of people in receipt of invalidity benefit has almost trebled over the past 15 years—from 550,000 to about 1.8 million.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My hon. Friend alluded to what he described as increasing concern that invalidity benefit was going to people to whom it should not. What evidence has he of that concern? What evidence has he that the concern may be justified?

Mr. Duncan: It is self-evident that, if the health of the nation is improving while, at the same time, the number of people deemed to be disabled and in receipt of benefit is increasing dramatically, there is something inconsistent in the way that disability benefit is delivered. I shall tell my hon. Friend the figures with which one has to wrestle.

Expenditure on benefit has more than doubled over the past 10 years, even after allowing for inflation. It more than trebled in cash terms—from £1.6 billion in the financial year 1982-83 to £7 billion in 1993-94. If the system remained unreformed, the estimate is that spending could rise to £10 billion by the end of the century. It has become the largest contributory benefit after the state pension and one of the fastest-growing areas of expenditure in the system. I commend the Government for addressing the problems of a set of circumstances with which it is increasingly impossible to live.

Those who are capable of work, but unemployed, should not be in receipt of incapacity benefit. Instead, they should receive benefits designed for those who are unemployed and, in particular, they should be designed to help such people back to work. Long-term dependence on incapacity benefit reduces motivation, causes skills to deteriorate and makes it harder for the recipient to take employment when work becomes available. It entrenches a distortion in the labour market which is severely detrimental to the long-term welfare and prosperity, not just of the country, but of the individuals involved.

Another problem with the system was that general practitioners were experiencing severe difficulty fulfilling their role as the gatekeeper to invalidity benefit. The current system has placed them in an unfair position—a nasty and invidious position—in relation to their patients.

[Mr. Duncan]

It is almost impossible for a GP to maintain a cordial relationship with a patient for whom he has care and a duty of care when he is also asked to be the effective vetter of the patient's right to a state-provided benefit. It is as well that the GP's role has been significantly reduced to a more administrative one.

The new system to be introduced in April amalgamates the myriad benefits into a single new benefit. It will be contributory and paid as of right, irrespective of means, to everyone who satisfies the necessary conditions. I think that the eligibility conditions have been fairly drawn. For the first 28 weeks of incapacity, people will be able to receive incapacity benefit if they are incapable of working in their own occupation. After 28 weeks, a new medical test of incapacity for all work will apply. It will apply in respect of both incapacity benefit and other benefits paid on the basis of long-term incapacity.

There will be three rates of payment. The lowest will be payable for the first 28 weeks of sickness, when many people have occupational sick pay and other resources to call on, and will be paid at a rate equivalent to existing sickness benefit. After 28 weeks, an intermediate tier will be payable, set at the current higher rate of statutory sick pay. It will ensure that the benefit level is maintained for those who have been receiving statutory sick pay. The highest rate of incapacity benefit will be payable after 52 weeks of incapacity and will be set at the current basic rate of invalidity benefit.

Existing claimants will continue to receive the rate of benefit in payment at the time of the change. In recognition of the overlap that now exists between state and private provision, the earnings-related additional pension on invalidity benefit will be abolished for new claimants and frozen for existing claimants. The Government have also undertaken to continue to uprate the remainder of the benefit. Many people undertake voluntary and therapeutic work, and certain changes contained in the measure will assist them. From April, all recipients of incapacity benefit will be able to undertake voluntary work for up to 16 hours a week while receiving benefit.

Under the existing system, many factors are considered when taking decisions on incapacity. Such factors include age, skills, education, experience and something dubbed "other social factors". But the trouble is that the list precludes a tight definition of incapacity and makes it difficult to determine precisely whether someone is eligible to receive the benefit.

The new system has considerable advantages and, under it, for the first 28 weeks of incapacity, people will be able to receive the lower rate of incapacity benefit if they are incapable of working in their own occupation. After 28 weeks, a new medical test of incapacity will apply. That medical test will involve the claimant, the claimant's GP and the departmental doctor. In an assessment of the claimant's ability to carry out a range of work-related activities, certain tests will apply. A significant advantage over the former system is that the GP will be involved only in a limited role and in supplying purely medical information.

The regulations that we are considering are detailed and the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) has quibbled with some of the tests included in the questionnaire—I can see why in many respects. The own occupation test and the all work test which are defined in the instruments have been researched extensively. In seeking to define them, the Government have received more than 350 responses since the publication of their consultation document on 1 December 1993. The Government have evaluated all the information and they have come up with detailed, clear and undeniably workable guidelines.

The methods of dealing with those who suffer from mental health problems—with which the hon. Member for Rochdale is intensely concerned; indeed, she raised the matter during the proceedings of the Disability Discrimination Bill this morning—have been addressed and the provisions have been designed properly. I have read them in considerable detail and assessed how they will replace the existing system and I commend them to the House.

6.20 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) is concerned, quite correctly, about avoiding the ghettoisation of the unemployed and the handicapped. He has advanced proposals in support of a scheme which at least makes a return to employment possible; that is a laudable objective. However, I wonder whether he is being entirely realistic.

I shall deal first the plight of those who suffer from mental illness—in either severe or moderate forms—which is not exempt from the test. People generally refuse to acknowledge their illness and they take violent exception to the suggestion that they may, in any way, be mentally ill. Therefore, those who suffer mental illness often make a very traumatic entry into the health service. The argument about whether people are mildly or severely mentally ill is totally irrelevant.

If such people lose their jobs and are then forced to deal with the most difficult aspects of social security provision, a temporary breakdown could easily become a permanent disability. When we identify the support mechanisms available to the mentally ill, it is obvious that the overwhelming burden of responsibility falls on community care and the health service. However, I do not think that the social security system can wash its hands entirely of its responsibilities.

I welcome the exemption of the severely mentally ill from the work test, but the fact that the mildly mentally ill will be subject to the test poses all sorts of problems. Regulation 18(1)(b) states:

"where a person . . . fails without good cause to attend for or submit himself to medical or other treatment . . . he shall be disqualified from receiving benefit".

That provision may overlap with the Government's proposals in the legislation dealing with the supervised discharge of the mentally ill and with community care arrangements. Have the Government thought about how regulation 18 will operate when community care arrangements vary hugely from one health authority to another and when the attitudes and the understanding of social security staff vary a great deal from one office to another? There is a standard system, but practical interpretation of it varies widely. I do not think that Motherwell is in the worst position in that regard, but I do not think that we fare particularly well either.

In building up the community care provision, it is essential that the Departments of Employment, of Health and of Social Security work together very closely. The Department of Employment supports many admirable access-to-work schemes for the mentally ill which are run by people who have been mentally ill themselves. Mentally-ill people receive a sympathetic hearing from departmental staff and they are encouraged to take on more and more work. However, there is a danger that they will take on too much work, which may have disastrous consequences. It could prove beneficial to link the access-to-work schemes more closely with the health service—in terms both of national policy and of the local delivery of that policy.

It is in the softer aspects of the organisation and provision of opportunities to return to work, rather than the hard, practical rules which are considered by the House, that the greatest progress will be made. Returning people to work successfully requires constructive and sensitive organisation and the regulations should be drafted in such a way as to achieve some flexibility. I do not think that that flexibility is achieved in the regulations as they stand at present and they overlap with legislation which is yet to come before the House. I trust that the Minister and his departmental colleagues will continue to give careful attention to those matters.

6.26 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): We have had a thoughtful debate, and I commend the effective contributions from both sides of the House, which will form a major part of the on-going debate on the regulations. They will continue to come before the House for a number of years and we shall be able to monitor their effects.

However, I must immediately take issue with the contribution of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). He said it was self-evident that, because the health of the nation is improving, the number of people on invalidity benefit should be falling. If he looks carefully at the research undertaken by the Department of Social Security—

Mr. Duncan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I did not say that. I said that if the health of the nation is improving, it is curious that the number of disabled people appears to be increasing as fast as it is.

Mr. Bradley: I accept the hon. Gentleman's rewording of what I thought he said. Even so, I should be grateful if he would read the research from the Department of Social Security before making such assumptions. DSS statistics and independent research show clearly that the growth in the number of claims is more to do with people spending longer periods on benefit than with an increase in the number of people making claims.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) referred to research conducted by the Policy Studies Institute which shows that demographic trends account for much of that increase. The trends include: an increase in the number of women paying national insurance contributions; an increase in the number of people above pension age; and a gradual increase in the number of people with disabilities, with a significant rise over the period of the increase. In future, I hope that the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton will look at the statistics more carefully before making rather broad-brush assumptions about why the number of claims for benefit has increased.

The regulations give us the opportunity to debate for the first time the new test of incapacity for work and the transitional arrangements. They are crucially important for thousands of people who are disabled and chronically sick and for those who will be so affected after April this year. The provisions are wide-ranging as they apply not only to incapacity benefit, which replaces sickness benefit and invalidity benefit, but to the assessment of incapacity for severe disablement allowance, income support and credit only cases. They range further than merely the assessment for incapacity benefit.

The reasoning behind the new test—to cut the increasing number of claims—has been perceived as a problem only in the case of invalidity benefit and not for the severe disablement allowance and for income support.

This is the first and last time that the House will have the opportunity to debate the details of the new incapacity test before it is implemented. We complained during the passage of the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994 that no definition of the medical test appeared in the Bill, so we could not debate it. Considerable concern was expressed in both Houses about the nature of the test. No details of the new definition were available because consultation and development were being undertaken simultaneously. We did not have the benefit of understanding that process while considering the Bill to implement the test.

It eventually became clear that the test would deal only with functional ability and would not be more wide-ranging. A person's incapacity is reduced to a set of formulas that omits other factors relevant to incapacity, which are used in the formulas for invalidity benefit—age, education, work experience and skills.

The October 1994 consultation document confirmed that the exclusion of relevant factors was a particular concern of many respondents to the February 1994 consultation. Even some members of the expert panel established to advise on development of the test expressed their concern. The test did not enjoy a consensus among all panel members but was the subject of considerable disagreement. That has not been properly explained in the House or elsewhere.

Professors of rehabilitation, for example, were not asked to participate as members of the panel, but expressed their considerable concern about the development of the test. They wrote to *The Times* on 12 April 1994 to express their grave doubts about the way that the matter was handled.

It is nothing short of cruel that people found to be capable of work on functional grounds should be expected to find employment when there is no work for them to do. Regulation 27 acknowledges exceptional circumstances in which someone could fail the functional test but nevertheless be deemed as incapable of work, and is to be welcomed. However, the October consultation document suggested that the provision was made because the evaluation studies revealed that, in some cases,

"the functional assessment was not appropriate".

If Benefits Agency medical service doctors found during clinical examination cases that could not be assessed on functional criteria alone, that must cast doubt

[Mr. Bradley]

on the validity of the test. Despite the BAMS reservations, the Government decided to go ahead with a clearly one-dimensional, functional test. One questions whether the principal rationale is to save money rather than to ensure accurate, proper and wide-ranging assessment of a person's incapacity.

Part III of the regulations, and particularly regulation 24, defines the all-work test as meaning an individual's inability to score a set number of points in the scale of descriptors in the schedule. Unlike the provisions for early assessment of incapacity for a person's own occupation in chapter I, which is applicable for the first 28 weeks, or for exempt work under regulation 17, part III contains no definition of "work" for the all-work test. That reduces someone's capacity to undertake all work to a crude assessment based on the performance of such functions as picking up a 2.5 kg bag of potatoes.

Incidentally, one change might be dubbed the metric meanness test. During consultation, the proposal to assess a person's ability to walk was based on yards, but that was changed to a metric measure, which will make it more difficult for the individual to score points.

Except for the estimated 15 per cent. of claimants who will be treated as incapable of work under regulation 10, most claimants will have to score at least 15 points in a test of physical or mental functions, or at least 10 in a test of mental ability alone. Many organisations throughout the country have expressed great concern about the score targets. We pay tribute to organisations such as the Disability Alliance, the Disablement Income Group, the citizens advice bureaux, MIND, the Multiple Sclerosis Society, the Child Poverty Action Group and many others, which provided a wealth of information that made our debates more effective. They clearly explained the problems that they envisage our constituents will present at our surgeries in future. We welcome the contributions of those organisations.

The arbitrary nature of the 15-point cut-off, with no other factors to be taken into account, means that a score of 13 or 14, while confirming substantial disability, would disqualify a person from incapacity benefit. The closeness of reaching the threshold will not be taken into account. That means that anyone who cannot

"stand for more than 30 minutes before needing to sit down"

and merits a score of seven, and cannot

"raise one arm to his head to put on a hat"

and merits a score of six, and so achieves a total score of 13, will be two points short of being eligible for the benefit.

Crucially, on the mental disability scale there could be people suffering from depression, anxiety or panic attacks who will also fail the test, but who would be unable to sustain the routine of work or travel to work. An individual with a mild or moderate mental health problem must score at least 10 points to qualify for benefit. Someone who frequently

"feels scared or panicky for no obvious reason"

and scores two, is

"scared or anxious that work would bring back or worsen his illness"

and

"too frightened to go out alone"

would score one point on each count, to achieve a total of only four, and not be entitled to incapacity benefit. I urge the Minister to reconsider wider matters.

Mention was made of problems associated with the interface between incapacity benefit and the jobseeker's allowance. We will monitor that carefully when the Bill introducing that allowance is enacted and its implications are clearer. Members on both sides of the House urged the Minister to reconsider the age factor. The passporting of people aged over 58 in the transitional regulations is recognition that age has an impact on a person's ability to undertake work. Age banding or some other mechanism should be used, rather than an arbitrary cut-off age of 58.

The regulations are before the House again because of the original failure to include severe mental illness. Can the Minister give an assurance that the amended regulations are not faulty? I shall give one example. I am sure that the Minister will be able to allay my fears, but on page 7 of the regulations, under the heading "Treating as Capable, Disqualification" it sets out where a person should be treated in that respect as being

"under regulations 10 to 15 or 26".

That is someone who is treated as capable for work. However, section 27 deals with the person's capability for work. I just want to ensure that that is my misreading of the regulations rather than an error.

I would like further assurance from the Minister that he will comply with the comments made by his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott), who said:

"Regulations will, however, be made before the full commencement of the Act."—[*Official Report*, 21 June 1994; Vol. 245, c. 148.]

As the Minister has agreed that there will have to be amendments to the regulations, and that those amendments will have to be affirmative regulations, will he assure us that they will be brought before the House before the Act is implemented, because flowing on from that is the guidance that the Benefits Agency staff and many other advisers throughout the country will require to ensure that the regulations and the benefit are properly administered? We do not want a repeat of the chaos that ensued following the introduction of the Child Support Agency. I urge the Minister to look carefully at the regulations and the guidance to ensure that the training and all the possible eventualities following the introduction of the benefit are properly addressed before the Act is implemented.

The points of concern over the regulations have already been identified. We are concerned that they contain a significant omission—that is, they do not take into account the effects of pain, stiffness, fatigue and the variability of functional limitations in fluctuating, relapsing or variable conditions. We heard examples of that from hon. Members on both sides of the House. I should like assurances that those factors will be properly considered by the Benefits Agency medical services when assessment is undertaken.

We want further assurances about exactly who will be included in the exempt group under regulation 10. A number of chronic conditions listed are described as "severe", but what precisely is severe? For example, what is

"a severe and progress neurological and muscle wasting disease"?

At what point does a person's condition become severe? Will there be provision for people to move from not severe into the severe category? How will that be assessed? What certificates will be required to ensure that that transfer is included?

We would like assurances on the interaction between exempt groups and functional scoring. The dividing line between the two could be quite crucial. If someone falls outside the exempt group, he or she will have to go through the functional scoring test—for example, people with learning disabilities falling outside the "severe" category. The mental disability scale is totally inappropriate, as it involves descriptors, which are compared with someone's mental state at the time when the claim was made, rather than as the condition developed. That does not address the needs of people with learning disabilities who have not acquired a mental health problem. There are other examples of where the change in the circumstances and the functional scoring at the point of the claim is inappropriate, because the condition could have been with that person since birth.

It is important that all Conservative Members are quite clear about what they are voting on and of the effects that it may have on their constituents who eventually come to see them about the legislation. Let me give a concrete example of what effect the legislation will have in practice. It is of a person aged 55 and who been on invalidity benefit for five years. He has chronic emphysema and chronic bronchitis. He has worked as a miner for 30 years and has limited learning and writing skills. His children have grown up and left home, but he continues to live with his wife, who is not in work. Under invalidity benefit today, he would be entitled, with each of the elements, to £109.30 a week. After the uprating in April 1995—to be fair to the Minister—he will receive £111.45.

Let us look at a neighbour who has been through the same experience at work and has had to leave work, perhaps with the same chronic ailments, but has not yet claimed, so will be a new recipient of incapacity benefit. In the first six months, he will receive £52.50 in statutory sick pay. At 28 weeks, if he falls within the exempt group, he will be treated as incapable of work and therefore be entitled to benefit, but at the 28-week stage, his benefit remains at £52.50. Only when he has been incapable of work for a year does his benefit go up, this time to £58.85. He receives no age allowance, as he has become incapable of work after the age of 45. While his neighbour will be getting £111.45, he will get £58.85—a difference of £52.60 per week. Because of the delay in receiving the full rate of benefit, there will be a further loss of £152.40 in the waiting time of 24 weeks.

I want Conservative Members to be absolutely clear that tonight they are voting for a potential difference between the current invalidity benefit of £111.45 and the new rate. Someone who is in exactly the same position, has passed the medical test and so is a "genuine"—to use the term of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton—claimant and recipient of incapacity benefit will receive £52.60 less per week. Conservative Members should not say that we have not told them. We have told them at every stage of the Bill—on Second Reading, Committee, Third Reading, and now on the regulations. That is the sort of case that Conservative Members will see coming through the doors of their advice bureaux. They should not come back to the House and say that we did not tell them.

6.47 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. William Hague): We have had an interesting and varied debate. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have asked me to respond to a number of questions. I will attempt to do that in the time available.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) asked me specifically about amendments to the regulations in future. Both he and I have had a number of discussions about that in recent times. I can tell him, as indeed he is already aware, that a number of amendments, which, I think, we would all want to make, have been identified since the regulations in their first draft were laid at the end of November. He is an extremely perceptive reader of the regulations in that he has spotted one of them—a 26 needs converting to a 27. There are others—very soon, he may be recruited as a civil servant to the Department of Social Security—such as the therapeutic earnings limit needing to be updated from £43 to £44, and so on. There are discussions with the Terrence Higgins Trust about the definition of immune deficiency. We want to ensure that we get these things right. Any such amendments will be laid in good time before the test comes into operation. They will be affirmative and none of them involves any policy change.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) gave a good summary of the case for reform of the current arrangements. He particularly referred to the position of GPs who, of course, for some time have been acting as policemen for the social security system. That can, as he said, undermine the doctor-patient relationship. The future restriction of GP involvement mainly to short-term claims will significantly reduce the burden upon them because they will need to complete many fewer statements of incapacity and the Department will be writing to them for further reports far less often.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) particularly asked whether the questionnaire seeks advice on variable conditions. It contains space for claimants to give information on all the effects of their condition, including pain, stress, fatigue and variability. There is a question in each functional area and at the end it asks claimants whether there is anything that they want to say about pain or stress.

When the Benefits Agency medical services doctor assesses someone for the all-work test, he will take full account of the history and evolution of the medical condition, the effect that it has on daily life and normal tasks over a period of time and the limitations that are imposed by it. The doctor must also justify his choice of descriptors in terms of any variability or fluctuation of those effects and also the effects of pain and fatigue. I can assure my hon. Friend that that point is being emphasised

[Mr. William Hague]

in the training given to doctors. The test will not be a snapshot at a point in time but an assessment of variable conditions over a period.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hague: I shall give way once, but I have many questions to answer, including some from my hon. Friend.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Reverting to the role of general practitioners, will my hon. Friend confirm that it is unacceptable to the Government that GPs should charge claimants fees for their part in the process, that that really is outrageous where it occurs and that the Government regard it as completely inconsistent with the principles of the NHS?

Mr. Hague: General practitioners have to provide such a report free of charge and they have to respond to inquiries from the Department. If additional information is required, it is up to general practitioners whether they wish to impose a charge, but many would not wish to do so. They have to provide the basic information to their patients and to the Department free of charge.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight was particularly concerned about multiple sclerosis. The Benefits Agency medical services doctor will advise adjudication officers on the basis of the report from the patient's doctor. The severity of symptoms and the care and treatment requirements of the person will all be carefully considered by a fully trained doctor who will be considering all the factors that I have described.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) asked about the medical conditions that will confer entitlement. The new all-work test assesses the limiting effect of medical conditions. It does not depend on diagnosis. Some conditions, such as multiple sclerosis, are so severe that it is likely that a sufferer would be exempt from the test.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) pointed to research about the reasons for the growth in the invalidity budget and it was accepted that those reasons are complex. They must concede that, even in the PSI documents quoted, nearly half of the growth could not be accounted for by demographic factors, even taking a loose definition of demographic. Research in the Department and independent research shows that GPs are issuing medical certificates to people who are not sick, or who are at least not too sick to work. It is important that we deal with that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon asked about the savings and referred to a written parliamentary answer that I gave him a few days ago about the change in expenditure that would result from extending the exemption from the test to existing claimants aged 55 and over or aged 50 and over. He quoted my reply accurately when he said that the amount involved would be £15 million if people aged 55 and over were exempted and £45 million in the coming year if people aged 50 and over were exempted. However, as I pointed out at the end of that written answer, the figure would be much higher for subsequent years. By the third year, the figures involved would be £105 million if all those aged 55 and over were exempted, or £210 million if all those aged 50 or over were exempted.

Those are huge sums of money, besides which it would scarcely be fair to new claimants of the benefit to exempt existing claimants on that scale, given the research that I have just quoted that seems to suggest that there are people receiving invalidity benefit who are capable of work.

I ask my hon. Friend to think about the pressures that are imposed on the rest of the social security budget if those sums of money are spent without confidence that they are focused on the people for whom they are intended. I ask him to think about where else we could make reductions of the scale that we are talking about here and that he advocated spending.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) asked about the percentage of existing claimants exempt from the test. He referred a number of times to a figure of one quarter. The figure that I have given of 220,000 people among existing claimants being found incapable of work is nearer to one eighth of the total number who are currently receiving the benefit. About one half are exempt from the new medical test because of the combination, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, of those who are 58 and over and those who fit the other criteria set out in the regulations. It is not possible to come up with local figures from the national figures, but I have published the national figures in the past and can do so again. However, I do not have figures for the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

The hon. Members for Garscadden and for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney expressed concern about people being worried and citizens advice bureaux being inundated with inquiries. We have developed a strategy for advising existing claimants, advisers and the medical profession about the changes. Leaflets have been published and order books include relevant messages. Further steps will also be taken.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) made an important point about the ability for sustained reading. When a Benefits Agency doctor considers vision, he will also take into account the ability to read text on a sustained basis, rather than the ability to read individual letters or words; the ability to scan and focus on areas of text quickly and reliably. I hope that that reassures the hon. Lady.

The hon. Lady also asked about the questionnaire, which I think she said would run into 72 pages. That might scare people, but it is actually 20 pages long. It is clear and easy to complete. It has been put through market research with existing claimants and their comments particularly stress that it was easy to complete. The comments were most positive. Help will be available from specially trained staff for those who need assistance with the questionnaire.

One of the most frightening things about all our debates on these matters is that the Opposition, fully aware that an unreformed invalidity benefit budget would head to about £10,000 million by the end of the century, and knowing that the benefit is not as focused as it should be, still have no alternative policy for dealing with the problem. The House and the nation are left not knowing how the Labour party would respond to that after all the debates that there have been in Committee and on the Floor of the House. After tonight's debate we are none the wiser. The Opposition know the pressure on other social

security programmes if we do not focus on those who need these benefits most. They know the difficulties created for other sectors of Government spending.

In the past few weeks, the Opposition have come to the House several times to vote against raising revenue; last night they came to the House to vote in a way that implied the spending of a great deal more money. They are going to do that again tonight. They oppose what we are suggesting—sensible and timely reforms—without having an alternative to put in the place of those reforms. We would receive more positive proposals, and more of an impression of awareness of the need to act, from the average ostrich than we receive from Opposition Front Benchers. Few things could better illustrate the Labour party's fiscal irresponsibility.

This is a necessary and timely reform. It focuses on the people who need benefit most—

It being Seven o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [27 January].*

The House divided: Ayes 275, Noes 232.

Division No. 62] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cthorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*

Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Cleland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Birm S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Wiltshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mrs. Barbara Roche.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security (Incapacity Benefit) (Transitional) Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security (Incapacity for Work) (General) Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Science Budget

[Relevant documents: The Second Report of Session 1993-94 from the Science and Technology Committee on the Forward Look of Government-Funded Science, Engineering and Technology 1994 (HC 422), the First Report of Session 1994-95 on the Efficiency Unit Scrutiny of Public Sector Research Establishments (HC 19) and European Community Document No. 10564/94, relating to co-ordination of research and development]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

7.12 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. David Hunt): The date 2 February is fast becoming an important day in the science calendar. On this day last year, we debated the orders creating the new research councils. This year, again, we have a welcome opportunity to focus on the Government's science policy. Today we announce a science budget that is a blueprint for the future—£1.3 billion, which will keep Britain in the premier league for research and ensure that British scientists and engineers remain some of the best in the world.

Today also gives me the chance to pay tribute to the work of the Science and Technology Select Committee, under the admirable chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw). The Committee has made a prominent contribution to debate on science policy, not least through its report on "First Forward Look", to which the Government responded earlier this week.

Last November, the Government demonstrated yet again that science and engineering were among our highest priorities when we were able to maintain the science budget at its current record level, despite the pressures on public spending. In allocating that budget now, I plan to build on the principles of the 1993 White Paper "Realising our Potential".

When I became Cabinet Minister with responsibility for science, I said that I wanted to build on the work of my predecessor, who performed such an outstanding job in putting science and engineering at the top of the United Kingdom political agenda. In doing that, we must ensure that we sustain the excellence of our science base, that our intellectual resources are harnessed to improving the country's economic performance and quality of life and that we promote partnership between the science base, industry and Government.

We must also retain our strong commitment to curiosity-driven research. We do not want university departments to become short-term problem-solvers for industry. The science base must concentrate on its proper role, which is the training of highly skilled men and women and research at the frontiers of knowledge, but those frontiers are expanding and we cannot possibly cover everything. We need to focus our efforts on the areas that we judge most likely to bear fruit. That is what the UK's first technology foresight programme is all about. It has provided a unique opportunity for Government, industry and the science base to pool their best people and to ensure that we pull together. Overall, some 10,000 people have had the opportunity to take part. The outcomes of the programme will be published this spring. I believe that they will set a challenging agenda for the future.

We also need to work across national boundaries. We cannot maintain high standards by working in isolation. We are committed to effective international co-operation in appropriate areas. That is why we have worked so hard to ensure that the individual programme lines within the fourth European framework programme reflect British priorities. That is why we worked so hard in negotiations on the large hadron collider at CERN to secure British involvement in the world's leading particle physics experiment and a budgetary framework that reflects our commitment to efficiency and value for money.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): On the point about funding for the LHC, has any progress has been made on shared funding between other European states to enable that project to proceed correctly?

Mr. Hunt: Thanks to the tremendous efforts of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, we were—at last—able to reach a satisfactory conclusion to the negotiations with an effective stand for a much more cost-effective regime, which will save considerable sums of money for the United Kingdom over the next 15 years. It will also mean that there is much more effective participation in an exciting programme that is affordable and can give good value for money.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): The right hon. Gentleman says that he has saved a considerable amount of money. Is that a saving to the Government or will it be redistributed within the science budget?

Mr. Hunt: It is a saving to the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council. Our subscription to CERN is paid through that research council, as is our subscription to the science programme of the European Space Agency. I cannot predict what will happen in future public expenditure rounds, but it is a substantive saving of £5 million a year for 15 years. That will very much strengthen our ability to focus on the right priorities. I cannot predict what the exact global figure will be, but some guideline figures were announced last November. The project will release additional funds in the PPARC budget.

Sir Gerard Vaughan (Reading, East): Will my right hon. Friend expand a little more on what he means by effective participation in the European science scene?

Mr. Hunt: Probably the most effective result of the negotiations is that we know that the project will be completed and will happen. I was delighted with the agreement that was reached. As a result, the UK and other member states will benefit from an overall reduction of some 1 billion Swiss francs in the cost of the project over its lifetime from 1998 to 2008. That is worth some £70 million to UK science.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Has not the considerable delay in reaching agreement on the funding of the CERN project possibly damaged the prospect of involvement from other international concerns in Japan and the United States of America?

Mr. Hunt: I do not think so, although I understand why the hon. Lady puts that point. We have now achieved

[Mr. Hunt]

a much stronger project. It was essential to establish a realistic, fair and sustainable financial and planning framework for the project. Let us not forget that we are talking about a total cost of £1.5 billion. With costs at that level, it would have been irresponsible of the Government to give approval to the LHC without that necessary framework. CERN, like all other institutions that are competing for the limited resources that are available to science, must demonstrate that it is providing the best value for money. To be assured that the LHC would be completed within the resources that are likely to be available, tight cost control was essential.

I expect that the anticipated additional contributions from non-member states will enable the LHC project to be accelerated. The current timetable, however, would still enable world-leading science to be carried out from the year 2004. In many ways, we now have a much stronger project as a result of all that has happened. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology led a trade delegation to CERN and a great deal of progress has been made, especially for British interests, now that the budget has been agreed.

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): Before the right hon. Gentleman leaves the issue of international collaboration, does he agree that the position does not seem quite as rosy for working scientists? I refer, for example, to the integral project led by the astronomy department at Southampton university. Over three or four years of close technical assessment, that project has been developed in collaboration with other countries, and the European Space Agency has agreed that it is a priority project; yet PPARC has been unable to guarantee the funds to enable that international collaboration to continue. Despite the Minister's words, from the working scientists' point of view, it seems that a major opportunity for Britain to contribute to an important international science project may be lost. I fear that the problem faces scientists working in other sectors as well.

Mr. Hunt: We have moved from CERN to the ESA, but we are dealing with subscriptions and with the ability to fund those subscriptions. I shall make an announcement in a moment on making that possible. The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. I know that he is in correspondence with my parliamentary secretary about it. The Government have found the resources to fund a real terms increase in science spending in this financial year, and to maintain it in the next, but budgetary constraints require difficult decisions to be taken all the time on funding priorities.

We already devote considerable resources to astronomy. The astronomy community has no less duty to demonstrate that it is securing best value for money than any other community. Real opportunities exist to make the necessary savings in the ESA, which would improve the balance between domestic and subscription spend. There is every encouragement to ensure that we achieve the best value for money in all these programmes.

Mr. Denham: Is the Minister saying that, if savings in ESA subscriptions can be achieved, money would be recycled back into the programme to enable projects such as the integral project in Southampton to continue?

Mr. Hunt: It is for PPARC to decide how best to deploy the resources available to it. If it decides not to fund UK participation in such an integral project, it will be because it believes that other research opportunities offer better scientific value for money.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that his Department will continue its strongest support for the space agency, which is such an important ingredient in ensuring that British space policy is focused, and that a proper balance exists between science and other commercial programmes that are run in the space community?

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, whose responsibility this is, has heard what my hon. Friend said. I am sure that the agency will work with all the others involved to ensure that we maintain a viable programme. I expect PPARC, in association with the British National Space Centre, to make strenuous efforts to obtain the best possible efficiency savings from the ESA's science budget.

We have demonstrated already that PPARC has benefited to a substantial degree from the excellent deal struck with CERN on the LHC, which will result in those financial savings. It is possible, therefore, to reduce mandatory subscriptions to the ESA by as much as £10 million a year. That gives opportunities to achieve spend at the right level. We must achieve the right balance between the domestic and the subscription spend.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): So that I am absolutely clear on this issue, will the right hon. Gentleman explain whether the Government will top slice international subscriptions from PPARC's budget so that the whole cost does not fall on PPARC, half of whose budget has been taken up with paying those subscriptions? If that happens, will any benefits gained be distributed across the whole sector or will they go back to PPARC?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman has raised an important new point. As I have already explained, our subscription to CERN is paid through PPARC. Taken together with our subscription to the science programme of the European Space Agency, those subscriptions cost some £100 million a year, but they are determined in foreign currency. Modest changes in exchange rates and in the relative economic performance of organisations' member states can have a significant effect on the sterling cost. Of course, the Government's tremendous success in putting Britain on top of the premier league for growth in Europe also has an impact. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to demonstrate one of the consequences of the Government's successful economic policy, but difficulties exist for PPARC.

I am pleased to be able to inform the House that, in announcing the allocation of the science budgets, we have agreed with the chief executives of all the research councils that, where such fluctuations occur, the cost will be taken as a first charge on the scientific budget. In 1995, the cost is estimated at around £8 million, but that will

not fall solely on PPARC. Because of the agreement reached right across research councils, it is taken as a first charge on the science budget.

Mr. Battle: Is the Minister saying that any surplus created as a result of fluctuation is the cost that will be shared but not the initial subscription, which will still be borne by PPARC? Is that correct?

Mr. Hunt: Yes, it is. To make it quite clear, we are talking about the fluctuations which presented such a problem for the research councils, but I hope that we have now dealt adequately with that matter. I congratulate Sir John Cadogan and all those responsible in all the research councils on having reached an agreement that removes the difficulties caused by the fluctuations.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): If costs escalate during the construction phase of the LHC and it is found to be 20 per cent. or 50 per cent. more expensive than currently estimated, what guarantees are there in the agreement that it will not be an extra cost to be taken out of the research councils' budget?

Mr. Hunt: There are some very tight guarantees within the very satisfactory agreement. I have all the details here but, rather than taking up further time, I am happy to supply them to the hon. Gentleman later.

Let me put it around the other way. There are prospects for other countries to contribute to the LHC project. I look forward to key non-member states, especially the United States, Japan and Canada, participating scientifically and financially in the LHC project because I feel that they have much to offer. The agreement reached provides the best possible incentives to those nations to join the LHC project. CERN member states have made a clear commitment to build the LHC and any non-member states' contributions will be used to accelerate and enhance the project. I understand that CERN management has already initiated discussions with potential partners, and the United Kingdom remains ready and willing to offer every possible assistance. I understand that the prospects are encouraging, and I greatly welcome that.

I have today provided a written statement on the overall allocation of the science budget for 1995-96.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): While my right hon. Friend is talking about particle physics, may I remind him that molecular chemistry is also very important? The Royal Society of Chemistry is concerned that, as large sums of money are spent on expensive physics experiments, some of the more basic needs of chemistry departments in universities are ignored. Will he assure the House and the Royal Society of Chemistry that he has taken ncte of those needs?

Mr. Hunt: I have had a fascinating time visiting key chemistry departments across the country. I visited a number of those operating at the leading edge of chemistry and I hope that they will take from today's announcement a clear message that we are committed to maintaining our leading edge in chemistry.

In the past week, I managed to visit Imperial college and—I have to think carefully about where I was every day of the week—on Monday I was in Sheffield. Last week I was in Warwick, and I have also been to Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Loughborough and Durham. I have found it fascinating that the original divide between chemistry, physics and biology is fast becoming flexible. We have to capture the imagination of the moment when looking ahead, and to some extent the old disciplines are becoming increasingly out of date. Although they are important in certain material respects, we have to raise our sights, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr Clark) said, to highlight the important of key areas. I hope that when my hon. Friend has a chance to read the booklet that deals with the science budget, a copy of which I have placed in the Library and which is also available on Internet through the CCTA Government information service, he will appreciate the priority that we attach to science.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): My right hon. Friend mentioned the CCTA, which has just established its new headquarters in my constituency. While he is touring the country, will he visit CCTA in Norwich before too long, and the university of East Anglia, which is doing excellent science research?

Mr. Hunt: I shall be in Norwich next Friday on my tour of the United Kingdom. I am primarily going to look at the work of the John Innes centre which is doing pioneering work. I must talk to my hon. Friend about visiting CCTA, which was opened by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, and about seeing the interesting work being done by the university of East Anglia.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I have also been able to make a visit, but to somewhere even more exotic than Norwich. I visited the Faraday base in the Antarctic last week. The base is due to close in 1995-96. What guarantee can the Chancellor give that the very valuable research into the ozone layer will not be lost when it closes? When was the decision taken to hand over the Faraday base to the Ukraine?

Mr. Hunt: I hope that when the hon. Gentleman was on the Faraday base, he was able to talk to the British Antarctic Survey, because it decided to close the base. He can obtain all the information that he needs from the BAS.

Mr. Banks: Indeed, but I was talking to the scientists based there. I think that there might be a divergence of opinion between the BAS in Cambridge and the scientists on the Faraday base. I understand that the Chancellor is not able to answer my question now, but will he perhaps consider it and let me have a response so that I can pass on the information?

Mr. Hunt: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has chosen to come to the House in the course of his world tour. If he has a little more time, I would be happy to see him and hear his report from the front line.

Let me recap. We have now made available £1,281.675 million for distribution. That very high figure demonstrates the priority that the Government attach to science, but that priority can never be taken for granted. There are always other deserving calls on public expenditure, so we have to use whatever funding we have to the best possible effect.

I am delighted to have Sir John Cadogan, the first Director General of the Research Councils, to advise me. He has carried out a detailed review of research council activities. He of course wanted to hear a wide range of opinion, to hear the voice of scientists at the bench and the voice of the user community, so he visited a total of

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76 scientific groups in receipt of research council funding. Users' views were explored in a series of informal discussions, and Sir John has also had meetings with the chief executives of the research councils, who are themselves highly eminent scientists. In total, he listened personally to the views of around 300 people, as well as being a member of the foresight steering group.

The White Paper anticipated that the director general would be aided by a small advisory group, a sort of inner circle. I believe that my predecessor, now the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, shared the view that that was perhaps not the best way forward. Sir John has demonstrated that we can improve on my right hon. Friend's prediction. He has created not an inner circle but an open circle, into which people from right across industry and the science base have been able to feed their views. Sir John has also worked with the chief executives to establish a set of high-priority initiatives, for which I am pleased to announce that we have been able to make available £67 million from the science budget. Those programmes will be targeted on three main areas.

Sir Gerard Vaughan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that he has effectively answered the recent criticism in the *New Scientist* about the openness of the consultation and what Sir John has been doing?

Mr. Hunt: Indeed, there has been some misunderstanding. I did my best to clear it up when I was giving evidence in another place. My effective answer is, as my hon. Friend says, the immense amount of work that Sir John has done in consulting such a wide group of people.

The three main areas—

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hunt: I shall first tell the House that the three main areas identified as targets for the programmes are support for interaction with industry, the maintenance of top-class people, and strategic and underpinning science. I shall go through each in turn, but first I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Bray: The document outlining the allocation of the science budget is similar to what has appeared in previous years, but any account of the process is missing. The right hon. Gentleman has just outlined what Sir John has being doing and I am sure that it has been very thorough, but there is no public record of it. In particular, there is no advice from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils. Would it not make much more sense if we had a public record of that consultative process? For example, do the priority initiatives, which were allocated some 5 per cent. of the science budget—not a large percentage—represent initiatives that the research councils would not have taken, but were, in some way, imposed by the right hon. Gentleman on the advice of Sir John, or do they represent shifts from some consensus process? Research councils are bodies with their own royal charters, they have a statutory basis and they are bound to report. What is their advice and what is the advice of the advisers to the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Hunt: I was not in post when the decision to abolish the ABRC was taken, although I strongly supported it. As I understood, it was supported by the former Labour spokesperson, the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), who said that the Labour party happily acknowledged that the ABRC needed to be abolished. Having made that decision, the White Paper then trailed the notion that there should be an inner circle.

Dr. Bray *rose—*

Mr. Hunt: I would answer the hon. Gentleman's point if he could contain himself. We moved on to the process which I have outlined. The public record of that will be found in the work of the research councils. They have discussed with Sir John the way in which they saw their priorities. Of course, it will also be revealed in the work of the technology foresight panels. I make it clear that I intend to publish the reports of the 15 panels, which contain work on identifying key priority areas. That has been a tremendous exercise in consultation and I undertake that those reports will be published. They will give hon. Members the opportunity to see processes through which we have been able to identify priorities.

We fed the emerging conclusions from the technology foresight panels into the consideration, too. The private discussions between Sir John Cadogan and the scientists in the laboratory are not a matter of public record. However, in a debate of this nature, I am happy for the hon. Gentleman to ask questions and we will do our best to answer them. The great strength in the science, engineering and technology base lies in consensus and extensive consultation; we just need to build on that.

Dr. Bray: There may be greater agreement, but there cannot be consensus unless the views of other people are clearly stated. Although I do not know the precise source of the Opposition statement to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, it was nevertheless the Government who combined the roles of the two advisory bodies in a single council. The right hon. Gentleman has not dispensed with the advisory council altogether. What is that council's role in the allocation?

Mr. Hunt: The Director General of Research Councils advises me on overall priorities for the best application of the science budget. In reaching his conclusions, he does many things. Perhaps the most important work that he does is to consult with the research councils. He has been conducting a review of research council activity, and his report of the review will be included in the forward look document, which we shall publish in May. His report will then be available for debate and discussion.

The priority initiatives, I am advised, are, in the main, those of the individual research councils. I understand that, last year, the 5 per cent. figure, to which I referred, was 1 per cent., so there has been a substantial increase. That means, as the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) said, that 95 per cent. of the budget is still very much linked to the research councils decision-making process. The initiatives have been allocated money, but the decisions on who won support on which projects were supported were still a matter for the research councils.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Would not it have been much more useful to hon. Members if the research councils' advice to Sir John Cadogan, on which today's decisions

are based, had been published before the debate, instead of our having to wait until May when the decisions will have been enacted?

Mr. Hunt: I do not want to mislead the hon. Gentleman. I was talking about the Director General of Research Councils' review of research council activity, on which he will report later this year. The hon. Gentleman is referring to the internal advice that I receive as Cabinet Minister responsible for science, to which I pay attention and which, of course, has never been published. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that I am explaining, as best I can, the detailed process behind Sir John giving me his advice.

Mr. Alan W. Williams *rose—*

Mr. Hunt: I am talking about the internal advice, which has never been published. The internal advice comes to the chief scientific adviser, Sir William Stewart, and me. We deliberate on it and reach our decisions. Our decision is based on conclusions from several sources, including those from the technology foresight panels and their final report will be published. Consultations are conducted in the research councils, in which Sir John is of course involved. The way in which research councils view their priorities will be published in their reports, and there is a range of considerations in the Director General's review of research councils. He will make his report available to me and I shall publish it in the "Forward Look" document.

There are a number of different aspects to consider. I think that the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) was referring to the internal advice, which, of course, as Ministers know, is not published.

Dr. Bray: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hunt: I should like to make a little progress, or Madam Deputy Speaker will disapprove of the length of my speech.

The first of the three themes to which I have referred, interaction with industry, means not getting the science base to do industry's work for it but working to ensure that the science base and industry have a better idea of each other's strengths and needs and determine where co-operation may be to their mutual advantage.

My top priority is to build on our tremendous response to the scheme initiated by my predecessor known as the ROPAs—the "Realising our Potential" awards. Under that scheme, 239 projects have been funded by three research councils. I am pleased to announce that the ROPA scheme will be extended to cover all the research councils. I have decided to allocate additional funding of almost £15 million in the next financial year, implying a full-year spend of £35 million.

Let me remind hon. Members briefly of how the scheme works. Our premise is that industry has already identified many good researchers in the science base and is funding them to carry out basic or strategic research. Researchers in receipt of appropriate funding from industry can apply for a ROPA if they would like to pursue original research completely of their own choosing—true curiosity-driven research.

"Realising our Potential" awards are not subject to conventional peer review, but proposals must be practical and original. Such awards will not replace the traditional grant award, but should serve to refresh the parts the peer review system sometimes fails to reach.

The LINK scheme is altogether different. It provides an excellent framework for jointly funded research between the public and private sectors. To date, more than 550 projects worth nearly £300 million have been supported, many of which have led to new products being marketed by United Kingdom companies.

The LINK scheme will be an important vehicle for implementing the foresight outcomes and I am therefore setting aside £3 million to stimulate new programmes in priority areas. Contributions from LINK partners should result overall in an additional £12 million being spent on new programmes in 1995-96.

The second theme is support of top-class people, which is another clear priority. We announced an expansion last year of the Royal Society's prestigious university research fellowship scheme from 200 to 240 places, and we shall expand that scheme still further to 255 appointments.

The Royal Society also plans to launch a pilot fellowship scheme for top-class younger scientists who are trying to get on to the research career ladder. I am delighted to announce additional Government support for those fellowships, which will be known as the Dorothy Hodgkin fellowships. They will be targeted at scientists who have just completed their PhDs.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I am sure that those schemes are very laudable and I am pleased that the Government recognise the importance of encouraging top-class scientists and attracting more good people into science, but is not the Chancellor concerned about the general poor career prospects for Government scientists and, in particular, the large increase in the number of workers on short-term contracts and the low salaries of Government-funded scientists?

The Chancellor recently took credit for several people returning from abroad to work in this country, but they have done so largely as a result of work by charities such as the Wellcome Trust, which have identified the problem and have attempted to provide better career structures for research scientists? Should not the Chancellor be considering the matter to discover whether such schemes could be introduced into the generality of Government-funded science in this country?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Lady is right. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and I visited the Wellcome Foundation, we met several scientists who had been attracted back—in a brain-gain dimension—to the United Kingdom to work here as a result of a combination of factors. We discussed those factors with the scientists.

The factors included issues such as a free enterprise society, a society that takes scientists seriously and a society in which scientists can work among the best in the world. I vividly recall a series of reasons. Quite often, scientists had taken a drop in earnings to work among the best in the world. They explained that money was not a consideration because they were forgoing money. They could perhaps earn more money elsewhere, but they wanted to work beside the best in the world. That carries with it an obligation on all of us who are involved with

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the science base to ensure that there is adequate remuneration for the people involved in leading-edge research.

I have been considering ways in which we can improve the situation and I will refer to them in a moment. However, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) should be aware that remuneration and contracts are matters for the research councils, which take the decisions that they believe result in the best targeting of resources.

When I visited the laboratories, I found that there was much concern about the £400 grant for laboratory equipment. I am therefore pleased to announce that I shall increase that by 50 per cent. so that £600 will be available. I will consider how I can help to get money through to the laboratories and to the people who need the money to purchase equipment.

Remuneration is a matter for the research councils. Of course we give guidance, but ultimately remuneration is a matter for the research councils.

I hope that the Dorothy Hodgkin fellowships will assist scientists who have just completed their PhDs. I recall that "The Rising Tide" report showed that that was a point at which women tended to drop out of science. By targeting the fellowships, I hope that we can find ways of enabling women to continue in science so that they have real equality of opportunity with men in the science world. The hon. Member for Selly Oak may be aware that I have asked Lynda Sharp to head a special unit in the Office of Science and Technology to ensure that we have a broad cross-section of women and men giving their talents to science.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Hunt: I would like to make a little more progress. I have been speaking for nearly 45 minutes and I have a few more points to cover.

I am pleased to announce funding to enable the Royal Academy of Engineering to introduce a programme of secondments to industry for academic engineers. Greater interaction between our universities and industry is just as important for engineers as it is for pure scientists. I look forward to real benefits deriving from that programme.

The third theme is basic and strategic science. Last year, we announced additional support for chemistry. I am now extending support to mainstream physics, mathematics and medicine. I will be launching a pilot programme to provide, through three of the research councils, additional funding to universities for equipment to match funding from industrial partners. As I have already said, I intend to increase the research training support grant from £400 to £600 a year for 11,000 students. That includes the increase in grant from £75 to £125 for social science and economics students.

We have identified several areas where additional support for first-class strategic science should make us better placed to respond to new opportunities. Details of that are set out in the allocations booklet. However, I would like to give the House a flavour of some of the work that we are supporting because I believe that it is work that will make a real contribution to wealth creation and the quality of life and a real difference to our lives and to the lives of our children.

I am allocating additional funding to the Medical and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Councils for the genome initiative. They are doing ground-breaking work, which will result in a comprehensive understanding of our genetic make-up, which in turn will provide the platform for a step-change in the quality of diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease as we move into the 21st century. The gene responsible for cystic fibrosis has already been identified, and new treatments are being pursued in Edinburgh and at the Royal Brompton hospital.

The Medical Research Council has developed an effective partnership with the Wellcome Trust. Individually, these organisations have a very strong track record, but together they make an even bigger impact. I was delighted to hear a few moments ago that, following my announcement earlier today, the Wellcome Trust is planning to increase its own commitment to genome research.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and I recently visited the Wellcome Trust to meet a number of the top medical scientists who have been attracted to work in this country by our outstanding reputation for medical research. We have also visited the Institute of Psychiatry, which is attached to the Maudsley hospital in south London and which was voted by its peers in a survey last year to be the best of its kind in the world.

My right hon. Friend and I are absolutely committed to maintaining the highest possible standards in medical research, and to ensuring that the results feed effectively into day-to-day practice in the national health service.

The NHS R and D strategy is the first of its kind in the world. The Cochrane Centre, which performs systematic reviews of health research, was highly praised this week in the report by the Health Select Committee. My right hon. Friend has announced that she will implement the key recommendations of the Culyer report, which will place the funding of medical research in this country on a secure and stable footing for the future.

Medicine is advancing at lightning speed. It is vital that the NHS keeps up with the pace and that the treatment it provides is as effective as possible, based on the most up-to-date knowledge. Our policies are working successfully towards that objective as well as boosting the UK's deserved international reputation in this field.

I intend to provide additional funds for the Natural Environment Research Council's work in environmental diagnostics. This will enable the council to carry out further comprehensive environmental audits, and help to develop sustainable business strategies for waste management in manufacturing industry in close co-operation with users and the regulators. That will bring benefits for business and local people.

We are putting additional money into the work of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council on producing industrial materials from plants. That will meet with approval from my hon. Friends.

I have, of course, been necessarily selective. Indeed, there was much more that I wanted to say, but I wanted to follow the practice of giving way to interventions. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] I am being tempted to continue, but I will not. I want to hear what other hon. Members have to say.

We are supporting tremendous leading-edge developments, with huge potential benefits for all of us. I want that to be more widely understood. We must encourage appreciation of the contribution of science and engineering to our economic and social well-being.

I am therefore very pleased to be able to announce an increase in the central public understanding of the science budget. Thanks in large part to the work of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, the first national science week last spring was a huge success, and I intend to make it an annual event. This year's science week will run from 17 to 26 March. I remind hon. Members that they have until only next Monday to suggest experiments, for which my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has volunteered to be a human guinea-pig. May I express the hope that all hon. Members will make a particular effort to support events taking place in their constituencies?

The Government are willing to devote substantial funds in support of our excellent scientists and engineers. We are determined to do so in ways deliberately designed to bring good returns to the economy and people of the United Kingdom. That is the philosophy underlying the allocation of the science budget, which I commend to the House.

8.4 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I am pleased to be able to take part in this short debate and I shall try to keep my remarks brief, as I know that a number of hon. Members want to contribute.

Many people who work in technology, science and engineering will be pleased that this debate is taking place at all. We can discuss the science budget which the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has announced, but also the direction which policy in this area should be taking.

The debate is important because science is not always at the centre of our political debates. It is an issue which tends to intimidate people and put them off. It can sometimes get pushed to the sidelines, because many of us do not have the scientific grounding that might be necessary to participate in such a debate. I absolve all my hon. Friends who are in the Chamber this evening from that charge, but some of us who are lay persons may feel that, on occasion, jargon can dominate these debates.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Will the hon. Lady confirm that science has not always been at the centre of debates within the Labour party? Did not the Labour party propose at the last general election that the science Minister should be demoted from Cabinet rank?

Mrs. Taylor: I am sorry that the hon. Lady has chosen to intervene right at the beginning of my speech on such a note. I must perhaps give my age away by saying that I first became interested in politics at school in the early 1960s when, with a general election pending, Harold Wilson excited many people with talk of the "white heat" of the technological revolution.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South) *rose—*

Mrs. Taylor: I do not want to labour this point, as I want to be brief. All of us have the responsibility for generating not only interest in science, but some hope for the future. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) has chosen to try to make this a partisan issue, as that was not the spirit in which the Minister spoke.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Taylor: I will, but then I must move on.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Lady may be interested to know that I, too, recall the days of the 1960s, when both my parents were research scientists. Many of those scientists of the 1960s and 1970s remember the extent to which the promises of the white heat of the technological revolution were so badly betrayed by every Labour Government.

Mrs. Taylor: I shall give the hon. Gentleman an example later which will show that many opportunities which were taken up under previous Labour Governments have been missed recently. Government assistance to industry was very productive under Labour Governments, and that is something of which we can be proud. As someone who has spent many years studying or teaching economic history, I have no doubt of the importance to our future of investment in science, technology and engineering.

The Chancellor of the Duchy mentioned economic development and medical research, and he also referred to the vital area—which I think still does not get sufficient attention—of environmental protection, which does affect the quality of life for us all. We all have the responsibility to make sure that decisions in this area are made on a long-term basis, so that we get the full benefit of all the decisions that we are talking about this evening.

We must emphasise the need to get away from the short-termism that has dogged so much of British politics, and the British economy, in recent years. While there was much in what the Chancellor said with which I agreed and welcomed, there is something of that short-termism that is endemic to the Government's attitude to science. The right hon. Gentleman, who wants to look ahead, must be wary of that.

The Chancellor gave us some details—great detail in some areas—about the proposals for the science budget that he announced today. There may be other questions, such as whether the factor for inflation is as high as it should be, but I welcome some of the questions that he mentioned.

For example, the Chancellor referred to the improvement in spending on environmental diagnostics, which I very much welcome. It is important, however, that research in that area should not merely focus on waste management, but on a range of environmental protection issues that will be important as a way of improving the quality of our environment and will have important economic benefits. The amount of environmental regulation will intensify, at a European and an international level, and the countries that get ahead with monitoring equipment and technological development in that field will have significant markets on which to draw, and there could be some important economic benefits. I welcome some aspects of the Minister's proposals.

The hon. Member for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan) and some of my hon. Friends mentioned the report in today's issue of the *New Scientist* headed, "Former science adviser slams secret carve-up". In his answer, the

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Minister did not take the charges as seriously as he should. They were the comments of someone who served as the chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils for 11 years, who was close to decision making and who knew the pressures on Ministers and what had been promised, for example, in the 1993 White Paper.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is responsible for science policy and for open government. He has a responsibility to consult and I agree with what he said about consulting a wider circle than the inner circle, but he has to be seen to be making his decisions as openly as possible. I trust that, when he has been in the job longer and is not bound by decisions made some time ago, his responsibilities as a science Minister will not conflict with his responsibilities as the Minister for open government. It is important that we establish the principle that there should be as much openness as possible.

On the specifics of the science budget, the Minister outlined the ways in which the departmental budget has been increased this year. He should not adopt such a blinkered attitude, or regard the science budget as simply the budget that goes through his Department. I understand that he cannot say so publicly this evening, but I hope that he shares my concern about the fact that, while his departmental science budget has increased, albeit temporarily, the total of the science budgets in all Government Departments has decreased, which is causing much concern.

I could go into detail and give the figures for the Department of Trade and Industry, or state what has happened to the research and development budget in defence—the fact that no one is taking up the opportunities that exist for defence diversification. Before the Minister boasts too much about his departmental successes, he should consider what has happened to science budgets overall.

I do not want to spend the whole evening bandying about figures that relate to the Chancellor's announcement. I hope that he will acknowledge what his Cabinet Office press release said at the end of November. It made it clear that the science budget for 1994-95 has increased by 1.9 per cent., but that it will be frozen in cash terms next year and that, between 1994-95 and 1997-98, his departmental science budget will decrease by 1.1 per cent. I am sure that the Minister will understand that any welcome with which we greet the fact that his departmental budget has increased this year must be muted because we know what is in the pipeline.

I hope that the Minister will share my concern about the figures published by the Royal Society of Chemistry. As has been said, it produced an effective briefing for the debate. Its figures show that research and development expenditure in the United Kingdom has declined in the past five years and that Government spending on research and development has declined as a proportion of all that spending. The figures in "The Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology 1994" look show that the Government provided £5 billion out of £11 billion spent on research and development in 1985-86, but the figure was down to £4.3 billion out of £12.2 billion in 1992-93. I do not for one moment say that all research and development should be Government-funded, but that is a worrying trend and one that the Minister glossed over.

Although we welcome aspects of the Minister's statement, such as the fact that his departmental budget has improved this year, it is not good enough to look at one narrow departmental budget alone. We must consider the Government's attitude across all Departments. Ministers and Departments are clearly pulling in different directions. Also, the chopping and changing is worrying to all people involved in scientific research and development. The fact that the Minister's budget is increasing this year, but will be frozen next and then reduced is sending the wrong signals to those involved in scientific investigation.

An obsession with market forces or market-based research should not blinker the Government, when it comes to investing in this country's future. The Minister mentioned his discussions with scientists—as he toured research laboratories—about the free enterprise society. Many other countries regard themselves as free-enterprise models, but they do not ignore or marginalise the critical importance of Government investment. They regard Government spending in that field not simply as expenditure, but as investment in the future. That thinking is essential as part of the longer-term perspective. Even the Minister's figures in the forward look prove the need to think in that way.

I mentioned short-termism, which is a major problem that should concern all of us. Short-term funding, whether by Government, industry or in universities, can threaten and lead to the break-up of research teams. We have witnessed much uncertainty, and university programmes have been cut. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) mentioned one important problem at university level—the rapid and incredible growth in the number of short-term contracts, which should worry hon. Members on both sides of the House. That feature is very worrying. Ten years ago, 11,000 people were on short-term contracts, recently the figure was 22,000 and it is growing all the time. Clearly, that is no good for the staff concerned. It worries them greatly. Nor can it be good if research projects and those working on them are under a cloud as regards future funding. The Minister could have dealt with those difficulties in his speech this evening.

Short termism has jeopardised the benefit to the British economy of British inventions. We could all give long lists of items, such as liquid crystal displays, developed in Britain but manufactured abroad so that the benefits have gone to other countries. Another item that was mentioned is transputers. The advanced microprocessor chip, which was developed by a British company, INMOS, is a good example of co-operation between Government and industry. Some of us remember that INMOS was supported by the last Labour Government through the National Enterprise Board. The Conservative Government sold INMOS to Thorn EMI, which quickly sold it on to a French-Italian group. That was clearly a missed chance for Britain and it did us a great deal of harm.

However, that is in the past. The serious point is that this country is still missing opportunities for the future, particularly in terms of potential for developing information super highways. Those present enormous opportunities for Britain in terms of potential for educational programmes, which would give our children access to information and new experiences in education that were never dreamed of in our youth. The

development of information super-highways would also bring enormous economic development and benefits, were Britain to get ahead.

Britain possesses some fantastic advantages. We have some of the world's leading talents in television and film production, and outstanding talents in educational publishing and writing, animation and computer games programming. Wonderful opportunities exist, not least because 80 per cent. of electronic information stored in the world is in English. We have hardware and software industries; we are a small island that could easily be cabled; and our private sector is eager to invest. So what is holding us back?

The report of the all-party Department of Trade and Industry Select Committee said:

"There is concern that government policies could be hindering or not sufficiently encouraging the development of the most advanced infrastructure and services, and that this could result in the UK falling behind other countries, with damaging consequences."

The danger is that, instead of grasping the opportunity to become the world's leader with all the consequential economic and educational benefits, unless the Government change their policy, Britain will fall further behind. The Minister has shown that he takes those matters seriously. I hope that he will lobby and talk to his right hon. Friends to get a change of direction in some crucial areas.

We also need a change of direction on post-16 qualifications in education. The number of young people taking science A-levels has decreased, yet more people than ever are taking and succeeding at GCSE. We must reform A-levels and have a broader educational base post-16, as other countries do. If we moved in that direction, it would strengthen our educational base and scientific awareness. In the long term, that would benefit everyone.

I should have liked to raise many more points. I hope that the Chancellor accepts that the temporary increase in his science budget, welcome though it is, should not allow him to become complacent. He still has much work to do, especially to counter the problems in so many areas and other Departments. I hope that he will take on board in particular the points that I have made about information super-highways and the need for change in education.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before I call the next hon. Member to speak, may I point out that there is a great deal of interest in this short debate. I therefore make a plea for short speeches.

8.26 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): In that case, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall get rid of my first page for a start.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, not only on how he handled the introduction to the debate, giving way with such generosity that little time is available for the rest of us, but on the fact that he has achieved, in an extremely difficult year, an increase—albeit modest—in the science budget.

We must restrain ourselves from believing that we are discussing the tenth year of a long-term plan for science and development. Sadly, that is not the case. We are in the early stages of a significant shift in how we organise, handle, fund and distribute a new sense of direction for science and investment. We are all committed to the general objective of raising our total investment in science and technology to ensure our competitive place in the world. The Select Committee and the House agree that the long-term future for UK plc depends on that, so anything that my right hon. Friend can do to increase the commitment, even if his Department has been unable to break free from the problems of public expenditure restraints, should be welcomed. What we are and must remain concerned about is the long-term directions which the Government have planned through the active work in my right hon. Friend's Department.

On the specific proposals, I shall leave on one side the flak which Lord Phillips raised on the consultative process. The hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr Bray) is heavily engaged in that matter.

On distribution, I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend has secured an increase of £14.95 million for the competitive scheme under the ROPA initiative. That is particularly welcome because, as my right hon. Friend said, it helps to improve interaction with industry, which must be right. The shorter time span between scientific research and innovative technology in any of the industrial sectors contacted must be welcomed. I trust that that increase means that many more researchers will qualify to be funded for strategic research in industry, which will help to alleviate some of the anxieties expressed by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor).

I am particularly glad to note that, in the section entitled

"Enhancement and Underpinning of Strategic Science",

the Medical Research Council is to be awarded an additional £4 million for research into the genome project. The Select Committee is currently engaged in that issue, and this is a suitable time for my right hon. Friend to decide that that vital international research should have a boost in funding.

I welcome, too, the additional funding for the bio-processing industries, which, as far as I can understand them—it is a complicated industrial activity—are at the leading edge of international competitiveness. They have been Cinderellas in their part of the industry. I am glad to see that that has been acknowledged and that they, too, are receiving a further increase.

It is clear that the increased amount available from a lower-than-forecast inflation factor have, by and large, benefited all the research councils in some way. Equally, I am absolutely clear that although research councils' chief executives have had the good grace to welcome the modest addition, the total expenditure must be of concern to the House.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury mentioned science spending by other Departments. The core role of the Office of Science and Technology is to re-organise the mission, composition and chairmanship of the research councils. In the barely 12 months in which that has been done, it has achieved a major breakthrough in the structural organisation of science. "Realising our Potential", the White Paper on which all those initiatives are based, made it clear that science funding should be largely directed to projects that

"improve our national competitiveness and the quality of life."

That means science funding throughout and beyond Government into industry and the world at large. I am anxious that the direction of OST policy in helping that

[Sir Giles Shaw]

enormous objective to go forward must include more influence on departmental budgets and how they enter the Government's priority.

I suspect that we shall battle it out when we come to the first technology recommendations that my right hon. Friend said would be introduced in due course from the 15 panels. If the four sites initiative means anything, it must mean that there should emerge from the assessment an agreed national series of objectives that should lead to the prioritising of scientific endeavour and, thus, scientific expenditure. I hope that my right hon. Friend will have that firmly in his eye. When we discuss total scientific objectives, we must mean a complete science base—Government, all Departments, industry, the Confederation of British Industry and other organisations. The engineers are always active in such matters and I am sure that Sir William Barlow will be glad to hear of the small amounts that my right hon. Friend has been able to offer today. That is where the crunch will come.

I hope that later in the year we shall have more time than is available now. As I recall, the Select Committee's report, "The Forward Look of Government-Funded Science, Engineering and Technology 1994" recommended that we should have an annual debate. I am happy to say that my right hon. Friend has now responded to the report and it looks as though he is prepared to use what he encouragingly describes as his best endeavours. I wish to see my right hon. Friend's best endeavours deliver a full debate on science when the "Forward Look" report is published in May.

I welcome the initiatives taking place in the research councils to ensure that industry's views are represented on the councils, which must be helpful. That is one reason why we are keen to know how the priorities in the council budgets were chosen. We must also encourage the initiative manufacturing programme which was launched in July 1944 and the ROPAs—"Realising our Potential" awards—to which my right hon. Friend referred.

I shall skip much of the next two pages of my speech and mention one or two other aspects of general science. One of the problems touched on in the exchange of questions on the LHC was the issue of attribution and European Union funding. Although the exercise conducted on the LHC was to discover how to recover our money from fluctuation, the Select Committees of both Houses have criticised the practice of attribution of European Union receipts to domestic budgets.

The Parliamentary Secretary may not be able to comment on that subject today, but it is worth further examination by the OST. The Department appears to show that receipts from the EU are, in some cases, attributed to the science budget, which is consequently adjusted so that overall spending remains as planned. We cannot welcome that as an old Chinese custom continuing when talking about the new priorities that we attach to science. I think that in the current year, £12.5 million of such provision comes from the EU, although the future year's figure is slightly lower. If he has the time, the Parliamentary Secretary might say how much EU money is generally additional to the science budget. In its first report the Select Committee commented on that.

The efficiency unit scrutiny has also exercised the Select Committee recently. The Government have set in place measures to encourage the science base in the desired direction, while leaving research councils the autonomy to determine how to spend the funds allocated to them. That is welcome, but the inclusion of research council institutes in the recent efficiency scrutiny of public sector research establishments was regrettable. Such institutes are funded by research councils because they perceive a need for them—it is not for the Government to try and second-guess those directly involved. There has been some duplication and it is no doubt wise to try to restrict it. But if there is a desire to avoid duplication at all costs, research councils should have their entrepreneurial instincts restrained rather than encouraged.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has agreed to respond to many of the recommendations in the Select Committee's report. I hope that my right hon. Friend will feel that it is consistent with our view that there should be a comprehensive statement of all the scientific investments being made and all the scientific endeavours to match the investment. We require plenty of information. We look forward to the time when the Office of Science and Technology fulfils the Select Committee's long-term objective to become the Government Department for all science, however funded.

I am glad that the Government will keep under consideration the extent to which additional information on university research should also be included in the "Forward Look". In the section on my right hon. Friend's response, dealing with the reduction in Government spending on civil research and development, the Department states that the fall of expenditure on civil research and development is largely due to the fast breeder research being wound down. I am not certain that that equates entirely with the position of the advanced technology programme in the Department of Trade and Industry. I suspect that changes in that are not adequately matched by the receipts from the DTI's launch aid initiative. I should be grateful to receive any information on that.

I note that the Government agree with the Select Committee's view on the development of output measures, the effectiveness of research and development and the co-ordinating role of the OST as the effective guardian of the Government's science policy. We anticipate seeing that role positively developing in the "Forward Look" report due out in May. I believe that the Select Committee will welcome a wide range of agreement with the recommendations in our report.

The main theme, which no debate on science and technology can avoid, is that it is essential that we lift the total national investment in the nation's science base and the nation's competitive technology. The OST is to be congratulated on the efforts that it has made in a relatively short time to start gathering in all the structural information necessary to lay the foundations for future development. The Department is becoming, not only an important custodian, but a generator of our science expenditure and the way in which it should be spent—although I accept that that is primarily related to Government expenditure. Ways must be found to broaden the initiative and I welcome anything that the Department can do to stimulate, if not to be responsible for, new scientific endeavour on a larger scale.

The new-look research councils are flourishing. They are now able to make recommendations to the OST. Sir John has done admirable work in trying to co-ordinate

that policy in a way that leads to effective leadership. The "Forward Look" and technology foresight will develop in the future.

The Department has to take the lead in the promotion of science and technology to the public. Clearly, the Department for Education has now accepted that science has a significant role to play in the curriculum, which is beginning to make its mark in our schools. But universities, industry and industrial associations should recognise that they must play their part in lifting the national level of knowledge so that, in time, we may reap the reward of improved technology and improved competitiveness in all the markets of the world.

8.38 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I am grateful for the chance to make a few remarks on today's debate on science. While preparing for the debate I read the briefing from the Royal Society of Chemistry—I was at one time a chemist. It gave a sobering account of the feeling in chemistry laboratories in our universities and institutes of higher education, particularly among the staff. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) earlier mentioned the number of short-term contracts. The lecturers at higher education institutes on short-term contracts have doubled in number in the past 10 years—from 11,500 to 21,500.

The briefing also mentioned the structure of buildings. Many chemistry laboratories were built in the 1960s, when universities were expanding and new universities were being built. The fabric of many of those buildings is in disrepair and needs refurbishment. The numbers in higher education have expanded enormously in the past 10 years, for which I pay tribute to the Government. But, unfortunately, the staff and equipment have not increased pro rata. The figures given show that the spending on equipment per academic has fallen from £1,850 in 1987-88 to £1,193 per academic in 1992-93. Equipment has been cut by one third per staff member despite the fact that there are more students.

Any briefing on science research contains figures on the country's expenditure on research and development and it shows how we lag behind our industrial competitors. The most recent figures that I have are for 1992 when 2.12 per cent. of our gross domestic product was spent on research and development compared with Japan at 2.8 per cent., the United States at 2.68 per cent., Germany at 2.53 per cent. and France at 2.36 per cent. When we discount the part of the budget which goes on defence, we are lagging 1 per cent behind Germany and Japan in our expenditure on civil research and development. All the members of the Science and Technology Committee know, as do all scientists and engineers in this country, that we should devote substantially more resources to research and development.

I think that my colleagues are being a little generous in congratulating the Minister on an increase in the science budget. My understanding of his letter of 29 November is that in this financial year the budget is £1,217 million at 1993 prices, in the coming financial year it will be £1,217 million, and it will drop to £1,205 million and £1,204 million in subsequent years. Over a three-year period, the Department's budget at 1993 prices will fall by 1 per cent.

Added to that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) pointed out, are the cuts in research in the Department of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and so on. Across the board it is a picture of continual belt-tightening and of a very difficult time for research scientists.

In the interests of allowing other hon. Members to participate in the debate, I will skip a few pages of my speech, as the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) did earlier.

I turn now to a matter that is outside the science budget. I know that the Glaxo-Wellcome bid is strictly a matter for the Department of Trade and Industry, but I think that it is of interest to the Office of Science and Technology. I invite the Minister to give us his Department's view on the takeover when he replies to the debate. Perhaps it does not have a view on the matter.

In a takeover bid worth £8.9 billion, the world's second largest pharmaceutical company is seeking to take over the world's 20th largest company. It would form not only the largest company in Britain, but the largest pharmaceutical company in the world, with a turnover of £28 billion. Britain has an excellent record in the pharmaceutical industry; it is the one industry sector where Britain is a world leader. We invest heavily in research and development and the industry's primary customer is the national health service, which provides a very large home market.

Glaxo and Wellcome invest about 15 per cent. of their yearly sales in research and development. In commenting on the takeover, a newspaper article has said that there certainly will be job cuts in research and development if the bid goes through. I know that the Wellcome Trust supports the takeover as it could mean an increase in research. Combining the two companies would mean a rationalisation of facilities and production and a rationalisation of large areas of research.

In the *New Scientist* of 26 January, Sir Richard Sykes, the chief executive of Glaxo and its former research director, admits:

"the planned 'rationalization' and streamlining of the research teams of the two companies, one of the main factors being used to generate support for the take-over among shareholders, will inevitably lead to job losses among researchers."

If that is true, we will lose PhDs and post-doctorate research workers from our industry to the United States. More importantly, it will have an adverse effect on the morale of scientists working in that sector, in higher education and throughout the scientific community. Any job losses in production and research which result from the takeover will hit morale hard in our leading industry sector.

I ask the Office of Science and Technology to look at the takeover bid very carefully. Is it in the interests of British science and our pharmaceutical industry for the bid go ahead? I would be grateful if the Minister would comment on that in his reply. It is not good enough for the Government to sit back and say, "No, this is a free market and that is the way it operates; it is not for us to comment or have a view about it", when research and the morale of many of our best people may be affected by the takeover.

8.45 pm

Sir Gerard Vaughan (Reading, East): Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I am mindful of the time and your call for short speeches, I will make only a comment or two. I will

[Sir Gerard Vaughan]

also refrain from reminding my right hon. Friend that he is welcome to visit Reading university in my constituency whenever he wishes.

Mr. David Hunt: I arranged today to visit Reading university. I shall suggest a number of dates to my hon. Friend so that I can ensure that the visit takes place at his convenience as well as mine.

Sir Gerard Vaughan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should explain that I did not raise that point by prior arrangement with my right hon. Friend. I could easily make a whole speech congratulating him not only on his success in raising extra money for the science budget, but on the enthusiasm and clarity with which he presented the situation tonight.

I was glad that he referred to the "Realising our Potential" awards scheme and the excellent work performed by the Royal Academy of Engineering. I also pay tribute to the work that has been done by the Office of Science and Technology. I believe that the briefing notes which it has produced for hon. Members have resulted in a greater understanding of the subject.

I shall pick up on two points which are not meant to be viewed as criticism. First, I agree entirely with the remarks of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones): it is a very serious situation. I think that part of the problem is our culture in this country which makes it difficult for us to appreciate the feeling of those in the science field. We have to raise the general image and standard of science and engineering throughout the whole community. It begins in our schools where I am afraid that the standard of science teaching and interest remains deplorable in many cases. It is an urgent situation with which we must deal immediately.

I am very pleased that extra money is to be allocated to the LINK programme. However, I ask my right hon. Friend to look seriously at some of the LINK programmes. While the concept of the programmes is welcomed by all, some of them appear to be over-bureaucratic and they are not producing effective results—in fact, I think that some of them are a total waste of money. That does not mean that the concept is at fault; it is a very good idea.

I realise that there are difficulties, but I ask my right hon. Friend to examine ways in which long-term development facilities could be made available for research and development in this country. Other countries, such as Japan and Germany, have achieved it very successfully and I think that we should re-examine the issue.

8.49 pm

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): I thank the Chancellor of the Duchy for the way in which he presented the report and for his announcements. He clearly acknowledges that investment in the science base is money well spent—there is no difference between any of us in that respect. We may differ on the scale of investment required if British people are to enjoy a decent standard of living now and in the next century.

Britain is good at invention. On a visit to the science museum last year its director, Sir Neil Cussons, told me that more than half the exhibits and papers it contains are associated with the inventions of British scientists. Dr. Richard Roberts, one of two Nobel prizewinners in 1993, described Britain as an

"unbelievably fertile ground for ideas."

Given the flooding in some parts of the country, that may be due to our weather—it keeps us indoors many months of the year.

Sadly, Dr. Roberts left Britain with a PhD in his twenties, for North America. He commented at that time that in Britain

"funding for research is really quite appalling and scientists are undervalued."

Those are strong words from a Nobel prizewinner.

An article in *The Independent* on 8 November 1994 stated:

"Britain's best chance of again winning Nobel prizes in science would be for the Germans and Japanese to take over some of our high-tech industries."

That is a radical proposal, and not one that we should adopt.

There have been two Nobel prizes for British-based research in the past 10 years, compared with 11 the preceding decade. Over the years, Britain has suffered from the brain drain. Andy Coghlan of *New Scientist* pointed out that

"many of those who leave are high fliers, and their departure is depriving Britain of its top talent."

Typically, overseas researchers tend to enter Britain on short-term contracts, while British emigrants leave this country for ever. I welcome the allocation report's section on enhancement of people-related programmes, and the recognition—I nearly intervened on the Chancellor on this point, but he made it eventually—that more women must be encouraged to enter science, and to remain after completing their PhDs. As members of this House, we ought to know that women have just as much to offer as men. As a nation, we must make use of all our talent, and women are a vital part of our future.

When the Prime Minister visited Japan in 1993, he said:

"We have undervalued science and the application of science in the United Kingdom over the past 20 or 30 years."

He was right. Since 1981, Government spending on research and development has fallen by one third and is now a lower proportion of gross domestic product in the UK than in the competitor countries of France, Germany, Japan and the United States. Departmental spending has fallen and is expected to continue doing so.

Figures released by the Department of Trade and Industry last December and published in the *Financial Times* show that its research and development expenditure will fall to £245 million in the present financial year, from £310 in 1993-94 and £500 million a year in the late 1980s.

Britain cannot compete with the low-wage economies of the Pacific rim, but it can through technology. That was recognised as early as the 1930s. A year ago, the eminent journalist Will Hutton wrote:

"It is common knowledge that the British economy has been in relative decline for more than a century, but what is less remarked upon is that had Britain stayed wedded to its textile, coal and heavy engineering economy of the 1920s, the decline would have been even more marked. Yet from the early 1930s

to the early 1950s, there was a transformation in the country's economic base. This was led by technology and, in particular, by state support of science.

Since then, we have seen the squandering of this inheritance through the insistence that a free financial system and reduction of state support will be enough to drive innovation."

I hope that that is changing, and I know from the comments by Conservative Members that they want change as much as I do. The best way to secure Britain's survival as a modern, industrialised nation whose people enjoy a high standard of living is to invest in the future.

I congratulate the Minister on listening positively to the wishes of the science community. I welcome the allocation paper's reference also to public understanding of science. It is no use pretending that we are not technical. This week, I attended an interesting meeting of the all-party group on cable and satellite, of which the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) is chairman. As I left, I heard one hon. Member—who I am glad is not present—say to his researcher, "You put that on the computer, because I'm not very technical." We must change that attitude. British people are good at invention and technical innovation; we should be proud of that and shout it from the rooftops.

Last year's science week was worth while, and I am pleased that it is to become an annual event. I remember being at the science museum at the crack of dawn with the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), to give a live interview on BBC breakfast television. A 1920s steamship engine was working behind us. It is fitting that that hon. Gentleman went on to become shadow Secretary of State for Transport.

One cannot overemphasise the importance to the nation of placing science policy high on the Government's agenda. Without properly funded research, there will be more debates of the sort that we heard yesterday, concerning further cutbacks in the country's social, education, health and police services.

Can the Minister say the extent to which research grant applications will be tied to the rigid goals of wealth creation? Is not it the nature of pure research that it must often be undertaken without achieving a specified profit? Sometimes there is no product—or if there is, that is serendipity and long into the future. How will the Government ensure that total research is maintained when departmental budgets rise and fall? It seems likely that money spent on military research will further decrease.

Baroness Thatcher once said:

"Transistors were not discovered by the entertainment industry seeking new ways of marketing pop music, but rather by people working on wave mechanics and solid-state physics."

That shows the value of the basic research that was done in inventing transistors in those days. The reality of the problem—I think all hon. Members know this—is that funding could be limitless. I am sure that, between them, research councils could dream up projects worthy of investment that would far outstrip the budget of any party in the House but I believe that there is a shortfall now that is damaging Britain's future.

The importance of encouraging industry to invest cannot be over-emphasised. I am pleased to see the description of the multiplier idea in the paper released today. It is important that the Government, research councils and industry work together, provide the funds, to work on specific projects of interest to all of them.

A second problem was identified in the Select Committee's report last year, and it was mentioned by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor). The problem is also exposed in Will Hutton's new book entitled, "The State We're In"—short-termism. Giles Coren's article in *The Times* this week tells the story of the British inventor and designer, James Dyson. Mr. Dyson is the man who invented the ballbarrow. I do not know whether you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have one of these at home, but it is a wheelbarrow based on a ball, which never gets stuck in the mud and does not make marks on the lawn. He also invented the dual cyclone vacuum cleaner. His inventions have achieved worldwide sales of more than £1 billion. But despite the success of his inventions, Mr. Dyson could find no one at home to back his efforts with cash, which is a perennial problem for British inventors. The article says:

"Instead he sold licences to America and Japan".

James Dyson says:

"British industry's attitude to development and designers is blighted by short-termism . . . You have to show a quick turn-around and immediate profit. Engineering is not about that—it's a long-term way of regenerating a company,"—

and a country.

"If the City-boys and the banks . . . demand an instant return we just sell our products better, we don't improve them. Advertising is the British answer to everything. But that is the way to a fast buck, not real money."

Mr. Dyson went on to point out that

"The best . . . business is one where you can sell a product at a high price with a large margin . . . and make an enormous amount of money,"—

Here's to that.

"For that you have to develop a product that works better and looks better than existing ones. That kind of investment is long-term, high-risk and not very British."

A third problem is that of the gap between the skills that we have and the skills that we need. Cuts in education, about which we talked yesterday, are the greatest betrayal of our young people. Throughout the country, school budgets are being cut.

We have talked about a proper career structure for scientists. I fear that the Government will put short-term political considerations before the long-term goal of providing for Britain an adequate research base to keep our brightest brains in Britain and to maintain and improve our quality of life. The Government's strategy seems to be to cut back on investment in key services now to create enough elbow room for a cut in income tax before the next election. That is not only short-termism but cynical short-termism, because one person's tax cut in 1996 could result in that same person's job loss in 1998-99.

When the Minister replies, I hope that he will be able to provide some answers to the questions raised in the debate. I wish him and the Chancellor well in the task of persuading his colleagues of the importance of research in this country. If they can persuade the Government to invest more in the future, they will receive enthusiastic support from me and from my right hon. and hon. Friends.

9.2 pm

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones), who, like

[Mr. Simon Coombs]

me, is a supporter of Swindon town football club, but I do not agree with his latter remarks. I believe that the Government's proposals this year, following, as they do, the White Paper on science and technology, show that the Government are indeed looking to a long-term future for science, and are approaching the need to avoid short-termism in a positive way.

I welcome what I hope is now an annual debate. It has been held on 2 February 1994 and on 2 February 1995. I put it to my right hon. Friend that if the next debate occurs on 2 February 1996—a Friday—we could have a five-hour instead of a two and three quarter hour debate on science.

I welcome the opportunity to say something about science, particularly the science research councils—five of the six of which are located in my constituency. They have been through a substantial sea change over the past 12 months as a result of what I believe were right decisions taken on the reorganisation of some of them. I pay tribute to the efforts made by the management and staff of the research councils in bringing those changes to fruition, working them out and making them effective. I am pleased to tell the House that, in general, things have settled down well and the research councils are now getting on with the job of administrating British science.

At the time of the White Paper's publication in 1993, and again in the debate a year ago, I asked for assurances from my right hon. Friend's predecessor as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster about the position of staff of the research councils. Those assurances—that the changes would not lead to significant alterations in staff—were given to me and they have been kept.

However, since that time, a decision has been made to undertake a review of staffing levels in the research councils and that has led to some concern among my constituents who work at the research councils. Once again, reassurance has been offered by Sir John Cadogan in a letter to staff representatives and it would be helpful if my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, in his reply to the debate, would reiterate the reassurance that what is looked for is improvements in efficiency but not the drastic reductions in staff number that were suggested by union representatives in Swindon at the end of last year. Staff in the research councils have a strong commitment and they deserve our support. I trust that my hon. Friend will feel the same and be able to give further assurances to my constituents tonight.

I want to make brief reference to one or two of the issues that were raised at the beginning of the debate in exchanges between my right hon. Friend and several hon. Members. The reference to the international subscriptions which fall within the remit of PPARC strikes a strong chord with me. I have raised the matter on many occasions in the past in the House. I look forward to the announcement of the mechanism—in section 6 of the White Paper—to be established to protect PPARC's budget, now a little under £200 million, but more than half of it devoted to the two subscriptions to CERN and ESA.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has said tonight that the fluctuations in those two subscriptions will be a first charge upon the totality of the science budget and that is obviously good news. It would be helpful if my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary could tell me, either at the end of the debate or, because I appreciate that he will have many things to do at that stage, perhaps later in a written reply, whether there will be a pro rata allocation of the £8 million between all the research councils budgets on the basis of their share of the total expenditure on science. That would mean that PPARC would still have to find about £1.5 million in addition as part of its contribution to the fluctuations element.

We welcome the improvement that has been made possible in the overall cost to Britain of the LHC at CERN. I have a figure of about £70 million over 10 or 12 years, which is a substantial sum. That money should be fed back directly into domestic programmes, which support the international projects. Again at some stage, I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to say that he agrees with that.

Furthermore, savings are now being talked about on the administration costs of ESA. It would be helpful to know whether the intention is to recycle those to UK science in general terms or specifically to PPARC projects, so that they may be the direct beneficiaries, bearing in mind that over the years first CERN and now PPARC have had to bear the total cost of the subscriptions, which have been a large drain on their respective budgets.

The two subscriptions buy only the scientific infrastructure in those overseas locations. The real value of our membership of CERN and ESA comes from the domestic research that we then undertake and that has to be separately funded. It is not clear to me at this stage whether the allocations announced by my right hon. Friend today will provide adequate funding for the domestic science base to enable Britain to obtain full value from continuing membership of those two European projects. Again, it would be helpful if my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary could clarify that point.

It was brought to my attention that ESA is concerned about the integral astronomy mission. It was made clear by my right hon. Friend that that was a matter for PPARC, but I hope that he will continue to support the belief that the UK is strong in the subject of astronomy. The hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) made that point in an intervention. We must stress how good we are at astronomy, and the fact that we lead Europe in that subject. It is vital for PPARC to finance the mission; failure to participate would deal a serious blow to those abroad.

I welcome the general increase in funds for this year, which is above the inflation rate. It recognises the desire of hon. Members on both sides of the House for more to be spent on science. I particularly welcome two projects. The first is cognitive engineering: an additional £1.2 million is to go to the Economic and Social Research Council. Interaction between humans and computers strikes me as one of the most crucial areas of advance for the country: I would hazard a guess that it will provide Nobel prizes here in years to come. Major breakthroughs may not be far away, and I am very pleased that support for cognitive engineering is continuing and increasing.

I also welcome the additional allocation of £2 million to the Natural Environment Research Council for environmental diagnostics, on which a number of hon. Members have commented. It is all very well for the Government to hit industry with the principle that the polluter pays, but it is equally right for us to give what help we can to industry to enable it to deal with such pollution problems as waste management.

I am pleased to learn that a new research council, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, is to be given generous funds for a number of new projects. The council will welcome those funds, and I look forward to visiting it before long to hear more about its plans.

Finally, I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has agreed to visit Swindon soon. That is an exercise organised by my hon. Friend and me—unlike the sub-plot of which we heard earlier, involving my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan) and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will be very welcome in Swindon, and I hope that he will arrive there in the next couple of months to see for himself the excellent work being done in the research councils. That work is leading British science towards a future which I believe is very bright, as a result of the allocation and all that has gone before it.

9.12 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I must declare an interest: I am a non-executive director of the Welding Institute, an independent research and technology organisation that will benefit from some of the new schemes announced by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

The Chancellor has made promising sounds about real increases in the science budgets, and if we did not know the whole picture it would look very rosy. I do not want to sound sour, but I feel that the true picture of science and technology spending should be shown. Between 1986 and 1992, spending by the Office of Public Service and Science increased by 21 per cent., but in the same period spending by the Higher Education Funding Council fell by 7 per cent.; civil Departments' spending fell by 29 per cent.; Ministry of Defence spending fell by 20 per cent.; and total Government science and technology spending fell by 13 per cent. Moreover, if we take into account projected spending to 1995-96, we find that total Government expenditure has fallen by 23 per cent. in real terms in the 10 years since 1985-86.

I accept that there is a real case for cutting MOD research expenditure, but why is the money not going into civil research? Instead, civil Departments' expenditure is being cut by an even greater amount than defence research spending.

I quote from a letter I have received from the head of a science department at Cambridge university. He said:

"In the USA there have been large cuts in the defence research budget but a substantial amount of these funds have been transferred to civil research, i.e. there has been a real peace dividend. In the UK there has been no peace dividend. You could ask why not. In aerospace, for example, I have been told by senior officials in the USA that not a dollar of the research budget has been lost: all the cuts in the defence aerospace budget have been transferred to the civil aerospace side. This is not a direct civil aerospace subsidy . . . but is a clearly constructed indirect subsidy via . . . joint university-industry aerospace projects, etc. In the UK, both the defence and the civil aerospace government R & D budget have been cut and hence British Aerospace, Rolls-Royce, etc., are really suffering (hence the recent Rolls-Royce redundancies in Scotland and there are more aerospace redundancies to come). The savings from defence research cuts should be transferred to the civil sector, and joint industry-university research, with the university side funded by EPSRC, would help to restore a level playing field and would help to save our aerospace industry."

Unfortunately, many British companies follow the British Government on research and defence spending. The Central Statistical Office review of industrial research in 1992 shows that funding for civil research has reached an all-time high of £7.8 billion. That is good news, but it is still only just over 1.25 per cent. of gross domestic product. France's 1.4 per cent., Germany's 1.7 per cent., the USA's 1.8 per cent. and Japan's 2.1 per cent. make British business expenditure on research and development look pathetic.

Long-term industrial competitiveness depends on our ability to use our scientific inventiveness to make new and improved products. A lead from the Government is needed to convince our industrial companies that investment in research and development is important, not only for their own competitiveness but for the future prosperity of the country.

Another head of a science department at Cambridge university has expressed concern about the way in which the Government are providing funds for industrial research and development. He wrote:

"All of us here appreciate the over-riding importance of a healthy industrial base. Government needs to provide encouragement for industrial investment in research and for Universities to collaborate in the projects. So far however, most of the funds for this endeavour seem to have been produced from the Research Council budget and not from the DTI budget or the MOD budget."

It is true that the cuts in the DTI budget have meant cuts in the advanced technology programme to which the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) referred. That money has not been replaced.

It would be helpful for the independent research and technology organisations to know whether they will be able to apply for funds from the research councils. Perhaps the Minister could tell us, when he replies, whether that money will be available.

My constituents are concerned about a number of other points. I refer to the short-term goals, especially the short-termism within the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. That is a matter that comes up again and again in conversation with research scientists in my constituency.

Yet another head of a science department at Cambridge university wrote saying that he was worried about the short-term goals being pursued by the EPSRC

"in contravention of the Minister's own pronouncements and of frequent warning from the House of Lords Select Committee. This is particularly annoying, as many parts of the remit of EPSRC . . . are involved with fundamental science just as much as the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council. Yet there is a repeated confirmation of the idea that EPSRC is concerned with wealth creation and the quality of life, and fundamental science of the blue skies kind must be pursued through PPARC."

He is asking the Minister to assure the country that vigorous support for high-quality fundamental science will continue to be provided, not just by the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council, but by all research councils. He asks:

"can the Research Councils—all of them—be again required by the Minister to take a long-term view of such things as the applicability of research?"

In the past two years, one of the changes in funding has hit Oxford university and Cambridge university, in particular, very badly. I refer to the dual support transfer system, which has been a uniform disaster for the major research universities. It was supposed to be an overall

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neutral operation, solely connected with research. How the best research universities could be so badly damaged must be questioned.

I have learnt that another department is in deficit to the tune of £500,000 this year because the funding in the transfer system has not been replaced in the way that it was supposed to have been. Oxford university has compiled a dossier on the ways in which the research councils have failed to do what was required of them, and have failed to apply the funds transferred to them from funding councils to the support of specific costs associated with research grants.

Research council panels have memberships from around the country. They naturally seek to make the money go as far as possible and they are inclined to say, in particular, that the major research universities are well enough resourced anyhow, and that this or that direct-cost request can be deleted in favour of giving another research grant somewhere else. Each of the major research universities has suffered a loss of several million pounds from that, and the country should be told that the shift of funding, allegedly to make the costs of support research more transparent, has been a disaster. I hope that the Minister will take that on board. I know that he recently announced a review of that system, but it is extremely important that those serious concerns are dealt with.

Difficulties are being experienced by some of the research institutes. A director of a research institute associated with crop research complains that he has already received

"two letters from BBSRC in the last few months . . . asking how we would deal with funding cuts because the Director General of Research Councils . . . wants the money for a range of short-term funding schemes."

I know that additional funding of £15 million has been announced today. That is not new money. It is coming from the fundamental and basic infrastructure of some of our best research institutes. If that is allowed to continue, it will seriously damage the research institutes because they need leading scientists, not only to find short-term contract money on which they depend, but as a basic structure for them to continue. I hope that the Minister will take that into consideration.

9.22 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I shall try to be as brief as possible so that it is possible for the Front-Bench spokesmen to allow further speeches in the debate. This debate is of interest to all parties. I do not regard the support for science as a matter of political controversy. After all, it is well known that we need to support science as much as possible.

In a sense, therefore, I follow the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) in that she referred to what has turned out to be the theme of the debate—the new concept about which we have all obviously been reading in our briefs from various sources. That theme is short-termism, a phrase which has cropped up in speeches by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I have been fascinated by the number of times reference has been made to short-termism.

I have been most encouraged by the opening speech of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. I have also been encouraged by the fact that he will visit Norwich on 10 February, and I know that he will enjoy that visit very much. I was encouraged by his remarks when he dealt with the problem of short-termism. Although he may need a little more pressure from those of us who are keen on scientific research, I have a feeling that he is on the right track. I was certainly very encouraged by his opening speech.

At a recent meeting of the new Council for Science and Technology, the Prime Minister said that science was at the heart of government. Of course, it was the Prime Minister who provided us with the new Office of Science and Technology, so there is no doubt about the Government's commitment to science, which I support.

We could have a lengthy debate about figures and the sums of money provided for science. The trouble with such debates is that they depend on which figures are cited. I shall not enter into that argument, but it is at least of some encouragement to me as a physicist that the Royal Society of Chemistry has given some welcome to the Government's statement on science funding. It seems that the message is getting through that we need to continue to provide substantial sums for scientific research.

I am one of those who will always want more resources for such research, and that should not be a matter of controversy. However, the mechanisms applied to funding are often controversial. Members of the Opposition Front Bench will be disappointed to learn that I shall not go into more detail because that would take too much time, but, clearly, we want more resources and the Royal Society of Chemistry has been encouraged by the Government's announcement, which is good news.

There is a tradition of pure research in this country. I remember my time at the Cavendish laboratory in Cambridge when I was struggling to get a degree in physics. Of course, that was where Rutherford and other great scientists split the atom—to use very simple terminology—using basic equipment. They had no idea that it would lead directly to such things as nuclear power. This week, Lord Wakeham came to East Anglia to start up the new Sizewell B nuclear power station. That is an example of a direct application of pure research, although originally no one had any idea to what it might lead. I pay tribute to all those in Suffolk, Norfolk and elsewhere who were involved in the Sizewell B project. It is a great success and I hope that it will run successfully after its opening this week.

The Times wrote about "1,188 MW per day", but that is wrong—*The Times* gets a lot wrong. Any scientists here will know that "megawatts" is power, so one refers simply to "megawatts", not "megawatts per day". In any event, it is an enormous amount of power, which will probably be good for the environment given the carbon dioxide emissions that will be prevented.

Many hon. Members have spoken about short-termism in terms of not only finance but research. I do not have time to develop that theme, but my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will understand that I appreciate that an important debate is going on in the background.

I especially congratulate the Government on their support for initiatives to raise public interest in science—that is good news and has been welcomed by hon. Members of all parties—including the national week of science, engineering and technology. I was rather surprised that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has

delegated the guinea pig idea to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, but perhaps I can find out more about it later.

Many organisations in East Anglia are involved in national science week. There are many projects in Cambridge, Suffolk and Essex, but I am disappointed to learn that there is only one project in Norfolk, unless I am out of date. I put it on record that that is not good enough and I shall be getting in touch with my constituents and others to see whether we can improve the situation. The engineering education scheme in Norwich is to be commended on its work, but I hope that we can do better in Norfolk by the time of the great event in March.

Once again, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Parliamentary Secretary and their colleagues on their clear commitment to science, although, like other hon. Members, I would push them a little further and a little faster.

9.29 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I thank right hon. and hon. Members for squeezing their speeches and enabling me to be the last Back Bencher to speak in this debate.

I praise the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, even though he may think that that is a little odd, coming from a constituency neighbour. I praise the Government's development of national science week—an excellent initiative which needs pushing harder. In our area—that represented by the right hon. Gentleman and by me—a number of exciting projects include one involving our respective borough councils of Ellesmere Port, Wirral and Chester and the Natural Environment Research Council. Many exciting projects at Ness gardens have received a staggering response and I hope that the Minister notes the commitment there.

My disappointment is aimed not at the Government but at the private sector. I am extremely disappointed at the lack of response by some of the major science players in the private sector in relation to the Cheshire and Wirral areas. If the Parliamentary Secretary wants something to do in the next few days to promote national science week, he should get hold of private sector research laboratories and science-based companies and ask them what they are doing. Nonetheless, the House ought to congratulate the British Association for the Advancement of Science on its work to ensure the success of national science week.

Several hon. Members have referred to short-termism and relative expenditure and to whether the budget has been increased. I bring to the attention of the House the document in the Vote Office under the signature of Karel van Miert, which I found extremely interesting, although I had too little time to read it. Pages 55 and 64 draw comparisons between expenditure on science research in the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany. The most staggering comparison is of the number of scientists and engineers engaged in research and development per thousand of the labour force. In the United Kingdom, it is 4.5, yet in Germany it is 6—an extraordinarily large gap. Some of the figures are extremely worrying.

The percentage of gross domestic expenditure spent on research and development financed by industry in the UK is 49.7 per cent., yet in Germany it is 59 per cent. The only area in which we seem to be ahead is in comparisons of military expenditure. I know that that creates all sorts of confusions in the figures, but the two countries are worth comparing. They illustrate the fact that, while the right hon. Gentleman, with his specific responsibilities for science and technology, is trying to do well with a limited budget, the overall commitment of the Government and the private sector is not as good as it is in Germany, one of our key comparators. That positive message should be sent from this debate.

The documents include an bemusing reference to subsidiarity which includes the sentence:

"Greater transparency in the research policies and activities of Member States would also enable individual States to develop their policies in the light of others' experience."

That is an interesting point.

Page 9 of Karel van Miert's document includes a sentence which reads:

"The Union must speak with a single voice on international bodies in order to participate in worldwide programmes."

If the Government are serious in that regard, they must get their act together in terms of the way in which they conduct themselves in European affairs and, in particular, the role of their own Back Benchers.

In responding to the comments of the Select Committee on Science and Technology with regard to "Forward Look", the Chancellor included a sentence that is perhaps in line with the definition of subsidiarity to which I have referred, and I welcome it. In his letter to the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), the Chancellor stated:

"Finally, 'Realising our potential' intended that the Forward Look would open up for public scrutiny and debate the current plans and priorities for publicly-funded science, engineering and technology."

I hope that that is a conversion to the definition of subsidiarity as far as it applies to science. I hope that the Chancellor recognises that, in the spirit of this debate, which has been quite supportive of Britain's need to develop a proper science policy, there is still room for improvement in some areas.

With regard to comparisons with other European countries, one obviously comes very rapidly to the issue of short-termism. It is important to consider the figures and then stand back and say, "Well, it is not really solely the responsibility of the banks and the financial institutions. If the infrastructure of support for science and research and development from the Government is not there, is it reasonable for the banks and financial institutions to take more than a short-term view?" Such issues must be part of a jigsaw. All the parts must be brought together and we will then see the explosion that we would all welcome.

I will conclude my rapid run through what was going to be a lengthy speech by referring to defence expenditure. Clearly, some of the important areas of research conducted under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence will result in potential for activities in the civilian sector. We should encourage the whole principle of diversification.

I challenge the Chancellor to look very carefully at page 17 of the Select Committee's second report. He should consider the exchange between his predecessor and the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet), who is not renowned for being a left winger on the Select Committee. The Chancellor will see from the language of

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that exchange that his predecessor was extremely muddled about the relationship between the Office of Science and Technology and the MOD.

There must be clarity because, without it, we will not have a structured transition from areas of research expertise in the MOD which could, in the post cold-war era, translate into civilian activities. That needs a carefully thought-out strategy, and I hope that, in the months and years to come, the Government—it will not be the present Government in the years to come—will engage in that debate seriously. That will give us the potential to release moneys to allow us to get on to the same league table as the Germans. Together with other constructive changes, that will create an initiative that will move the private sector and the financial institutions in parallel and help us to generate a science base in the interests of Great Britain plc in the longer term.

9.39 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): This brief, but important, debate has proved to be more of a Government statement on the allocation of funding for science than anything else. Science has suffered some neglect in the House since the Science and Technology Act 1965 aroused such great interest, and we all ought to welcome the fact that it is moving up the political agenda.

This is not the annual debate on science—we have that to come on "Forward Look"—but we do need an overall debate on the Government's budgets for research and development and future policy. Part of the frustration of hon. Members taking part in the debate this evening has been caused by the lack of time, and let us hope that more hon. Members join in when we have a full debate.

Although the emphasis of this debate has been on the science Budget, we must keep the debate in the context of the Government's overall spending, and I hope to refer to that during my brief remarks. A briefing based on "Forward Look" figures which I received from the Library on 1 December after the November Budget stated:

"The 1994-5 total Government spending on science and technology was planned to be £6,106.5 million . . . This was lower than the estimate for 1993-4 by some £160.3 million . . . As you suspected this planned reduction in last year's plans, last year, is greater in size than the increase in the science budget announced in the budget statement."

In other words, the science budget has effectively been undermined by other Departments' spending cuts. The Chancellor of the Duchy may claim to be holding his science budget, but it has been dramatically undermined by falls in departmental spending elsewhere. Departmental spending equals only 63 per cent. of the Government's total spending for science.

The Government's record is not good. Publicly funded research and development fell from 43 per cent. of the UK total in 1989 to 35 per cent. in 1992. In 1992, the UK spent 2.12 per cent. of GDP on research and development—lower than Japan, America, France and Germany. Hon. Members have referred to the dramatic reduction in civil expenditure, which is mostly attributable to the Department of Trade and Industry.

DTI expenditure has fallen in real terms from £900 million in 1984-85 to £245 million in 1994-95, and it is planned to go down further to £237.5 million in 1996-97. The DTI has withdrawn its joint programmes with what was formerly the Science and Engineering Research Council. The Department ended the advance technology programmes in high temperature superconductivity research. DTI money was lost from the joint framework for information technology, and from the advanced manufacturing technology committee's research into advanced robotics and computer-aided engineering. Even the smaller scale computer-integrated manufacturing was chopped by the DTI.

I put it to the Chancellor that that cannot be helpful when he is trying to co-ordinate a Government-wide strategy. There is a distinct lack of enthusiasm from the President of the Board of Trade; indeed, on the very day in June 1993 when the Chancellor's predecessor was launching the White Paper on science, the President of the Board of Trade ended the DTI's collaborative research programmes, and effectively withdrew the joint funding programmes with what was then SERC. It was a loss of an estimated £40 million, which the Government withdrew from science support. Perhaps the Minister will confirm that in his reply, and tell us how much has been lost from research programmes that were jointly funded by the Department of Trade and Industry and the research councils. Is it not about £40 million, which would wipe out any claimed increase in the support for the science base?

Will the Office of Science and Technology, via the research councils, be the main source of all Government funding for the support of research in industry and elsewhere? Will the OST guarantee to replace what has been lost by reductions in other Departments?

As we all know, it is not merely a case of reductions in the Department of Trade and Industry. That same downward trend, although less marked, is evident in other Government Departments. They are all forecasting reductions in expenditure for 1996-97 of between 8 and 17 per cent., compared with 1992-93. The Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are forecasting reductions. The Department of Transport is forecasting a £2.5 million cut in expenditure on engineering policy by the end of this financial year, compared with 1992-93. That cannot contribute to an integrated, co-ordinated departmental policy.

We need a strategy of interdepartmental thinking and action from the Government—some transdepartmental action and co-ordination, so that there is a thrust for a science policy throughout all Government Departments.

We have heard international comparisons. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) asked whether the private sector would fill the gap. Paragraph 3.2 of "Forward Look" states:

"with private sector contributions growing commensurately."

That implies that if the Government withdrew support, it would be matched by the private sector, but that is not happening. In 1991, British companies funded only 69 per cent. of their research, which is a lower proportion than in any other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country, bar France. Research and development by British industry is a lower percentage of the gross domestic product than that of our competitors and we are losing ground. Employment in industrial research fell by 46,000 between 1986 and 1992.

As Dr. John Mulvey said in a letter in *Physics World* in August 1994:

"Compared to Germany and Japan, where expenditure by industry per head of the labour force is at least twice the UK level, the gap has widened to nearly 1 per cent. of GDP or about £6 billion per year. It is indeed asking rather a lot of the science base to compensate for this enormous deficit by providing better value for money."

In September, the Prime Minister promised the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee:

"Despite the absolute necessity of restraining public expenditure we expect spending on the science base to rise in real terms next year and science will remain a high priority in future."

There seems to have been a decline in real terms even in this year's figure. It seems to be up £13.9 million, but with inflation at 2.4 per cent., it ought to have increased by £28.9 million. On page 2 of the Minister's press release, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council claims that the budget has increased by £4.5 million, but compared with last year's figures, it has been reduced by £10.2 million from £171.8 million. Perhaps the Minister can explain that. Obviously, tonight we are discussing not new money but the earmarking and sharing out of a fragment—5 per cent.—of the science budget.

It is good to see that the underpinning of strategic science is underlined in the report and we wholeheartedly welcome that. I was especially glad to see the reference to work on protein structure, which is to be supported. We all remember the observations of Sir John Kendrew, when he was speaking of his early work at Cambridge with Max Perutz, which led to the first identification of a protein structure. He said that they had achieved no results in more than 10 years of research and that experts claimed that they were doomed to fail. The message is clear to all of us: we should support the science base.

Let us not get the debate out of perspective. The Government have spent nearly a quarter of a million pounds simply on the citizens charter for British Rail. That sum is equivalent to what they spent this year on the public understanding of science. Is science a real priority when the Government spend £208 million simply to advertise the sale of British Rail? We are forced to ask whether the Government have put science, and spending on the science base, at the heart of their agenda. Savings could be made elsewhere and that money spent on the science base.

9.49 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. Robert G. Hughes): I enormously welcomed the eight Back-Bench contributions to the debate. I welcomed not necessarily their content but the fact that so many hon. Members wanted to take part in this important debate. Hon. Members on both sides of the House may be disappointed to know that, although I have agreed to become a guinea pig in the Megalab 95 competition, I stipulated that testing should be non-destructive. I should add that it was not my idea but that of Roger Highfield, who did not ask me but just put my name in print. But I am happy to go along with it.

Many hon. Members, particularly Opposition Members, concentrated on money. Although it is important to discuss every aspect of Government research and development programmes, hon. Members must be patient and wait for the publication of "Forward Look", in which the Government will detail where we are going, what we want to do, the sums that will be spent and the process by which we have reached those conclusions. "Forward Look" is the largest explanation that a British Government have ever given about what they seek to do, so it is yet another example of the open government policies for which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy is responsible.

Mr. Battle: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hughes: I shall give way just this once, in affection to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Battle: It might be in affection, but I should prefer a guarantee from the Minister that the Government will set aside time for a full day's debate on "Forward Look" in June or July.

Mr. Hughes: That is a matter for the Leader of the House, but my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates), who represents the Patronage Secretary, will have heard the hon. Gentleman's request and will no doubt report it in the right places.

We have heard a few Jeremiahs in the debate. The speech by the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) was somewhat lugubrious. I do not know what makes him happy, but today's science budget should have done so because it has been maintained at a record level. I remind hon. Members that, in real terms, it is 30 per cent. above its value in 1979-80 and that the revision of the GDP deflator—the accurate forecast of what the money is worth—has increased the value of this year's science budget by about 2 per cent. That is good news.

We can all bandy figures about. If one is in Opposition—I have served in opposition on councils—one tries to find the worst figures, while if one is in Government or in charge, one tries to find the best figures. Let us not forget that the UK is an average spender among G7 nations. Government funding for research and development in the UK is higher than in Japan, Italy and Canada and our spending on high-technology industries stands up well to international comparison. So we are doing well by international standards and this year's figure for the basic science budget, which is, after all, the subject of tonight's debate, stands up extremely well. The figure for total Government spending on research and development will be contained in "Forward Look".

At the beginning of her speech, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) spoke about environmental protection. I am glad that she did so because this is a tremendous opportunity. If we are to have high environmental standards, it is vital that they be science-based. A distinct fear came through from the research councils, scientists and industrialists that much of what they were being asked to do was not based firmly enough on good science. The money that we are making available will ensure that it is based on good science. That is good for all of us—it is good for the economy, the country, industrialists and the environment. If we are to lay down a strict regime, it is important that it should be the right regime and that we do not think, in a few years' time, that if only we had had better science, we could have done a better job. I look forward to the results.

Hon. Members suggested that there had been a secret carve-up. But the Director General of Research Councils has consulted widely. He has had extensive discussions

[Mr. Hughes]

with all the research council chief executives. He consulted more than 300 science practitioners before he reached the recommendations that he made to my right hon. Friend and me. Of course, my right hon. Friend listened carefully to what people said to him when he visited the universities.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hughes: If I give way to the hon. Lady I shall not even reach the points that she made in her speech. I normally give way when hon. Members ask me, but I think it will be more courteous to answer as many questions as I can.

Sir John Cadogan, the Director General of Research Councils, is a civil servant and it has not been the practice to publish the advice of civil servants to Ministers under any Government. We are at pains to say that plans will be published in the allocation booklet announcing the basis on which we arrived at the decisions that we took.

Several hon. Members spoke about short-term contracts for researchers. That is an important point and the research councils, with the OST, are developing a concordat on contract researchers. They will soon be discussing it with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, which represents the universities and the employers of contract staff. New initiatives have been introduced and the Royal Society has increased the number of long-term personal fellowships. Warwick university has introduced 50 six-year fellowships.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), the Chairman of the Select Committee, mentioned ROPA. I am glad that he did so as I think that ROPA answers the question raised by the hon. Members for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones)—on behalf of the Liberal party—and for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), on behalf of the Labour party, about blue skies research. I do not mind if the Labour party calls it red dawn research—we know what we mean. We mean research that has no direct industrial application at the time—not making widgets for industry and not necessarily knowing what one will get out of the research. That is precisely what the ROPA scheme does.

We should remind ourselves of the success of ROPA. Some 239 awards worth £5 million have been made in the past year and the scheme has been viewed favourably. We had to find extra money in the existing year and, together with the figures announced by my right hon. Friend, the money will be spread across all the research councils.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey spoke of the European Community money and receipts. The science research councils received£12 million from the European Community in 1994-1995 and none of it is deducted from the science provision. I commend to the House a piece that appeared in the current edition of *Director* magazine. Michael Kenward, former editor of the *New Scientist*, said that £9.6 billion over the next four years would be spent on the fourth framework programme. He kindly says that, because of the negotiations that we carried out, the figure accurately reflects the United Kingdom's competence in a number of sectors. He says that it gives United Kingdom companies a distinct edge over their European competitors when meeting the European Union's needs. We received more than our just returns on the third framework, and I am confident that British industry and academics will take up the challenge and do at least as well this time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs), who is the host Member of Parliament for most of the research councils—I look forward to visiting them with him—sought an assurance that we are looking for efficiency and not drastic cuts. I am happy to be able to give him that assurance. We are not pursuing job cuts for their own sake and we are committed to ensuring that as much of the science budget as possible goes into science. I think that the whole House will welcome that.

We do not want money to go to administration; we want it to go to the sharp end for good scientific research. It is the Government's duty to ensure that the research councils remain fit to fulfil their future purpose and we remain committed to that duty. The hon. Member for Cambridge asked whether independent research organisations can apply for grants. I will get back to the hon. Lady on that point—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Patricia Anne Hall

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

10 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): It is with considerable regret that I bring this particularly tragic case to the Floor of the House. I am most grateful that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department is in his place to respond to it.

Mrs. Patricia Hall lived with her husband, Keith, at 11 Moorland drive in Pudsey and was thus a constituent of mine. She has not been seen by anyone since Sunday 27 January 1992. The inquiry into her disappearance was led by Superintendents Stainthorpe and Hudson of the West Yorkshire police, who were stationed at Pudsey, and the evidence uncovered led to Mrs. Hall's husband, Keith, being arrested, charged and tried for the murder of his wife.

His trial lasted nine days and he was acquitted by a majority verdict of 10 to two almost one year ago. This is not the place to go into the detail of the trial; suffice to say that the main prosecution evidence rested upon a tape-recorded confession obtained by an undercover WPC, which was subsequently ruled inadmissible and unreliable by the trial judge.

However, in response to an application by Gilbert Gray QC, the judge allowed the transcript of the tape recording to be published. The case of Patricia Anne Hall and the surprising conclusion of the trial has become very much a matter of public concern and interest, both locally and nationally. With the acquittal of the accused, the incidents which gave rise to the alleged death of Mrs. Patricia Hall have not been proven to a point where her death might be formally recognised and so registered.

On the other hand, although the taped evidence was declared inadmissible as the basis for prosecution at a murder trial, it is possible that incidental information contained in the transcript which was published may provide circumstantial evidence to a coroner.

It is against that background that both the west Yorkshire coroner in post at that time and his successor, Mr. David Hinchliffe, the current coroner, considered that an application to the Home Office for an inquest to be held under section 15 of the Coroners Act 1988 should be made. As I understand it, section 15 of the 1988 Act permits the Home Secretary to direct an inquest to be opened to permit registration of death to take place under certain specific circumstances. It states:

"Where a coroner has reason to believe—

(a) that a death has occurred in or near his district in such circumstances that an inquest ought to be held; and

(b) that owing to the destruction of the body by fire or otherwise, or to the fact that the body is lying in a place from which it cannot be recovered, an inquest cannot be held except in pursuance of this section . . . he may report the facts to the Secretary of State".

This application was made by the west Yorkshire coroner on 7 April last year. The reply from the Home Office dated 22 July stated that the Home Secretary had decided not to direct an inquest under section 15 of the Act. The main reason was that any finding as to the cause of death, which section 16 requires, could not be inconsistent with the outcome of the criminal proceedings. He stated that it would be intolerable if any finding of an inquest should state that Mrs. Hall was "murdered by her husband" when he had been acquitted of that charge in criminal proceedings. Moreover, the Home Secretary did not think that there was a public interest matter at stake here.

On 31 August, the coroner wrote to the Home Secretary again enclosing a further copy of the transcript and renewing his request for direction under section 15. In October, the Home Office asked the coroner for further information to show that he had reason to believe that a death had occurred. A mere disappearance of a person would not be regarded as sufficient.

In particular, the Home Office stated that more evidence must have been laid before the Crown court independent of the confession, to establish the death of Patricia Anne Hall. As a consequence of the coroner's application to the Home Office, I became involved by receiving requests from relatives and other concerned constituents to support the coroner in his endeavours to hold an inquest.

If such an inquest were held, it could determine for registration purposes that Patricia Anne Hall was dead. The family might then with dignity draw a line through their grievous uncertainty. Moreover, I believed that the case had aroused substantial public interest and that that should be taken into account—supported by a strong local press campaign that an inquest was desirable.

To fulfil the Home Office request for evidence outwith the transcript, the coroner requested West Yorkshire police to provide such evidence that they could obtain that Patricia Anne Hall had died. Senior investigating officers of West Yorkshire police provided a report to the coroner dated 10 November 1994, which sought to meet his request. It concluded:

"In the light of all the evidence gathered it remains the unanimous view of the inquiry team that Mrs. Hall was killed at 11 Moorland Drive, Pudsey, on Monday 27 January 1992."

Accordingly, the coroner wrote to the Home Office on 21 November setting out the revised evidence that, in his view, would support the case for a section 15 application. He concluded with this summary:

"(i) The enclosed report from West Yorkshire Police demonstrates the likelihood that Mrs. Hall is dead.

(ii) Mrs. Hall's home address, which is the place where she likely met her death, is within my jurisdiction.

(iii) The enclosed report from West Yorkshire Police refers to the likely circumstances of the destruction of the body.

(iv) I refer to my previous correspondence regarding my concern for an inquest to be held, which is stated in detail in my letter of the 7th April 1994."

I wrote to the Home Secretary in support of that application, and I consider that it would be in the best interests of all parties that such an inquest should be held. An inquest could determine, for registration purposes, that Patricia Anne Hall is dead. An inquest would provide substantial relief to Mrs. Hall's relatives and might enable a settlement of her affairs. It would also meet substantial public interest supported by a strong local press campaign and, above all, would allow the coroner to discharge his perceived duty.

As yet, there has been no reply from the Home Secretary on that matter. It is time that such a reply was made, and that is why I applied to Madam Speaker for this Adjournment debate.

I recognise that that request has caused—and probably is causing—difficult legal issues to be raised within the Home Office. The jurisdiction of a coroner is somewhat

[Sir Giles Shaw]

constrained. Although the acquittal of the man accused of murdering Mrs. Hall has already determined that particular line of inquiry, it does not seem to me impossible that a coroner's verdict could be arrived at which in no way either involves the taped admission itself—deemed unreliable and inadmissible by the trial judge—or conflicts with the verdict of the higher court. It seems to me that a verdict such as "killed unlawfully" or an open verdict would certainly not conflict with the Crown court. The cause of death could be described in medical terms as "unascertainable". It also seems to me that the Home Secretary has received sufficient additional evidence to demonstrate the likelihood that Mrs. Hall is dead, and there is no doubt that if that evidence is accepted the death clearly occurred within the west Yorkshire coroner's jurisdiction. The report from the West Yorkshire police team indicates the likely circumstances of the disposal and subsequent destruction of the body and shows that such actions would have been practicable.

I deduce from that, therefore, that all the requirements of the coroner by the correspondence with the Home Office and the answers to all the questions that it set down for elucidation before arriving at its decision have now been fully and fairly delivered and that the answers should enable the Home Office to make a recommendation to the Home Secretary that a direction be issued under section 15 of the Coroners Act.

I said at the outset that this is a tragedy—for the family and for the Pudsey community. It should be brought to a fair and final conclusion.

I therefore think it right to ask my hon. Friend, who is responding to the debate on behalf of the Home Secretary, to accept that he has a duty to allow the west Yorkshire coroner to proceed to an inquest, which would be the proper fulfilment of his professional duty to the public whom he serves with distinction. It would also bring one element of justice, so far denied to the devastated family of Patricia Anne Hall.

10.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Nicholas Baker): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) for raising this important and tragic case and I pay tribute to the zeal and persistence with which he has pursued it over several months. It is a case that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and I have considered extremely carefully, because we recognise its importance to the family of Patricia Anne Hall.

Inquests in England and Wales are conducted in accordance with the Coroners Act 1988 and the coroners rules 1984. Coroners are appointed to investigate sudden or unexplained deaths, in the general interest of the community. Their duty to hold an inquest is triggered when a report is made to them that the body of a deceased person is lying within their district and that there is reasonable cause to believe that he or she has died a violent or unnatural death, a sudden death of unknown cause or has died in custody.

What happens if the coroner has reason to believe that a death has occurred in his district in such circumstances that an inquest should be held, but the body has been destroyed or cannot be recovered? That is what the coroner believes in this case. This situation is catered for by section 15 of the Coroners Act, which provides that, in such circumstances, the coroner may report the facts to the Secretary of State, who may, if he considers it desirable to do so, direct either the coroner or another one to hold an inquest into the death.

The disappearance of Patricia Anne Hall was reported to the police by her husband, Keith Hall, on 27 January 1992. No body has ever been found, but, following police investigations, Keith Hall was charged with his wife's murder. During those investigations, Mr. Hall admitted to an undercover policewoman that he had strangled his wife and disposed of her body in an incinerator.

That admission was tape-recorded by the police officer. In the course of a preliminary hearing at the trial, the judge ruled that the taped confession was inadmissible in evidence, as the circumstances in which it was made rendered it potentially unreliable. On 10 March 1994, after hearing the rest of the evidence, the jury acquitted Mr. Hall of his wife's murder. It was part of his case that his wife might still be alive.

Following the trial, on 16 March 1994, Her Majesty's coroner for the eastern district of west Yorkshire reported to the Secretary of State his belief that the death of Patricia Anne Hall had occurred in his district, in such circumstances that an inquest should be held and that owing to the destruction of the body by fire an inquest could not be held except in pursuance of section 15 of the Coroners Act. The application was carefully considered by Home Office officials, acting on behalf of the Secretary of State.

A decision was taken, at official level, not to direct the holding of an inquest and that decision was communicated to the coroner in a letter of 22 July 1994. In that letter it was pointed out that, if the inquest had been opened and adjourned to await the outcome of criminal proceedings, as would probably have happened had Mrs. Hall's body been found before her husband's trial, section 16(7) of the Coroners Act would have required that the finding of the inquest as to the cause of death should not be inconsistent with the outcome of the criminal proceedings.

The view was taken that the same principle must apply to an inquest opened only after the criminal proceedings had been concluded, and that it would have been intolerable if the finding of the inquest had effectively been—although not of course couched in those specific terms—that Mrs. Hall had been murdered by her husband when he had been acquitted of that charge in criminal proceedings.

On 31 August 1994 and 21 November 1994, the coroner wrote asking for the matter to be reconsidered. During the same period, my hon. Friends the Members for Pudsey and for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) and the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) made representations about the case. Those developments prompted us to look into its implications again. Further legal advice was sought on a number of points and I now propose to outline the major factors that we took into consideration.

I should say straight away that both my right hon. and learned Friend and I can well understand, and have every sympathy with, the desire of Mrs. Hall's family to obtain an official pronouncement of her death, in order not only to be able to register the death and complete their grieving

but also, on a more practical level, to sort out her estate. We have also considered all the matters urged on us by the coroner.

As the hon. Member for Pudsey has made clear, one of the matters most strongly urged was that to which I have just referred: the need of the family and the local community to establish that Mrs. Hall is dead and not just a missing person. However, I am advised that that is not what an inquest is for. The general purpose of an inquest is to ensure that sudden deaths are publicly investigated. The specific purposes of an inquest, as stated in rule 36 of the coroners rules, are to ascertain who the deceased was and how, when and where he came by his death. Of course it is necessary, to trigger section 15, for the coroner to believe that a person is dead, and in this case the coroner has made it quite clear that he believes that Mrs. Hall is dead. But it would not be right for my right hon. and learned Friend to exercise his discretion under section 15 for the purpose of simply establishing the fact of her death rather than for the normal purposes of an inquest, which, as I have said, are to determine how, when and where the death occurred.

There is also the possibility of the inquest verdict being inconsistent with the verdict at the trial. That, as I have said, is an aspect on which the Home Office letter of 22 July 1994 to the coroner concentrated.

Having taken further legal advice on this point, we feel that a verdict at an inquest of unlawful killing would not be inconsistent with an acquittal in a criminal trial in every case, as the coroners rules preclude a coroner from naming the person whom he believes to have committed the unlawful killing. However, a verdict of unlawful killing in this instance could contemplate no one but Mr. Hall, since, as we understand it, the wide-ranging and thorough investigations of the police produced no evidence whatsoever to implicate anyone else. Furthermore, the fact that section 16 of the Coroners Act envisages that an inquest once adjourned might not be resumed—in part because all the facts have been ventilated at a criminal trial—is a factor to be weighed in the balance. In considering the desirability of an inquest, account should also be taken of the spirit of the "no inconsistency provisions" of section 16(7).

Another important question that we have had to address is the difficulty of the coroner admitting in evidence at the inquest the disputed tape-recorded confession. A High Court judge has ruled it inadmissible in criminal proceedings. It would, of course, be a matter for a coroner to consider questions of admissibility in accordance with the law, but we are concerned at the possibility of such evidence being admitted at a coroner's inquisition, where safeguards built into the criminal process do not apply. We have also given weight to the fact that there has already been a trial lasting nine days at which all the relevant evidence was ventilated, and which led to the acquittal of the person before the court. We have also considered the undesirability of the same issues being subjected to a second judicial process.

The coroner's reasons for wishing to hold an inquest, and the representations received in support of one from my hon. Friends the Members for Pudsey and for Skipton and Ripon and the hon. Member for Leeds, West have been looked at very carefully, but having considered all the circumstances of the case my right hon. and learned Friend has concluded that it would not be desirable to direct that an inquest be held in this case. He has had particular regard to the consequence of not holding an inquest—the practical difficulty facing Mrs. Hall's family in that they are currently unable to obtain an official pronouncement of her death or to register her death. But this factor does not, in the opinion of my right hon. and learned Friend, outweigh the general undesirability of directing an inquest in the circumstances of the case.

I realise that this is a most unwelcome result for the family. My right hon. and learned Friend and I greatly regret the distress that this decision may cause them.

10.24 pm

Sir Giles Shaw: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to speak again as my hon. Friend the Minister has allowed time for me to do so.

It goes without saying that what my hon. Friend has now announced as the decision of the Home Secretary—that he will not proceed to direct an inquest—will be received with very great distress indeed. He has, however, made it clear that substantial legal arguments have led to that decision.

I want my hon. Friend the Minister to know that it seems to me to be desirable to allow the coroner for west Yorkshire to examine with care the statement that my hon. Friend has made in giving the decision on this matter. Should he then believe that it is desirable to ensure that he fully understands the reasoning that has now been adduced in this matter, I might apply to my hon. Friend to visit the Home Office for further discussion. I recognise that it would not be easy, if not impossible, to overturn a decision that has been many months overdue, but it might help to determine precisely why, in legal terms, the Home Secretary has arrived at this decision.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 3 February 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILL PRESENTED

LICENSING (SUNDAY HOURS)

Mr. Secretary Howard, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary Dorrell and Mr. Michael Forsyth presented a Bill to amend the provisions of the Licensing Act 1964 relating to permitted hours in licensed premises and clubs on Sundays, Christmas Day and Good Friday; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Monday 6 February, and to be printed. [Bill 44.]

Orders of the Day

Proceeds of Crime Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.34 am

Sir John Hannam (Exeter): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is third time lucky for me in the private Members' ballot. I was also lucky last year in the private motions ballot, so I am not going to buy any more lottery tickets as I am sure that my luck has now run out. However, I am delighted to have the opportunity to present this Bill. Although it may appear a narrow and fairly technical measure—I apologise for its technicalities—it is none the less an ambitious one and I am confident that hon. Members of all parties will support its aims and principles.

The Bill aims to make life much more difficult for those who profit from crime and especially those who make a living out of the proceeds of crime, those whom we call the life-style criminals. It bites on a whole range of serious and acquisitive crimes except drug trafficking and terrorism, which are covered by their own legislation.

The proposals follow recent improvements to the drug trafficking confiscation scheme which, by an apt coincidence, comes into force this very day. Like those recent improvements in the powers of the courts to confiscate the proceeds of drugs offences, the proposals have their origins in a report of the Home Office working group on confiscation which was established in 1990 to monitor and develop the confiscation legislation. They do not alter the fundamental nature of the all-crime confiscation scheme; rather, they are intended to build on and strengthen the existing powers in part VI of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and bring its powers more closely into line with the drug trafficking provisions as they now stand following the entry into force today of the Drug Trafficking Act 1994.

One of the concerns highlighted in the Home Office working group's report, which I draw to the House's attention, is the infrequent use being made of the confiscation powers in the 1988 Act. Home Office statistics show that in the financial year 1993-94 only 13 "non-drugs" confiscation orders were made by the courts to a total value of some £412,000. Of that sum, only £265,600 has been paid over to the Secretary of State. That is disappointing, to say the least, and such sums can only be a drop in the ocean of profits that criminals are making out of their lifestyles of crime. The Bill is designed to make our laws much more effective in removing profits from the criminal fraternity.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I congratulate my hon. Friend on promoting the Bill. Is he aware that the proposals that he is outlining have been warmly welcomed by the police and correspond four square with the evidence given to the Select Committee on Home Affairs during its current inquiry into organised crime and the need to widen the provisions to enable greater confiscation of criminal proceeds?

[Mr. John Greenway]

Sir John Hannam: Yes, I am aware of the support of the police and hon. Members of all parties for the measure, which will extend the available powers and place a duty on the courts.

Clause 1 imposes a duty on the court to make a confiscation order where written notice is tendered by the prosecutor. At present, the court has a discretion, so the clause would bring part VI of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 into line with drug trafficking provisions and ensure that in future the courts make a confiscation order to the full amount of the defendant's financial benefit from crime. In line with the arrangements for drug trafficking, if the prosecutor does not tender a notice, the court may still make an order of its own volition.

Clause 1 also abolishes the £10,000 minimum amount currently applicable to confiscation orders under the Criminal Justice Act 1988, which follows the approach taken in the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill being considered in another place. It must be wrong, as I am sure that hon. Members would agree, that criminals should know themselves to be safe from confiscation wherever they have—ostensibly—less than £10,000 of benefit or of realisable property. There has never been a lower limit for drug trafficking, and the same should apply for all indictable offences.

Of course, it costs money to pursue a confiscation case through the courts. Prosecutors will no doubt have the likely costs and benefits very much in mind when they consider whether to tender a notice asking the court to confiscate proceeds in a given case. Few cases below the £10,000 threshold may be considered viable and the cost would be greater than the benefit. On the other hand, confiscation orders may still be made and sums realised in cases involving benefit and property below £10,000 without imposing disproportionate costs on the courts. I suspect that the Government will wish to monitor that closely to ensure that public money is used to best effect.

Clause 2 is the cutting edge of the Bill. Part VI of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 permits the courts to confiscate only the proceeds of any offences of which the defendant is convicted, plus the benefit from any offences taken into consideration. Unfortunately, as a result, the 1988 Act has had little effect on criminals who amass large profits by repeating similar offences over a period of years. The best example of that is the difficulty illustrated by pornographic videos. A criminal may copy and distribute thousands of videos a month, but the production of each video will constitute a separate offence. For the entire proceeds of that criminal enterprise to be confiscated under the 1988 Act, every offence would have to charged and convicted separately or taken into consideration by the court.

Unfortunately, the courts may take offences into consideration only with the defendant's consent and lifestyle criminals are well aware of the possibility of their ill-gotten gains being confiscated if they allow the court to take too many offences into consideration and will obviously not allow it. Clause 2 addresses those problems.

Under certain circumstances, which I shall describe, clause 2 empowers the courts to assume that all property passed through the defendant's hands in the past six years has come from crime. If the defendant cannot show that assumption to be wrong, in whole or in part, the court will be able to order the defendant to pay an amount equivalent to that assumed benefit. The Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 has always allowed similar assumptions to be made on the strength of one drug trafficking conviction.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): I fully understand that it is essential that the court may make assumptions, but does my hon. Friend agree that it may be possible to go further still, as the Drug Trafficking Offences Act does, and require the court to make those assumptions? Would he consider that sensible?

Sir John Hannam: As I shall describe, the Bill places certain requirements on the court, and the onus to prove otherwise will fall very much on the defendant. Nevertheless, since general crime is distinct from clearly defined drug trafficking offences, the assumptions require a little more latitude. I shall address that point in more detail.

First, the courts have power to make assumptions only when the prosecutor regards the case as suitable and tenders a declaration to that effect. Secondly, assumptions may be made only when there is some indication of a pattern of offending. We are aiming at catching the life-style criminals. Either the defendant must have been convicted of another qualifying offence in the previous six years or he must stand convicted of four or more qualifying offences.

Thirdly, the court has overriding discretion to make assumptions, which is quite different from the Drug Trafficking Offences Act, under which the court is obliged, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) pointed out, to make more far-reaching assumptions in all cases, even when sentencing a first-time offender for a single drug trafficking offence. The Bill enables the courts to confiscate benefits from offenders who have previously been able to keep their profits. However, the Bill also establishes necessary safeguards to ensure that the new powers are not used in undeserving cases.

Clauses 3 and 4 recognise that information is essential in confiscation hearings. They ensure that the court has the opportunity to get the information it needs in a reasonable period. Clause 3 requires the prosecutor to give the court a statement or statements about the defendant's benefit from crime. At present, the production of a statement is discretionary. Conversely, clause 4 allows the court to order the defendant to provide any information that it considers relevant to the making of a confiscation order.

As hon. Members will readily appreciate, the amount and whereabouts of proceeds is very often known only to the defendant. Clause 4 will help the courts to assess the value of the confiscation order. Failure to comply with the court order will, of course, put the defendant in contempt of court. Clauses 3 and 4 echo the Drug Trafficking Offences Act, as do the revaluation powers in clauses 5 to 7. At present, under part VI of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, the courts are powerless to confiscate the value of the benefit, which was made from crime but discovered after the original proceedings. The Bill will enable courts to confiscate additional benefit within six years of the defendant's conviction on an application by the prosecutor.

Clause 8 closes a loophole in serious and lucrative crime which is already closed in drug trafficking. Since confiscation orders made under the 1988 Act are enforced like fines in many respects, the service of a term of imprisonment in default of payment expunges the debt for the amount payable under the order. In some cases, that means that the offender can hang on to substantial ill-gotten gains by serving a short term of imprisonment in default of payment—an issue raised in almost every radio interview that I have given regarding the Bill—which is contrary to the spirit of the confiscation legislation.

I am sure that hon. Members will share my view that there should be no question of choice between paying the court's confiscation order and going to prison and keeping the profits. The Bill will prevent that choice from arising in future. Even when a default term has been served, it will still be possible to enforce a confiscation order by other means.

Clause 9 is a further enforcement measure. At present, if they wish, the courts can allow time for the payment of a confiscation order. That may sometimes be necessary when, for instance, a property is to be disposed of because, often, the criminal sinks the proceeds into property as quickly as possible. However, defendants who fail to pay up promptly can benefit from the interest accruing on the unpaid account, which is quite wrong. Clause 9, therefore, allows the courts to add interest on the unpaid amount and treat it as part of the confiscation order. Again, that echoes drug trafficking legislation.

The remaining clauses of the Bill essentially provide more effective asset-tracing powers for use by our enforcement authorities. Clause 11 allows the police and customs officers, who have been heavily involved in the preparation of the Bill, to obtain material for use in an investigation into whether a person has benefited from any criminal conduct or into the extent of any proceeds and their whereabouts. Clause 12 enables a search warrant to be issued for the same purpose.

Those new powers are based on powers in clauses 27 and 28 of the Drug Trafficking Offences Act and are designed to enable the enforcement authorities to gain access to confidential banking and other material which could be of substantial use in financial investigations. The powers of drug trafficking legislation have proved an effective tool, especially in the early stages of a drug trafficking investigation. That is operated on an international scale. We can all cite instances of crimes in respect of which the public are fed up and disgusted with the lack of follow-up. As a result of the Bill, the police will be able to carry out the necessary investigations so that ultimately the proceeds can be confiscated.

The House clearly has a duty to ensure that the appropriate authorities have the necessary tools to unearth the true extent of a criminal's benefit from crime. The new measures include all the appropriate safeguards and they are limited to investigations into the proceeds of crime. They do not extend police powers generally.

Clause 13 is modelled on provisions originally in section 30 of the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986. It incorporates the safeguards in the drug trafficking legislation. It allows the High Court to order Government Departments to produce material which is likely to be of use in restraining, charging and realising property under part VI of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. Where the High Court permits, material produced may be disclosed to other agencies to assist in the fight against crime.

I believe that I have given a fair and accurate description of the aims, principles and content of the Bill. In my view, it is absolutely essential that the courts and the enforcement authorities should be able to deal effectively with lucrative crime of all kinds. The Bill will go a long way towards achieving that, and I am confident that it will be welcomed by hon. Members and the general public. I commend it to the House.

9.50 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I congratulate the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir John Hannam) on his luck in the ballot and on choosing this subject. He has presented his concerns and the concerns of hon. Members and of the general public very clearly. I am a member of the British delegation to the Council of Europe and I serve on the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee. We held meetings in Strasbourg this week in which we had detailed discussions about the problem of drug trading and dealing. The hon. Member for Exeter referred to that point.

It is clear that drug crime and every other form of major crime is now highly organised. Criminals do not simply deal in drugs on a national and international basis. We are aware that very large sums of money are involved in crime.

I am glad to see the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), in the Chamber today. He will be aware that we are not talking about the little groups of villains which, sadly, exist in many parts of the country and elsewhere. Those villains cause trouble, commit robberies, steal and beat up people if they step out of line. We are talking about organised crime which has international links.

The financial rewards of international organised crime are enormous: enormous sums of money are made. The people who run those organisations are very rarely caught. The lower ranks are caught and appear before the courts. Wandsworth prison is in my constituency, and I sometimes get to know inmates and the kind of offences which have caused them to be in prison.

However, the people who are making enormous sums of money and who are building up their empires are rarely caught. I wish the Bill every success, but, with respect, the hon. Member for Exeter omitted to refer to one or two points. I am sure that he would not be opposed to the comments that I propose to make later. I believe that we should confiscate the assets of the people who run the organisations and, if they are convicted by our courts, they should be sent to prison for a very long time.

A few moments ago, I said that we were concerned about drugs and the vast sums of money that can be earned from that form of criminal activity. Hon Members may have listened to this morning's "Today" programme. According to a report on that programme, a large number of police officers in a police station in the Bronx were actively involved with people who were trading in drugs in New York. From that brief report, it appeared that one officer had well over $1 million stuffed in a holdall in his locker in the police station.

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That report illustrates the amount of money involved and the extent of the corruption that takes place at all levels. Not only police officers are involved; sadly, corruption occurs in many spheres of day-to-day life and it involves people who have authority to make decisions.

With regard to other aspects of crime and the vast sums of money involved, we must consider the illegal arms trade. We know something about that activity. If our colleagues from Northern Ireland were here today, I am sure that they could speak at length about the illegal arms which found their way into Northern Ireland from far-away countries. Those arms are were not given; they were sold. They were obviously being sold for very large sums of money, and that money had to be filtered through other channels so that it appeared to be clean and not dirty money.

We should also consider the traffic in stolen art. Many pictures are extremely valuable. They sell for very large sums of money. There are professional criminals and thieves operating in the art world.

Although I am a London Member, I am aware that car crime occurs in all parts of the country. I recall that, two or three years ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) bought quite a pricey motor car, having regard to the distance that he has to travel from his home to this place. That car was stolen. When he went to the police, they said, "We've got to tell you, your chances of ever seeing your car again are zero. In our view, that car could well be somewhere in Europe today." Car stealing groups in this country and elsewhere in Europe make enormous sums of money. Although we are aware of that crime, it is not easy to contain it or to obtain the information which the hon. Member for Exeter seeks to obtain in his Bill.

The hon. Member for Exeter referred to pornography. Pornography is undoubtedly one of the growth industries. Again, we are talking about very large sums of money. Far be it from me to name people, because they would then say, "He is just taking advantage of parliamentary privilege," but there are extremely wealthy people in London. We often read about them in the daily press. They are proud to say, "I have been associated with the pornography industry for years. That's how I made my money." They own substantial businesses and large properties. We certainly know that the pornography trade is not run by a little group in the United Kingdom; its links are worldwide. It is now easy to move around the world.

There are some who say that, by and large, the single market could be a good thing. The Minister may wish to comment on the problems that the single market has caused.

The next problem to which I refer is not talked about very much, but it certainly exists—Hon. Members who serve in the Council of Europe certainly discuss it with their colleagues there. It occurs in the present central European countries—the old eastern European countries—in which, sadly, life can be very hard for many people. There is now clear evidence of a flourishing trade in women in certain eastern European countries. Because of the hardship that those women and their families suffer, some might think, "Prostitution is not the kind of life that I would like, but if it will give me money to help my family, I might do it for a while." There is evidence of such women being moved around countries in Europe.

How do we tackle the people who indulge in that evil trade? As we know, it is easy for someone to approach women, especially young women, and say, "Look, we are seeking hostesses, dancers and others in the entertainment world." I am sure that the most honourable of women would think, "I would like to do that." They are then moved to a foreign country whose laws they know nothing about and where they know no one. They then become the virtual prisoners of the people who move them from country to country.

There is evidence of that—it does not receive much coverage, but it most certainly happens. I do not say that we should spend much time on that subject today, but perhaps the Minister will comment on it.

The hon. Member for Exeter will be the first to agree that the people whose activities he wants to curb and whose ill-gotten gains he wishes to recover are highly professional. I am sure that he agrees that it will be very hard to do that.

I have a paper that was prepared and presented by a senior official of the Italian law enforcement office. It makes very interesting reading. I suppose that all hon. Members have heard of the Mafia and have seen "The Godfather". Hon. Members possibly enjoyed such films and thought, "Well, perhaps a little bit of it is true, but much of it is typical Hollywood make-believe." That is not the case, according to that official's paper. It shows that there are many other highly organised, professional criminal groups in Italy.

You, Madam Deputy Speaker, might ask me, "What does Italy have to do with the hon. Gentleman's Bill?" The answer is, a great deal. Crime knows no boundaries, nor do those who organise crime. It is easy for people from Italy or from the United Kingdom to be in each other's country in two or three hours. One has a passport, one goes to the appropriate airport, and one is away. Obviously, one can quickly meet somebody abroad.

As the paper shows, we are dealing with organisations. Until I read that paper and talked to people from Italy, I did not fully understand the extent of organised crime. We are talking about family groups who live in Italy, the United States, Argentina and Venezuela—they could live in this country—who have close links. They meet not to talk about the weather but about how they organise their racket. That is of great concern to us.

The Italian official's paper highlights enormous problems for the courts. Sadly, the hon. Gentleman will find out about them as he pilots his Bill through its Committee stage. I shall certainly support him fully. The paper states:

> "In the complex investigative field in which we operate, changes in orientations and methods evolve rapidly. In addition, these changes involve not only criminals' new operational schemes, but also the last achievements of technology, such as fax machines, computers, cellular phones and global satellite mobiles and so on."

Through their wealth and their international organisations, people have been able to pursue their criminal activities.

There is no cut in criminals' funding. No criminal organisation ever says, "We should be doing that, but just think of the money." I do not make a party political point, because it could happen under any Government, but hon.

Members repeatedly express concern about the lack of sufficient funding for police forces to try to combat crime at whatever level.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the confiscation of assets. No one other than criminals would object to that. However, we are not talking only about bank transactions. Many people often think that criminals put large sums of money in a bank or perhaps in several banks so that there are smaller amounts, but we are not talking about that. Evidence has been submitted to us in the Council of Europe, and I am sure that the Home Office has also received information. We may be talking about property investment, and I do not mean the family house. There is clear evidence that large properties and businesses, such as night clubs or casinos, are being bought.

I am sure that the Minister knows that it is easy to launder money through such businesses. The owners can fill in books and allow inspections, but it can be difficult to charge anyone running those organisations, although the authorities may not believe that all the money the owners are declaring has been paid in the course of gaming transactions in the casino. How do we tackle those people, and the confusion they cause?

Another thing which amazes me—I should no longer be amazed at what criminals get up to—is that there is a lucrative market for criminals in antique furniture. I do not mean anything cheap or tatty, but antique furniture of elegance and great value. It is the easiest thing in the world for someone who has bought furniture quickly to pass it on, and that is a great problem with which the Bill must deal.

I return to the report from the senior Italian officer. A short comment highlights what I am talking about. In June 1993, the leader of a criminal group purchased a boat for 1 billion lire. Some of that money had previously been changed into Dutch guilders and Swiss francs, and eventually the money was transferred to the seller from a Swiss bank. My understanding is that the gentleman sold the boat not long after buying.

I would like to know what checks are being made—or can be made—within the single market. It is easy to move from country to country, and the traffic in women exists because there are few border controls. As an example, I came home last night from the Council of Europe. I was in Strasbourg, and was taken by car across the Swiss border. There were no checks, the car did not stop at customs or immigration and we were just waved through. We were making a perfectly honourable journey, but there could be many people who are not.

A point that we must examine is extradition. Let us think about two recent cases which perhaps did not involve drugs. I suppose that I can name the gentleman in the first case, because he is presently serving a prison sentence. Mr. Ronnie Knight and his friends made life very enjoyable and pleasant for themselves in Spain from the proceeds of crime, and they received massive press coverage. Only Knight knows the reasons he had for coming back, but eventually he did come back. The House will know of the on-going difficulties that we experience in this area, and the Government—to their credit—had tried to get that gentleman back.

I am told that there are a number of people in Spain whom the police authorities here would like to interview—to use the polite jargon—but they cannot get them back. It would be interesting to hear from the Minister what kind of discussions are taking place with countries in the European Union, and we must not forget that Spain is a member of the EU. There are a number of people who have, frankly, paid no regard to the laws of this country and, to use a somewhat crude expression, have put two fingers up to authority and said that they could not care less. They know that we can do nothing about them, and they continue to live as pleasantly as they can from their gains from crime.

It would be interesting to hear from the Minister how he thinks the Bill could be strengthened to tackle the issue of extradition. The House will remember also the Brinks-Mat robbery at Heathrow some years ago, when large sums were taken. Some individuals went into hiding abroad, and there was nothing we could do about it.

I shall be careful about the next person to whom I refer, as I realise that there may be criminal proceedings in the pipeline. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) has asked questions in the past couple of weeks to the Attorney-General about Mr. Nadir. We know that he is in northern Cyprus, and we know that there is a great deal of evidence which the police may wish to use in charges against him. It would obviously then be for the courts to decide whether, based on that evidence, Mr. Nadir was guilty.

There was a conference in Cyprus on legal affairs some years ago, and I think that the then Lord Chancellor went there to try to talk to Mr. Denktash in an effort to build relations and in the hope that Mr. Nadir could be sent back to the UK. Nothing happened, and he is still there. That is another example of a person who may have committed offences, yet whom the police cannot question.

I welcome the Bill, but aspects of it could still be tightened. The Bill goes outside the existing legislation regarding drug offences, and I would like to know how much co-operation we are seeking from member states of the EU. That has great relevance. We should know if any have similar legislation at present and, if so, how it is working.

Those of us who have been in this place for a while know that when Bills go into Committee, amendments may be tabled by other Members or by the Government. If there is a general willingness to see the Bill go through—I hope that there is such a willingness on this Bill—there is no harm in amendments being tabled in Committee.

I referred to the fact that I serve on the Council of Europe. I would like to hear the Minister's comments on the point that I have just made. I would like him and his officials to find out how many of the other 11 member states have similar legislation; whether it is working; and what weaknesses they have found. I have concentrated my remarks on the 11 members, because we know of the rules that govern the interaction of members of the European Union—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to interrupt to hon. Gentleman, but we are looking at a Bill that deals with the recovery of the proceeds of criminal conduct, and it seems to me that, although some background is certainly desirable, he is now dealing with matters that could not possibly relate to the Second Reading of the Bill.

Mr. Cox: I note what you say, Madam Speaker, and will bear it in mind. I was simply giving examples to show that the European Union suffers from the same kinds of problems that the hon. Member for Exeter seeks to

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overcome in his Bill. Surely this is an opportunity, before the Bill becomes law—I hope that it goes through all its stages without problems—to say that we have consulted other countries and believe that it is a good thing, because I can think of legislation that was introduced some time ago with regard to the control of firearms, but not long afterwards, we found that there were loopholes in the legislation. That is the point that I was making.

I warmly welcome the Bill and the way in which it was presented by the hon. Gentleman. I have outlined other matters which I believe fit into the overall discussion that we are entitled to have on Second Reading. It is no good simply saying, "It is a wonderful Bill; I am going to support it and I hope that everyone else does," without saying, "Yes, I will support the Bill, but are we really aware of this problem, or that problem?" I hope that, when it is considered in Committee it will not be rushed through, because that is the opportunity to look in detail at the worthwhile proposals that the hon. Gentleman has presented in the Bill and outlined today. I for one offer him my fullest support.

10.22 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): Before any more hon. Members speak, I shall take this early opportunity to express the Government's position on the Bill, which may influence other speeches. I want to set at rest any doubt about whether the Government support it.

The Government are grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) for introducing the Bill to deprive criminals of wealth accumulated from crime, and it has our full support. I am delighted, although not surprised, that it has received a warm welcome from hon. Members on both sides of the House. Most hon. Members recognise that tough laws are necessary to ensure that criminals do not enjoy a living from crime, at the cost and suffering of those who live within the law. The Bill tackles the problem head on, and my hon. Friend can be assured that the Government will continue to give him all the support and assistance necessary to ensure that it is enacted.

In the two years since the publication of the Home Office working group's second report, the need to strengthen the courts' powers to confiscate the proceeds of non-drugs crime has become even more acute, as the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) pointed out. The statistics quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter in his opening remarks speak for themselves. Last year, confiscation orders under the Criminal Justice Act 1988 realised the meagre sum of £265,600. Clearly, many criminals—too many—are continuing to benefit from their crimes and are keeping their profits.

My hon. Friend gave a full description of the main contents of the Bill, and I do not think that the House would want me to delay other speeches by repeating ad nauseam what he said or by running through the clauses. With your permission, however, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to say that the Government particularly support the innovative proposals in clause 2. The fact that the law does not deal effectively with criminals who persist in a life style of crime and make a good living from doing so has been of great concern to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and me for some time.

Although, for good reasons, the proposals in clause 2 fall short of the powers available in drug trafficking and terrorism legislation, they are, none the less, hard hitting, and I am confident that once the legislation begins to bite criminals will be far less confident about their ability to hold on to their ill-gotten gains. Safeguards will ensure that the powers are not used unfairly or in unsuitable cases.

The new investigative powers in clauses 11, 12 and 13 are well overdue and will be especially welcomed by the police and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

In short, the Government fully support my hon. Friend's Bill and I welcome the support that I believe it will receive from the Opposition. We are very grateful for the consensus across the House. We wish the measure well during the remainder of its passage through the House and in another place. Once again, I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing such a sensible Bill—a highly technical and complex measure—and on the excellent way in which he explained it.

10.25 am

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I add my congratulations to those of other hon. Members who congratulated the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) on introducing the Bill, and on his luck in being successful in the private Member's ballot. He is fortunate indeed. I have not yet had such good fortune myself, although I hope to before I eventually leave the House.

It is important to say that the Bill has the full support of Opposition Members, and I am very happy to stand and express that support. It is good, too, to hear of the Government's support, because I presume that it will mean that the Bill will have an easy passage through all its stages in the House. I look forward to the Bill completing its passage during this Session.

Labour Members are tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. The Bill falls, perhaps, into the first category—of being tough on crime. It will have a deterrent effect, particularly on those who are habitual criminals. I hope that it will have a minor effect on the causes of crime too.

For many people, who perhaps are listening to the debate today or will read about it at a later stage, it is important that the Bill satisfies the laws of natural justice. Most people would feel it instinctively right that criminals should not be able to benefit from criminal procedures. I am not particularly familiar with the criminal law, but I was quite shocked to realise that there were such gaps in the law on the recovery of the results of crime.

I recall the case of the great train robbers. Although it occurred a long time ago, I remember the shock with which most people realised that, having served their sentence, the people involved were permitted to come out of prison and live a fairly luxurious life style on the proceeds of the crime that had been committed. I cannot emphasise enough how unfair that will appear to most of the people in this country. I am very happy that the Bill has come before the House, and am happy to give it my full support to ensure that those injustices are put right.

One of the rather sad features of our present criminal justice system is that only one in 50 crimes results in a successful prosecution. The Bill will not redress that or make it easier for the police to bring successful prosecutions. However, I hope that once criminal activity

has been uncovered and the criminals have been brought to justice, they will be pursued not only at the time of the trial but later if proceeds from the crime are discovered, and that action will be taken to recover them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) referred to international crime and cross-border smuggling. I refer to a domestic criminal activity of which a relative of mine has recent experience. A gang of so-called antique dealers made a speciality of preying on the elderly and those living alone. I am glad to say that the criminals were eventually brought to justice, but most of the stolen property was not recovered. It is a source of great anguish to the elderly people involved, who felt defrauded of property that had probably been in their family for many years, that the criminals could serve a short prison sentence and then come out and live on the proceeds of the stolen property.

That nasty crime, which caused much anger among not only the elderly people involved but their relatives, was perpetrated by people calling on homes, possibly during the day when few other people were around, and persuading elderly people to part with family heirlooms and goods of which they may not have realised the intrinsic value. The disappearance of other goods was not noticed until the thieves had departed. As the Minister said, confiscation orders last year totalled only £265,000. I am sure that that group of so-called antique dealers is living off profits that greatly exceed that sum.

I am happy to support the Bill, and congratulate once again the hon. Member for Exeter on introducing it.

10.32 am

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I join other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) on what may be his swan-song measure in the House. It is a fitting end to a noble and long career, which will end—I hope that he will begin a well-earned retirement as soon as possible—by putting on the statute book a measure that will act as both a retribution for and a deterrent to crime.

I am delighted that the Government support the Bill and hope that it will send a message to criminals that they should have some regard for the fact that, even if they are caught, condemned and spend time in prison, they will in no way benefit from the crime.

I draw attention to a small caveat: the need to protect criminals' families. The sins and crimes of a father or mother should not be visited upon their children. I assume that some consideration will be given in Committee to ensuring that criminals' families are not deprived of a roof over their heads in order to punish the person who may have bought the house with the proceeds of crime.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) said, although the Bill is tough on crime and criminals, Labour Members would prefer the Government, in their remaining months in office, to introduce measures that are tough on the causes of crime. In my constituency of Rotherham in South Yorkshire, since 1979 home burglaries have increased by 483 per cent.; other burglaries have increased by 228 per cent.; motor vehicle thefts have risen by 242 per cent.; and other thefts and handling have increased by 335 per cent.

It is wholly appropriate that the Bill is before the House because hon. Members on both sides have a duty to try to ease the sense of the majority of citizens that they live in a society in which crime pays. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge pointed out, criminals are often not caught or, if they are apprehended, only one in 50 cases results in prosecution.

The Bill may serve as an important deterrent in the growing area of white collar crime. A substantial increase has taken place in what one might call "big money" criminality in new areas such as computers and automatic money transfers, which can take place with great ease thanks to there being no exchange controls. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) should note that, if we want to control criminality in Europe, it should be done not by stepping up border checks or putting road blocks between Switzerland and Europe, which would not solve the problem, but by greater supervision, disclosure and policing of the flow of money between, say, French and Swiss banks and between various gentlemen in this country and trusts in Anstalten in Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

I congratulate *The Guardian* on successfully resisting a disgraceful gagging writ by Ms Karen Morgan Thomas, who was involved in share dealing in Anglia Television. I shall not go into the case, because Madam Speaker gave a ruling last week when my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) raised the clear indications of criminal dealings in the buying of Anglia Television shares.

Even the new chairman of the stock exchange, Mr. John Kemp-Welch, is reported as saying that he is extremely concerned about our criminal prosecution system's inability to deal with white collar crime, particularly involving share dealings. I hope that the Bill will give a message to gentlemen of the City that, despite the culture of sleaze and corruption—a culture in which the bacillus of crime has developed so strongly in recent years—the House is now taking this issue seriously, even if it is through a private Member's Bill on a Friday morning.

It would be far better to have measures aimed at prevention rather than prosecution, as discouragement is far better than punishment. None the less, if the Bill results in the message going out through the media, the implied threat will be that, however much money is made and however well it is hidden, crime will not pay, even after a period of imprisonment.

We need far more powerful mechanisms of disclosure. I greatly regret that the Department of Trade and Industry is still not fully publishing all the details of the reports sent to it on insider share dealing. Such action would be a preventive measure—the threat of disclosure may be a greater deterrent even than the stepped-up retribution in the Bill.

I join all hon. Members in welcoming the Bill. An unpleasant court case is taking place in Sheffield Crown court involving a Rotherham company. Many investors lost their money and many people lost jobs. The case involved one of the business expansion schemes scams of the 1980s. If the Bill had been on the statute book, the gentleman involved in that case might have thought twice before setting up a scheme that robbed honest investors and cost many of my constituents their jobs. Once that case is over, I may return to the House with the subject, as it involves a deputy chairman of the Conservative party.

Today, I simply wish to congratulate the hon. Member for Exeter, to record my support for the Bill and to wish it a speedy passage through its remaining stages in this and the other House.

10.40 am

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) on introducing the Bill, which will provide important strengthening and tightening of the law on confiscation.

Those of us who, in 1993, served on the Committee that considered the Criminal Justice Bill, which strengthened the law in respect of the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986, felt that the law, as it stood under the Criminal Justice Act 1988, also required review. I know that the Home Office working party has worked extremely hard to produce conclusions. The evidence it heard from the Association of Chief Police Officers, the national crime intelligence service and Customs included strong arguments for a move in that direction. I am pleased that my hon. Friend has been able to introduce an excellent measure that will strengthen the courts' hand when dealing with people who create a life style from crime.

I do not intend to go into the Bill's details, but I am glad to have had this opportunity to give my support to my hon. Friend for his pioneering criminal legislation, which runs with the current of present thinking in the courts and, I believe, among hon. Members and lawyers.

10.42 am

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): I congratulate the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) on winning his place in the ballot and all those hon. Members who have supported the Bill, including my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), who spoke so well today, and my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport—

Mr. MacShane: Rotherham.

Mrs. Roche: I wish to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey), who is a sponsor of the Bill. I shall deal with the excellent contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) in a little while. Another sponsor of the Bill is the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe). I have to mention him because he is my parliamentary pair, and therefore an extremely important person in my parliamentary life.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Exeter, not only on his success in the ballot, but on the eloquent way in which he presented the Bill which, as the Minister of State said, is a technical Bill. I firmly believe that the Bill, which is long overdue, will make a tremendous contribution to our criminal justice system—to the courts and the police—in combating crime.

There have been a number of excellent contributions to the debate. The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) made an important point about the nature of organised crime. The theme of organised crime was touched on in the interesting and wide-ranging speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and in the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham.

Until recently, I had the great honour to be a member of the Select Committee on Home Affairs. That Select Committee is undertaking an investigation into organised crime, which is no easy subject as it is involved and complicated. A great deal of evidence has been submitted to the Committee. There is no doubt that all hon. Members must take organised crime seriously. Some aspects of it have great ramifications—it is sophisticated, it is organised internationally and it has an effect on the everyday lives of men and women.

Crime is an extremely debilitating feature of our society. It is right that burglars, robbers, fraudsters and other criminals should not profit from their crimes any more than those who traffic in drugs. In London and in my constituency, the levels of home burglary are significantly higher than elsewhere in England and Wales. Victims have to pay three times: through the loss of their property; through the size of their insurance premiums—they are proportionately worse off because of last October's new 3 per cent. tax on home and car insurance—and through their taxes, which are used to fund the huge cost of the criminal justice system.

Businesses are also hard hit by crime. The latest quarterly report of the Forum of Private Business reported that more than 43 per cent. of the businesses that it surveyed in London described crime as a significant burden, leading to serious implications for the numbers of people employed by small businesses.

There is no reason why burglars, those who rob and commit fraud should be treated differently from those who engage in the dreadful traffic in drugs. There is no reason why they should be able to serve short prison terms—costing the taxpayer more than £400 a week, according to the answer to a parliamentary question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) last November—then come out of prison and live on the proceeds of their ill-gotten gains. Some of them even use the proceeds to fund future criminal activities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge made a pertinent point when she said that the public were very shocked at the thought of people serving relatively short prison sentences, coming out of prison and leading luxurious life styles. There is a sense of revulsion at that, and my hon. Friend spoke for the whole House. There is no reason why a burglar should be able to avoid confiscation if the proceeds of his night's criminal activities amount to £9,999. That is why I so welcome the relevant provision in the Bill.

Various big criminal cases have been discussed this morning. We all know the sort of criminals that we are talking about. The popular television series "Birds of a Feather" almost celebrates the life style of the criminal with a luxurious home. Of course, I make no reference to the constituency of the Minister for Transport in London, the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), who is sitting on the Treasury Bench. I am sure that the inhabitants of Chigwell in his lovely constituency in the fine county of Essex are law-abiding. That is certainly a part of the world in which the Labour party expects to do extremely well in the next general election, following the results of the last local government elections.

On a serious note, it is correct that the legislation is aimed at those criminals who are popularly depicted. Knowing that Parliament takes the issue seriously will have great resonance for members of the public.

Part VI of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 is not working as well as it should. The answers which were given yesterday to my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) show that only 13 confiscation orders were made under part VI in 1993-94, realising a mere £265,000. Orders made in the same period under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1983 realised more than £5

million. There is a clear discrepancy between the two figures and Parliament must rectify that anomaly. That is why I welcome the Bill on behalf of the Opposition Front Bench.

I hope that the Minister will intervene again to explain why the Government have taken so long to come to their conclusions and why the provisions in the legislation did not form part of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Reference has already been made to the fact that the Bill will be warmly welcomed by the police, who have said that the lack of investigative powers in the 1988 Act has resulted in that Act having little effect in preventing criminals from benefiting from the proceeds of their crimes. In November 1992, the Home Office working group on confiscation pointed out that the number of confiscation orders made under the Criminal Justice Act was "disappointingly low". It advised:

"the practical advantages of harmonising the provisions [of the Criminal Justice and Drug Trafficking Offences Act] are clear . . . legislation should be strengthened and clarified".

It is hard to believe that consultation on the working group's proposals has taken more than two years. Perhaps the Minister can explain why the proposals have taken so long to reach this stage.

I would be grateful if the Minister could also assure the House that the proceeds of confiscation will be recycled to fund crime prevention. My hon. Friends referred to the Labour party's policy of being tough on crime and on the causes of crime. This legislation is tough on crime, but we also need to be tough on its causes. Crime prevention is at the heart of that debate. Britain spends a miserly 0.2 per cent. of its criminal justice budget on crime prevention. That is nowhere near the United Nations short-term target of 1 per cent. or its long-term target of 10 per cent. It would constitute some progress if the Minister could assure us that recycling the proceeds of crime might improve our dismal record in some small way.

I welcome the Bill on behalf of the Labour party, because it goes to the root of the problems in our criminal justice system. I know that many police officers feel frustrated that, after long and painstaking investigations, criminal sentences are often inadequate. They also feel that, owing to the nature of the criminal justice process, they have not managed to halt the careers of life-style criminals and stop their activities once and for all.

If the Government are serious about empowering the police and dealing with the proceeds of crime, I urge the Minister to recall the amendment that I tabled to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill—which has now been enacted—which would have allowed the police to apply to the courts to use in their fight against crime the high-tech and expensive computer equipment seized from computer pornographers. The amendment was backed by the police and by the all-party Home Affairs Select Committee, of which I was then a member. It recommended last February that the Government should introduce

"appropriate amendments to the law to allow the police to redirect confiscated equipment against the pornographers".

In a letter to me dated 21 February 1994, the Minister stated that he had "a degree of sympathy" with the new clause and that, if the power were "deemed necessary", it could be enforced by statutory instrument. However, that has not happened. Perhaps the Minister will explain why that measure—which Detective Inspector Bob McLachlan of Scotland Yard's obscene publications branch said would "greatly help in our fight against these appalling crimes"—has not been implemented.

The Home Affairs Select Committee has published its evidence on organised crime and it makes extremely interesting, if worrying, reading. It presents a picture of organised crime in this country and its international links. The national criminal intelligence service, the police unit which is responsible for gathering intelligence information on organised crime, presented a great deal of evidence to the Committee. In examining the background to the Bill, we must look at organised crime.

Ben Jonson once said:

"As crimes do grow, justice should rouse itself".

This Bill is about justice; it is about depriving offenders of what is not rightfully theirs and, for that reason, it has the Labour party's whole-hearted support.

It is in everyone's interest that so-called "life-style criminals" be forced to pay back any money which they have gained illegally. If the measures in the Bill act as a deterrent it may make a small difference to the huge amount of criminal activity, which has more than doubled since 1979 and which blights the lives of too many of our citizens.

10.56 am

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the House for not being present for the whole of the debate. Nowadays, television monitors relay the proceedings of the House live to Members' rooms and, while doing other work, I have attempted to follow the debate very closely.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) on his luck in the draw and on introducing the Bill. Initially, I was somewhat disappointed that, in view of his background as joint chair of the all-party disablement group, he did not decide to pick up the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill which he sponsored last year. However, I realise that he now has a different view about tactics in connection with that measure, so I have picked it up, and we shall consider it next week.

This proposal enjoys the support of both the Government and the Opposition. Parliament does not meet very frequently and it is not overrun with business at the moment, so I think that the Government could have taken the opportunity to introduce their own measure. However, that does not detract from the significance and importance of the proposal or from the fact that the hon. Gentleman has picked it up and run with it.

The deterrent theory espoused by the Bill—which is one that I would not normally adhere to closely—seems to have some relevance in this matter. If criminals believe that, in the end, they will not benefit from the proceeds of their crimes—if there is a change in criminal culture—the Bill will add a deterrent factor. Generally, I advocate—as does my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche)—prevention and higher capture rates as the best forms of deterrent. I acknowledge that there is much ill will in society towards easy sentences. That view is justifiable and not a matter of retribution. Criminals should suffer for their activities, not benefit from the proceeds.

Sometimes, the true value of stolen property is not easy to determine. There may be cases when the figure is exaggerated by the victims for insurance purposes. In such

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instances, there may be an injustice done, because the proceeds of a crime were said to be greater than they were. The fact that a criminal is the victim of such an injustice is not a ground for ignoring it. The law must be seen to be reasonable and fair. Perhaps the Bill's promoter will clarify that matter.

11.1 am

Sir John Hannam: I am grateful to all hon. Members who spoke in support of the Bill—particularly my hon. Friend the Minister and the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche). I listened with care to the points made, and I am left in no doubt that my Bill is of considerable importance to the House. In Committee, we will have ample opportunity to explore the various questions that hon. Members raised—including that of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), which is well covered by the Bill's provisions for re-examination of any assumption made by the court when it decides confiscation amounts. I again thank hon. Members for their support, and I look forward to discussing my Bill further in Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Road Traffic (New Drivers) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

11.2 am

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam), who has presented three Bills during his time in the House, this is my first in nearly 12 years. Whereas my hon. Friend hoped that he would be third time lucky, I hope to be first time lucky. The subject of my Bill is of importance and concern—the behaviour of newly qualified drivers, most of whom are young. At the stage in their driving careers when they are inexperienced, it is all important that they drive safely and pay attention to traffic regulations and the Highway Code. Even young drivers whose behaviour is blameless will be more at risk of accidents than the experienced driver, simply because situations develop that they have not anticipated or do not know how to handle.

That risk increases greatly if young drivers overestimate their skills, try to impress their passengers or flout the law. My Bill is primarily aimed at that irresponsible element. They are a minority, but the trouble that they cause is disproportionate to their numbers. The Bill is targeted. It does not propose new laws and regulations for all drivers but for a small group of new, principally young drivers who cause a disproportionate number of accidents.

That problem causes concern in my constituency and elsewhere in Essex. My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London represents an Essex constituency, and I am delighted that he is in his place to contribute to the debate. Two years ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) introduced a ten-minute Bill on newly qualified drivers. Although it was different from mine in detail, it also would have made progress towards improving the driving performance of newly qualified young drivers. Unfortunately, my hon. Friend's Bill did not make progress, but I hope that mine will enjoy better luck. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford for being present to support my Bill.

The problem that I described exists throughout Britain, not just in Essex. Essex man may reign in Essex, but some of his mentality reigns elsewhere in the country. We are increasingly a nation of car drivers and owners. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency issues about 1 million new provisional driving licences every year, which means that that number of new learner drivers or motor cyclists start using our roads. Most of them will eventually pass a driving test and become qualified. About half begin learning at 17, and a quarter of those who pass the driving test do so before their 18th birthday. Many more do so by the age of 21.

Those can be dangerous years for other road users as well as for the young driver. Ten per cent. of all driving licences are held by people under 21, yet they are involved in 25 per cent. of fatal accidents producing 1,000 deaths each year. The figures might be even worse if they drove long distances, as older drivers do. Even driving short distances, young drivers have a disproportionate effect on road accidents and fatalities. Mile for mile, a young man of 17 is seven times more likely to have an accident than a middle-aged man.

In most cases, that is not because young drivers have not learnt basic driving skills. After all, they passed the driving test. However, too often they choose not to apply those skills, thinking that they have become expert drivers overnight. They want the world to know how well they can drive, and to prove to themselves and to their friends how fast they can accelerate, how ably they can corner and how suddenly they can brake—and they may cut up other motorists to prove that to themselves. However, they lack the ability to read the road ahead, anticipate hazards and know when to react—in other words, experience. They may also lack tolerance towards and consideration for other road users whose reactions are slower—so in that sense they lack maturity.

Even among young inexperienced motorists, there is a difference between the accident risk of a responsible driver and a tearaway. The Transport Research Laboratory made a detailed examination of new drivers and found that those who commit offences in the first year after passing their test are more than twice as likely to be involved in accidents as drivers who do not. They remain twice as likely to have accidents even in their second and third years. So there is a clear link between offences and the risk of an accident.

That is why it makes sense to target the offenders and make them pay for extra lessons, take another test, and perhaps come in for a great deal of humiliation as they have to put on their L-plates once more. It is better to do that—to aim the Bill at these drivers—than to make the driving test harder and more lengthy and expensive for everyone.

This Bill is not aimed just at young drivers: it is aimed at all new drivers. All young drivers are new drivers, but not all new drivers are young drivers. So why should we include the older new drivers at all? At any age, inexperienced drivers are at greater risk than experienced ones. Both youth and inexperience are associated with greater risk.

What is more, people can do something about their lack of experience—they can take advanced training, for instance—but there is nothing they can do about their age apart from wait. If the Bill applied only to young drivers, where would the cut-off point be—21, 25 or older? There seems no consensus about that, so it is better to make the Bill comprehensive and apply it to new drivers in general, not young drivers in particular.

My Bill will therefore apply to every new driver for the first two years after he or she passes the test for the first time; but only those who commit offences will be any the worse off. On the whole, they will be younger drivers, and predominantly male.

Clause 1 defines the scope of the Bill. Anyone learning to drive or ride a motor cycle or moped starts with a provisional licence and L-plates. As soon as these drivers pass their tests, in a car or on a two-wheeler, they are entitled to the full licence for that class of vehicle. From that point on they are deemed to be qualified drivers. The two-year probationary period mentioned in the Bill starts from the moment people become qualified drivers. They may go on to pass a test in some other class of vehicle, but that does not make them probationers all over again. It is only on the first occasion that this clause will bite.

The Bill applies to holders of British licences who pass their tests in Great Britain, or who got their Great Britain licences as a result of tests passed in certain other places outside the GB mainland—countries with which we have reciprocal arrangements. When the date of passing the test outside Britain is known, as it usually will be in such cases, it is recorded on the British licence and thus defines the starting point of the probationary period.

Clause 2 contains the meat of the Bill. Its effect is that when a driver in the probationary period gets six or more penalty points on his licence, either by a court conviction or by paying a fixed penalty, the licence must be surrendered and sent to the Secretary of State—in practice, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency—to be revoked. The first two subsections cover convictions by a court and the rest cover fixed penalties.

Clause 3 follows on logically. When the Secretary of State receives a licence, he must serve notice on the holder that it is revoked. The person can no longer drive as a fully fledged driver but may apply for a provisional licence and start again as a learner. So the offending person does not lose all ability to drive and does not have his licence completely revoked. He has to revert to being a provisional licence holder and can continue to drive, with L-plates, being accompanied. He must then in due course take the test once more.

Clause 4 goes on to the next stage. Now that a person is a learner again, he or she is not eligible for a full licence until the test has been passed. But to avoid unnecessary harshness, this clause does not require people who had passed more than one class of test before the revocation to pass them all again. Passing just one of them will get back all the lost entitlements. The clause also does not prevent such people from learning to drive a new type of vehicle and passing the test in that—but doing the latter will not win back the old entitlements as well.

Clause 5 deals with special cases when the person affected by the revocation appeals against the conviction that caused it. Provided that the Secretary of State is notified of this, he must issue a temporary licence while the appeal is pending. If the appeal is successful enough to remove the penalty points or to reduce them to fewer than six, the Secretary of State must grant a permanent licence replacing the one that was taken away. Some of the procedural details are to be in regulations.

Clause 6 and schedule 1 cover essentially the same ground as clauses 2 to 5, but apply to the special case of a person who has passed the test but not yet handed in the pass certificate and provisional licence to get a full licence. Current legislation allows a two-year period in which pass certificates and provisional licences can be exchanged for a full licence. Most people exchange them straight away, but there are a few who choose not to or who forget to. The schedule is necessary to close a loophole which might allow the retesting procedure to be evaded.

Clause 7 has two purposes. First, paragraph (a) prevents a person from being doubly penalised if a court uses its powers to order a retest. The court order takes precedence over anything in this Bill, and once it has been made the person is no longer regarded as being in the probationary period. Often, the re-test ordered by the court will be a double-length test, whereas the test required by the Bill is always of the usual length.

Secondly, paragraphs (b) and (c) prevent a person from being caught in a continual round of retesting, which would be too harsh. Once the person has passed a test, he is no longer subject to the provisions of the Bill. It must be remembered, however, that passing the test and getting back the full licence do not wipe off the six penalty points

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that caused the retesting in the first place. Those six points are still there, and if the driver gets another six before they are spent, making 12 in all, the court will disqualify him for six months under the existing totting-up procedures and laws.

The other clauses and schedule 2 are supplementary, and I shall not go into detail about them.

I hope that the House will agree that these are tough but fair provisions. They will not make it any harder to qualify as a driver in the first place, but they will make it harder for people to keep their licences if they misbehave. They will therefore act as a powerful deterrent for drivers who are tempted to break the law or who drive without consideration for others.

Research suggests that drivers are more deterred by the threat of losing their licences than they are by fines. At the moment, they need not worry too much until they get close to 12 penalty points, which can mean up to four speeding offences. But this scheme will bite at six points. It will not stop them driving altogether, but it will force them back into the classroom, to the world of L-plates and an experienced driver by their side. There will also be considerable humiliation.

The scheme will also provide an incentive to take further lessons and will give drivers the opportunity to reconsider what it really means to be a responsible adult driver.

I am pleased to have been able to obtain backers for the Bill both from my party and from the Opposition. I am also pleased to have the unstinting support of the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club. I am pleased, too, to have the support of the former roads Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). I know that he played a major part in putting the subject on the political agenda, and I am grateful for his backing and support.

I hope that I can count on support from all parties to bring this worthy measure to the statute book.

11.20 am

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): First, I declare my interest as a parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation. There is considerable concern among police officers about their difficult encounters with young drivers, who often drive fast cars at high speed. It is a problem that needs to be dealt with, and the Bill seeks to do so. Therefore, I give a warm welcome to the Bill. It is necessary and it will do considerable good in resolving many difficulties.

We know that 1,000 people die each year in accidents involving young drivers. They hold only 10 per cent. of driving licences, but they are involved in 20 per cent. of all accidents. New drivers who are convicted of motoring offences are twice as likely to be involved in accidents as drivers who do not break motoring laws.

Over the past two decades there has been a change in public attitudes towards drink-driving. Young men in particular used to regard it as a way of proving their masculinity. They were willing to drive after having consumed far too much alcohol. Fortunately, social attitudes have changed, especially among young people.

Before I came to this place I was a lawyer at the criminal Bar. It is my experience that many of those who have been convicted of drink-driving in recent years have been older people. When they were young it was perhaps acceptable to drink and drive. I found that young people were less and less involved in that behaviour as a result of changed social attitudes and pressures.

The Bill will start the process of changing the social attitudes—perhaps not of the present generation—of the generation to come towards driving cars, especially fast cars. There have been problems on several housing estates in my constituency, where young people drive at high speed. Some young people tend to drive their cars—on occasion, stolen cars—at high speed across traffic-calming road humps. This often happens at night. The humps normally serve a good purpose and it is regrettable that the driving that I have described is exactly the opposite of the objective of the humps. Such driving needs to be clamped down upon with vigour.

Apart from dealing with those who are committing motoring offences by way of penalties and penalty points, we need to bring about a change in social attitudes. The law must take the lead. The hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) has introduced a Bill that shows that we in this place take road traffic matters extremely seriously and that we are prepared to support the police in recognising the importance of taking action and dealing with the problem. The Bill shows that we are ready to start the process of changing attitudes.

Young drivers are often less safe than others, especially if they are inexperienced. They should know that if they start to accumulate penalty points by speeding, for example, and arrive at six, they will not have the facility of their "wheels" and all the advantage that they provide, especially at a young age. They should know that they may have to face a second test.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): My hon. Friend is talking about young drivers. I accept that the Bill will apply mainly to those drivers, but it applies also to newly qualified drivers, who are not always young people. I accept, of course, that many of the problems with which the Bill seeks to deal involve all people and the accumulation of penalty points. There is a need for these measures.

Mr. O'Brien: That is entirely right. I agree with my hon. Friend that the Bill does not apply only to young people. When enacted, it will be much broader in its application. That can only be right.

As I have said, there has been a change in social attitudes in recent years towards drink-driving. I have no doubt that behind the Bill is a wish to change social attitudes towards fast or erratic driving. It may still be thought among the older generation that drivers can get away with breaking the law by occasional speeding. That is regrettable. The Bill is an attempt to deal with the problem. I suspect that it would be extremely difficult to frame clauses to deal only with young drivers. There are advantages in having a Bill that is drafted to deal with all new and inexperienced drivers, and I support it. I offer a warm welcome to the Bill. I hope that it will be given a Second Reading with support from hon. Members on both sides of the House.

11.25 am

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I, too, welcome the Bill. It is an important step forward in improving driver safety. That being said, I would like measures to come before us which go further towards improving road safety. The Bill is important, but it is only one step in that direction.

We must consider and try to deal with the behavioural characteristics of the young male driver if we are to achieve general improvements in driver safety. I accept, of course, that the Bill covers all new drivers of both sexes, whether they are young, in their middle years, or elderly. I shall concentrate, however, on the young male driver, who often poses a problem by engaging in hazardous driving.

It is worth reflecting that most criminal offences are committed by young males. When they reach 25 years of age, most of those young offenders cease to offend. It is important to realise that many of the offences that are committed by males in that age group are motoring offences. Young male offenders are prepared to drive recklessly without insurance and without a licence. That being so, we must question whether the effectiveness of the Bill will be sufficient to curb the committing of motoring offences by such people. Will young male drivers who are prepared to drive while uninsured and without a full licence be sufficiently deterred by the proposal to reduce the number of penalty points leading to disqualification to six?

Recent studies have shown that about 15 per cent. of all male drivers have driven illegally before they have gained even a provisional licence. It is interesting that that is twice the percentage of women who have done that.

I welcome the Bill's proposals, especially the two-year probation period for new drivers and the revocation of licences if six or more penalty points are accumulated during the probationary period. I welcome also the requirement that there must be a further test before a licence is reinstated. These and other measures are steps in the right direction but are only a start towards improving driver safety. They must be considered as only part of a more general package to improve driver safety, especially among young males. If we are to deal with that specific problem, we need to look more closely at the life style factors of that group, as the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) suggested.

We must examine why some 35 per cent. of young male drivers were categorised as unsafe in a study undertaken in 1991 by the university of Southampton near Eastleigh. The work undertaken by the department of psychology is significant in this regard. Its earlier studies found that there were differences in driver behaviour and performance within the 17 to 25-year-old age group. As the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) will know, its more recent work explored the relevance of life-style factors to the differences in driving behaviour.

We must realise that there are indeed different attitudes among male drivers and we cannot assume that all young male drivers should all be labelled as inherently unsafe. Driving behaviour characteristics are far more complex than that. On average, the young male drivers studied by Southampton university rated their driving skills and driving safety as considerably above the average for their own age group. Unsafe drivers rated their driving as more skilled than safe, whereas safe drivers rated their driving as more safe than skilled. The important point is that unsafe drivers tend to test their ability and their car's capacity to a much greater extent than safe drivers, but their so-called skill is of course illusory, as unsafe drivers have a high accident involvement.

Many young drivers fail to recognise how close they have been to having an accident. Furthermore, they seldom recognise that a near miss is feedback to the effect that they are driving badly—it is much easier for drivers to blame their surroundings and other drivers for a near miss. The most obvious feedback in respect of poor driving is involvement in an accident, but, even after an accident, it is easy to find causes other than poor driving.

Young male drivers seem to suffer from the delusion that accidents are chance events and occur at random, but that is not so; poor driving is a significant characteristic of and contributor to accidents. Driving should not be viewed as merely a physical skill. It is all too clear that unsafe drivers are unaware of the risks that they take and, even if they are aware of the risks that they take, because they believe that they are highly skilled they assume that they will not have an accident.

The proposals to improve the skills of young drivers and to impose stiffer penalties on those found guilty of poor or illegal driving are not in themselves sufficient to tackle what I regard as the root of the problem. Pre-licence training in road safety must incorporate things other than the learning of driving skills. The Minister will be aware that the response to the Government's new driver safety consultation paper, which was issued just over a year ago, showed that there was wide support for the retesting of offenders as proposed in the Bill, but the consultation also revealed overwhelming support for a separate mandatory theory test to fulfil the second EC driving licence directive.

I am sure that we are all familiar with the parliamentary Advisory Council on Transport Safety which welcomed the Bill but said that it should be seen alongside other measures to improve the skills of young drivers. In addition to a stick—the removal of a driving licence—we need a carrot, or better training to increase awareness of the difficulties of driving. Like the advisory council, I look forward to hearing proposals from the Department of Transport for the compulsory test involving an element of hazard perception. We could thus ensure that young and new drivers were able to drive competently and less dangerously.

Post-test driver training has been the subject of strong interest by the insurance industry, and the development of road safety and education programmes for the 16-year-olds and above has been supported by colleges and other establishments.

At the time of the consultation exercise the Minister said that a mandatory theory test would be in place by 1 July 1996 and that the Department was working with the private and voluntary sectors to establish post-test driver training schemes and road safety education programmes. I would welcome confirmation that the Bill is but one part of a comprehensive package to be introduced within the time scale previously set out.

The Liberal Democrats welcome and enthusiastically support the Bill, but we should like an assurance that it is a first step in a package of measures to improve driver safety.

11.35 am

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I am sure that nothing could be more harrowing than the anguish of a young mother who has lost her child through the foolishness of an inexperienced driver. The driver will be haunted for the rest of his life by the memory that he was responsible for the death of a child and that it could have been avoided. In some instances, the driver does not have the opportunity to look back on the incident, because he too has been killed by his actions. Therefore, anything that we can do to make the roads safer must be worth while. For that reason, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) on promoting this excellent Bill, the provisions of which I strongly support.

It is often observed that if the number of people killed on the roads were killed in any other way there would be a national scandal. What if a series of jumbo jets crashed every year, leading to the equivalent number of deaths, or a catastrophe occurred regularly in industry? If rail accident deaths reached anything near the number of road deaths, there would be an outcry. Nevertheless, we must take satisfaction from the fact that the number of deaths on the roads is falling, and markedly so. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London and his team on their road safety work, which has helped to achieve that fall.

The number of people killed on the roads has declined steadily, from around 5,000 in 1990 to 3,814 in 1993. The control of drinking and driving has clearly been a major contributory factor and I support any measure that strengthens the law in that respect. Of those road accidents, about 1,000 deaths—20 per cent.—are the responsibility of young drivers. Statistics show that youth and inexperience are major factors in accidents, so it is excellent that the Bill is targeted specifically at that group.

In my borough of Bromley, 205 drivers in the 17-to-24 age group were injured in 1994, bearing out statistics showing that group to be especially vulnerable, usually because of their own inexperience. New drivers are twice as likely to break the law but it is not only the statistics but our personal experience that illustrate the risk attached to young and inexperienced drivers, especially young and inexperienced male drivers.

I remember when I first started driving people in my age group were immediately enthused with their new-found freedom and it was only a matter days after taking off the L-plates that they began to drive fast and tried to acquire more powerful cars. There will probably always be a macho image attached to driving but it must be restrained by the law. I can think of no better way in which to restrain that macho urge than the deterrent of the Bill. The most effective means of deterring that 17-to-24 age group from transgressing is to threaten to remove what they regard as most precious: the new-found right to drive without having to display L-plates. Having to display L-plates and to pass another test would be quite humiliating for that age group.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) is right to suggest that the Bill should be part of an overall package of policy. I support what he said about "Pass Plus", an excellent post-test driving training scheme that will shortly come into force. To go with the stick in the Bill, that scheme will introduce a carrot. The introduction and development of theoretical driving tests would add to the beneficial pressure on the target age group.

The teaching of driving skills at school plays an important part in encouraging and developing the right approach and attitude before would-be drivers get behind the wheel. Indeed, my borough of Bromley, which may be the only London borough that is taking such major strides in this area, runs an innovative pre-driver programme in secondary schools, which has involved more than 800 pupils so far. It is free and it runs for 11 weeks.

It is co-run by the Intercounty driving school, which provides free cars, and pupils have up to three 20-minute sessions behind the wheel as well as supportive work in the classroom aimed at preparing young drivers, influencing their attitudes, calming them down and getting them used to the control and safety needed on roads, rather than allowing the development of the idea that driving is simply a matter of getting behind the wheel.

The programme has already produced excellent results and I hope that it is developed further not only in Bromley but across the country. I know that Scott Pickering, the road safety export in the borough, who has played a leading role in pioneering the project, would support a Bill aimed at people whom he knows are vulnerable and need protecting from themselves. For all those reasons, I strongly support the Bill and I am glad that it is before the House. For the sake of not only the target group but all potential victims on the roads who we may prevent from becoming victims, I wish the Bill speedy progress to the statute book.

11.42 am

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I may be no expert on this Bill—I am probably one of the few hon. Members who does not have a car and cannot drive—but I am interested in it because if I decided to try to qualify to drive, I would be subject to its provisions. Therefore, I have a self-interest as well as a wider interest in the Bill.

My constituency is a busy commuter belt between Chesterfield and Sheffield. Regularly each morning, we take our standard spending assessment over the border of Derbyshire into Yorkshire and Sheffield for their benefit. We encounter quite serious transport problems, because the roads are such that a serious accident considerably hinders people getting to work and back.

I always seem to be writing letters to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency about massive problems that people have with their licences. Presumably, the Bill may place further pressure on the DVLA as people lose their licences or have to take another test.

As the Bill is founded on sense and should progress, I want to make a procedural point. I believe that I am correct in saying that, although the Bill was introduced by hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark), it was initiated by the Government. When I promoted a private Member's Bill in the 1992-93 Session, I was contacted by the Minister to see if I would bring it forward through the Government like other hon. Members. Debating the Proceeds of Crime Bill earlier revealed that acceptable legislation, which the Government have in mind, is being introduced as private Members' Bills. Private Members' Bills should address the concerns of hon. Members, who may then seek the Government's support and help with technical drafting.

My private Member's Bill, the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, attempted to extend the franchise and provide access to polling stations for the

disabled. I met the Minister of the Department concerned and if he had agreed to support my Bill, I would have been very happy indeed for a great deal of the work to be taken on by the Government and developed to ensure that its wording was parliamentary and procedurally acceptable.

Hon. Members are allowed £200 for legal assistance with a private Member's Bill; it would be worth £1,400 today if it had been adjusted since it was introduced. One cannot get any serious legal advice on the drafting of a Bill for £200. One can only, therefore—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I must remind him that we are debating the Second Reading of a particular Bill and he is dealing with matters not germane to it. There are plenty of other opportunities for the hon. Member to raise the general issues to which he is addressing his remarks.

Mr. Barnes: I accept your ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was about to conclude in any case. I was trying to make a point that seemed relevant to this Bill as well as many other private Members' Bills.

I support the Bill and I do not wish to speak at length, but I want to point out that there are other methods by which such Bills, welcome as they are, could progress. The House does not sit often enough in Government time to debate such matters. The Bill could have progressed differently.

11.47 am

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) on introducing the Bill. For the record, the House should be told that, far from the implications of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) that my hon. Friend has picked the Bill up at the urging of the Department of Transport, if there is one Member of the House who is not a poodle of the Department of Transport, it is my hon. Friend, whose exertions on behalf of his constituents about the A13 I feel on my back as I speak. I know from conversations with my hon. Friend that he has promoted the Bill because he has great interest in the subject. He has the full support of the Government and I strongly endorse all that he said about the Bill's importance.

I also agreed with the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), who said that driving is not just a physical skill. That is exactly the point. Ironically, young drivers tend to be rather good at the physical skill of moving the metal around the road. Indeed, they are so good that they become over-confident, and that is what the Bill is aimed at. The hon. Gentleman was right to refer to the theory test directive.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) said in an excellent intervention, it is right that the Bill should be part of a package of measures. I will refer briefly to each of the elements to which my hon. Friend referred. I also endorse his remarks about the road safety officer in Bromley. He, like many other people in the London boroughs with whom I have a great deal of personal contact, is doing an excellent job.

As a result of that excellent work, there has been a 34 per cent. reduction in road deaths in this country. We should not lose sight of that; our record is excellent. Reducing road deaths by 34 per cent. since 1986 is an extraordinary success. That has been achieved despite the growth of traffic in the intervening period. That is an extraordinary performance. It is not a political achievement; it is the achievement of many people working nationally and locally and it involves many bodies, private companies, voluntary organisations and motoring organisations all working together.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham referred graphically, but very accurately, to the number of road deaths being equivalent to losing a jumbo jet every five weeks. There are still 80 deaths a week and that fact underpins everything that we do and it provides us all with the motivation to continue to find ways to eradicate that horrendous total.

Some people might think that the Bill is an unreasonably oppressive measure and that it is aimed at killing the joy of the young. They might think that it is unfair to impose this additional measure on the young. The underlying principle behind the Bill is straightforward. The principle says, "If you manage to accumulate six points, which will mean a minimum of two endorsable offences in the first two years after you have passed your test, the assumption is that you did not actually learn the lessons that you were supposed to have learnt in order to pass the test in the first place. Would you please go back and have another go and this time understand what you are being asked to qualify for?" That principle is not unreasonable.

None of us can put our hands on our hearts and say that we have not driven faster than the legal speed limit on a fairly regular basis because life is like that. The only exception in the Chamber to that rule is the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East. He follows a very important principle in this House which is never to let the arguments be bedevilled by the facts and always to ensure that one speaks on subjects about which one has not the slightest personal experience. He is a pastmaster of that art, and he demonstrated it again today.

Mr. Barnes: As a pedestrian, I have great experience of the matters that we are discussing today. I can barely cross the road in front of my house. I am very concerned that people should drive safely. If new drivers are not driving safely, the measures in the Bill should be applied to them. In addition, probably more people have cars in my constituency than in any other.

Mr. Norris: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman supports the measure and I hope that we can bring its Second Reading to a fairly speedy conclusion.

I will not speak at length, because my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford clearly set out the need for the Bill and how it would work in practice. However, I want to add a piece of information that might not be known to many hon. Members, including those who take a particular interest in this work. A study was published today that follows on from the Transport Research Laboratory programme involving new drivers and a major research programme, which examined the reasons for new driver behaviour.

The study published today showed that 18 per cent. of drivers are involved in at least one accident in their first year after passing the test. However, 42 per cent. of drivers who received fixed penalty notices or a summons in their first year were involved in car accidents. The risk is more than doubled. I am afraid that that emphasises

[Mr. Norris]

why the measure is necessary, and why I believe that it will do a great deal to reduce the hazard that young people cause on the roads. It is worth recalling the statistic advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford: that 10 per cent. of licence holders are under 21 and are responsible for 20 per cent. of accidents and 25 per cent. of fatalities. That is a very sad statistic.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Although this point is not included in the terms of the Bill, has my hon. Friend the Minister considered probationary licence plates?

Mr. Norris: We have considered probationary licence plates and the Northern Ireland Office has supervised the use of such plates. It produced results on the project only very recently, showing that probationary licence plates are popular in the community and that people support the idea. Sadly, the results also show that plates do not have a discernible effect on accident reduction. The principle is very attractive, but I am not minded to press forward with measures that cannot show—as I believe the Bill can—a demonstrable link with accidents.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh and my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham referred to the need for a package of measures. The post-test driver training scheme called "Pass Plus" will be launched by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on Monday. A substantial number of insurance companies are involved in the scheme and it will make a major contribution. It is, of course, training after the licence has been acquired, but it offers a genuine discount to the motorist for having bothered to take on the additional training and it will allow insurance companies to lower their premiums. There is gain for each of the parties involved. The greatest gainer is the person who is not now likely to be the victim of an accident.

We have also prepared an educational resource designed to make over-16s aware of their responsibilities when they drive a car. That is a very important part of the package. We intend to introduce the enlarged theory element by July 1996. We are working on the practical details of the package at the moment. I agree with the hon. Member for Eastleigh that it will be a useful addition and it might even allow us to test some of the skills that the existing driving test does not allow us to test.

Even in its present form, our driving test in Britain is among the most demanding in the world. We should not ignore the principle behind the Bill: that some newly qualified drivers do not maintain the high standards that they have learnt in preparing for and taking the test. The Bill will encourage safe and considerate driving and it will allow new drivers to build up the essential experience of traffic and road conditions and the skills of hazard perception that they need to make them safer drivers.

The deterrent effect of having to use L-plates again and to be accompanied by an experienced driver should be sufficient to prevent newly qualified drivers from behaving irresponsibly and foolishly. It should thus result in a reduction in road accidents and injuries to those drivers and to other road users.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford has done the nation a service by introducing his Bill. I congratulate him on the way in which he introduced it today and I am delighted that hon. Members on both sides of the House have seen its wisdom, and I wish it every success.

11.58 am

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) on his success in the ballot and on introducing his Bill. The Bill will clearly have great importance for the public and it is supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It certainly has the very full support of those on the Opposition Front Bench.

We have had an interesting debate this morning. It is quite appropriate that my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) should take part in it. He follows in an honourable tradition of people who have made great contributions to transport issues but who have not been drivers. I am thinking, of course, of my own political heroine, Baroness Castle, who was a distinguished Secretary of State for Transport but who was a non-driver. She certainly made a considerable impact on driving and transport issues.

Mr. Barnes: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind comments. The Minister has great expertise in these matters. On this occasion it works, but on many occasions it is counter-productive.

Mrs. Roche: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) made an interesting speech and drew a welcome contrast between male and female drivers. The machismo that is often shown by male drivers, who sometimes have poor regard for road safety and poor car control and display anti-social behaviour, is not shared by their female counterparts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien) made an interesting point about the police view. There is no doubt that the police are concerned about accidents involving new drivers. It is good to have my hon. Friend's expertise as we consider the matter.

The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) made a graphic point about road fatalities and the tremendous grief that they cause. Although I welcome the reduced figures that the Minister recited, I feel that there are too many fatal accidents. One occurred in my constituency this week. When I speak to some of the families concerned, I see their grief at having a loved one—husband, wife, son or daughter—suddenly and tragically taken away. That will always stay with me. I am sure that all hon. Members have had the same experience. It is important to take the issue very seriously.

Southampton university has found that a significant minority of young drivers—about 35 per cent.—could be categorised as unsafe. As has been said, when we talk about driving, we talk not only about driving skills but about judgment, maturity and courtesy. We need much more common courtesy on our roads. It would have a tremendous impact not only on tragic fatalities but on day-to-day road incidents.

Although I warmly support the Bill, may I pose a couple of questions? The Bill does not take into account newly qualified drivers of heavy goods vehicles or public service vehicles. Will the hon. Member for Rochford clarify that point? Also, if newly qualified drivers of

heavy goods vehicles or public service vehicles accrue six penalty points, will they automatically lose their licences? Obviously, that is a small part of our anxiety about newly qualified drivers, but it is valid to draw it to the hon. Gentleman's attention, and I shall be interested to hear his response.

The House will be aware of the great concern about road safety and drivers' conduct. In my constituency, there is a tremendous problem with drivers who, particularly early in the morning, think that they have a straight run and speed with complete disregard for members of the public. Last week, I took my six-year-old daughter to school. We were just about to cross at the zebra crossing, when, without any regard for pedestrians, a car sped by. That is a daily occurrence for many people, and we should be aware of it.

I welcome the Minister's honesty and candour in saying that not one of us can say that he or she has not regularly exceeded the reasonable speed limit—

Mr. Norris: The legal speed limit.

Mrs. Roche: The Minister says, "The legal speed limit." With the greatest respect, we should not encourage that attitude. Speed limits are to be obeyed, and we must do everything we can to encourage drivers to abide by them.

Mr. Norris: Of course, the only hon. Member who has never exceeded the speed limit is the hon. Lady. I am quite happy to put that on the record if that is what she would like me to do.

Mrs. Roche: I am grateful to the Minister. Although I hold a full driving licence, I am an extremely reluctant driver, as my husband will testify, and I therefore hardly drive at all. I am afraid I am one of those drivers with whom the Minister obviously becomes very irritated. I drive very slowly—far too slowly. I am grateful for the Minister's approval. I shall have great pleasure, this weekend, in passing on that approval to my family.

I cannot resist the temptation, with the Minister present, to raise a matter of great concern in London in relation to speeding, road safety, and newly qualified and existing drivers. I refer to red routes. The Minister will be aware of points that colleagues and I have made about the Government's accident figures on those routes, which have been shown to be inaccurate. On a serious point, he will be aware also about road fatalities. They cause us great concern.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochford on introducing the Bill. It has our support. I hope that the public, who have closely followed our proceedings, will know that the whole House is concerned about this important issue.

12.7 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I apologise to the House for not being present earlier.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Disgraceful.

Mr. Miller: The hon. Gentleman says that it was disgraceful. I was doing some work on road deaths—a matter to which I drew attention on Friday. I listened intently to this debate upstairs. A couple of weeks ago our road safety debate, regrettably, was poorly attended by hon. Members. This Bill neatly follows that debate.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) on bringing the Bill to the House. I sincerely hope that it is supported by all hon. Members. The way in which the Bill fits in with the discussions to which I referred is clear.

Young drivers who speed are dangerous, and the young are statistically among the group most likely to cause death on the roads. The issue of handling death on the roads is extremely tortuous. I am having detailed discussions with a number of people in the legal profession, such as the Law Commission, and I made arrangements to go to the Crown Prosecution Service to discuss the way in which the courts deal with such cases.

It is, of course, a process which takes place after the event, and the important thing about the approach adopted by the hon. Member for Rochford is that it is part of a process of deterrence of the crime of causing death on the roads. The jigsaw puzzle must be put together in that way, and the Bill is an important part of that.

In my discussions with eminent people in the legal profession, the thrust of the debate has been how on earth we can stop the crimes taking place in the first place. The hon. Member for Rochford has hit upon an important aspect of that. We know that the drink-driving laws changed attitudes, and there is an extraordinary difference in the attitudes of people in their 40s and 50s, and of young people, towards the drink-driving laws. It is not unusual to see a group of 18 to 20-year-olds, out for an enjoyable evening, deliberately making arrangements that one of them will not drink. The cult of having to have the macho six pints before one drives a car has gone. It is perfectly accepted that one person in a group, or a number of people, should have soft drinks or low-alcohol drinks.

That positive change followed a lead from the House. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) said, the lead given by Baroness Castle had an important impact. I hope that education will create a climate that will bring sense to some road users. As my hon. Friend said, some road users are totally oblivious to the rights of others. A measure such as this will help in that regard.

I urge the House to think that the Bill, while important, is not a panacea. It will not in itself stop the huge number of deaths which occur on the roads each year. Last year, 510 deaths were caused by drinking and driving. We must carry on working hard as a Parliament to find the right set of rules and regulations which will bring that figure down to zero.

The police and the motoring organisations welcome the Bill which, I am sure, will receive widespread support. There is a recognition of the stark difference in accident statistics between young drivers and more mature and experienced drivers. I admit openly to the House that the first accident I had while driving was in the early 1960s. I have driven 20,000 miles every year of my adult life, and I know full well that—given the same situation 30 years later—I could have driven out of the circumstances which caused that accident. It was somebody else's fault, but experience does help in driving.

We must instil in young people the firm belief and understanding that one does not simply pass the test and become an expert driver. If that were true, the figures would look healthier. It is important that the House gives the Bill an unopposed passage, but let me emphasise that this must be a part of a series of approaches aimed at tackling all the causes of death on the roads. We may

[Mr. Miller]

need to think positively about the design of vehicles, and about whether, for example, heavy vehicles have adequate vision.

We must also consider the way in which some companies impose schedules upon drivers which make it impossible for them to drive safely. We know about that in the context of coaches, and the Minister has taken positive steps recently in that respect. There are a host of issues and the House must address them in its efforts to tackle the huge numbers of unnecessary deaths. The Bill forms an important part of the strategy, and I once again congratulate the hon. Member for Rochford on promoting the Bill. I wish it a speedy passage through its remaining stages.

12.26 pm

Dr. Michael Clark: With the leave of the House; I should like to thank all of those hon. Members who have taken part in the debate for the support that they have given without reservation. I would particularly like to thank the hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien), the advisor to the Police Federation, for conveying to the House the support that the police give to the Bill. He pointed out that drink-driving was a problem of past generations, while macho driving may be a problem of this one, and welcomed the Bill in that regard.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) pointed out that young males offend under the age of 25, but that the rate of offending tends to fall once people are over 25. The Bill might help them to get through that period. I was pleased with the hon. Gentleman's comments, and I thank him for them. He also pointed out that young drivers have skills, but generally choose not to use them. We must persuade them to use those skills, and I am grateful for the work done by the university of Southampton in that respect.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh described the Bill as being one measure in a series of steps, and my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) wenton to outline what those steps are. They include "Pass Plus", a driving test on theory and driving teaching in schools.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) pointed out that he is a non-driver and, were the Bill to come into law, he—a man of mature years—would be caught within its provisions if he were to apply for a licence. Despite that, he welcomed the Bill.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for his support, and I am also grateful that he pointed out that I am not a poodle of the Department of Transport. We both know that that is true. He mentioned that road deaths have reduced by 34 per cent. since 1987, despite more miles having been covered by drivers.

I was pleased that the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) spoke from the Opposition Front Bench. She will know that my constituency takes its name from the principal river—the Roche—so it was appropriate that she responded this morning. I thank her for her support.

She asked about HGVs and public service vehicles. Those are not included in the provisions of the Bill, principally because drivers of those vehicles must be 21 years of age at least before they can hold a licence. They must also hold a car licence before they can apply for those licences. It is thought, because of their age and the fact that they must have a car licence first, that they will be caught within the provisions of the Bill in those stages rather than later when they have a more advanced licence.

I thank the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) for his support. I know that he was busy this morning on road safety matters in the privacy of his office. I am grateful that he could break away to come here to support the Bill. He, too, pointed out that young people are more responsible with regard to drink-driving. Let us hope that the Bill will make them more responsible in other ways, too.

I am pleased to see you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thank you for the time that you have given me. I thank all hon. Members for the support that they have given the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

12.20 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill seeks simply to protect the Olympic symbol and the Olympic words from unauthorised commercial exploitation. It has all-party support. Perhaps it would be appropriate to spell out the names of those who are supporting me in the Bill. They include my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), who, of course, is respected and renowned for his sporting ability in the past and for his on-going interest in sport; my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe)—I need not describe his exploits, ability and the achievements that he has notched up, not only on his own behalf but on behalf of the United Kingdom, and his tally of medals, including Olympic medals, is something of which everybody can be proud; my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) and for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel); the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who has been a distinguished Minister and Opposition spokesman and currently heads the Select Committee on National Heritage; the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), who has established a fine reputation for his interest in sport, who supports a wide range of sport and speaks with considerable knowledge; the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), an outspoken and robust advocate of sport who has done great credit to himself, his constituency and the sports for which he speaks; the hon Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton); the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms Hoey), who has held the position of Opposition spokesman for sport and is highly respected and regarded; the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), who represents the Liberal Democrats, has given the Bill his warm support and acts as a sponsor; and our hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), who brings a genuine all-party image to and support for the Bill.

In short, the Bill will enable the Secretary of State to grant the British Olympic Association an exclusive licence to exploit the Olympic symbols commercially, thus giving statutory force to the common law rights of the BOA. As our national Olympic committee, the BOA is responsible, as most hon. Members will be aware, for all aspects of the British team at the Olympic games, such as organising transport and providing accommodation, the necessary kit and back-up support. That in itself is an increasingly expensive exercise.

Its role now, however, is much wider, as it also provides extensive services to potential British competitors of all Olympic sports. Those services are aimed at ensuring that the team—we all want this—is as well prepared as possible for international competition, and are acknowledged by the governing bodies of the sport in question to be vital for our top competitors.

As the BOA receives no Government funds, its ability to provide and maintain the existing levels of service to competitors depends, as we are clearly aware, on its ability to raise sponsorship. If we are to maintain and improve British international performances through expenditure of the commercial income available through Olympic sponsorship, statutory protection from unauthorised commercial exploitation is vital.

Such protection would give sponsors—who will, I believe, provide a great deal of money—the comfort of knowing that they have a legally protected right. Thus, control of any authorised use would be very much easier. It is an unfortunate fact that such unauthorised use has become increasingly prevalent and poses a serious threat to the BOA's fund-raising ability and so to the future of British sport.

At this point it may be worth quoting a sentence from a letter that I have received from Craig Reedie, the chairman of the BOA. He says:

"The Bill has the unanimous backing of the sporting community and I hope that, given its uncontentious nature, it will receive your support."

I have also received a letter from Gavin Stewart, chairman of the BOA's Competitors' Council. He is a well-respected and renowned international rower. In his letter, copies of which may have gone to many hon. Members, he says:

"The ability to maintain existing levels of service to top British competitors depends increasingly on the ability to generate income through commercial exploitation of the Olympic Symbols. The protection which this Bill would offer is vital in order to ensure that Britain's top competitors are not deprived of the benefits of the revenue which this commercial exploitation can produce."

It is interesting that Mr. Stewart sends out with his letter a list. It was written on behalf of the governing bodies of Olympic sports, all of which are listed and all of which support the Bill. I am almost tempted to read out all of them, because it is so comprehensive, and it shows the wide support for the Bill. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on!"] I will succumb to the temptation. The list comprises the Grand National Archery Society; the British Athletic Federation; the British Badminton Olympic Committee; the British Baseball Federation; the British and Irish Basketball Federation; the British Bobsleigh Association; the British Amateur Boxing Association; the British Canoe Union; the British Curling Association; the British Cycling Federation; the British Equestrian Federation; the Amateur Fencing Association; the Football Association; the British Amateur Gymnastics Association; the British Handball Association; the Great Britain Olympic Hockey Board; the British Ice Hockey Association; the National Ice Skating Association of the United Kingdom; the British Judo Association; the Lawn Tennis Association; the Great Britain Luge Association; the Modern Pentathlon Association of Great Britain; the Amateur Rowing Association; the British Ski Federation; the National Softball Federation; the Amateur Swimming Federation of Great Britain; the British Olympic Table Tennis Committee; the Great Britain Target Shooting Federation; the British Volleyball Federation; the British Amateur Weightlifters' Association; the British Amateur Wrestling Association; and the Royal Yachting Association. That is an extremely comprehensive list.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): The hon. Gentleman has not read out the name of the British Amateur Rugby League Association. Does that mean that it is opposed to the Bill?

Mr. Winterton: I am happy to say that I do not believe that it is. I received the list from the British Olympic Association and, although I confess it does not include the

[Mr. Winterton]

British Amateur Rugby League Association, I am confident that, although that organisation is not directly affected by the legislation, its members would unanimously support the Bill.

The United Kingdom is one of the few countries that do not give statutory protection to the olympic symbol. As the BOA is one of the few national Olympic committees that does not receive Government funds, British sportsmen and women operate at a significant disadvantage compared with their counterparts from the countries against which they compete.

The Bill has no negative revenue implications for the Treasury and I hope that the House agrees that it is neither complicated nor controversial. As I emphasised, it has total cross-party support, as is evidenced by my 11 co-sponsors. It has the support of the Department of National Heritage, Her Majesty's Opposition and the Labour party spokesman on sport, and the minority parties. As I sought to show, it also has the unanimous backing of the sporting community. I am delighted to introduce the Bill.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): I strongly support the measure but may I ask my hon. Friend about clause 4—*[Interruption.]* It may cause a little trouble, as that clause often does. Clause 4 provides an exemption to the infringement provision and suggests that certain kinds of work should not be covered. It says that, if

"a dramatic work, a musical work, an artistic work, a sound recording, a film, a broadcast and a cable programme"

infringes the association right, the infringement would not be actionable. What is the thinking behind that? A film that uses the Olympic symbol would probably be a big-money production from which the association could get some useful revenue, so what is the point of the exemption?

Mr. Winterton: I have always been told that it is unwise to give way. I suspect that I may be unable to give my hon. Friend the full answer that he requires. When my hon. Friend the Minister makes the Government's contribution, he may wish to comment on the matter. The widespread legal advice on which the Bill has been framed may marginally limit its scope. Clauses 2 to 4 specify the rights conferred by the Olympic association's rights and what amounts to infringement, and deal with the limits of those rights. There was a danger that, if the Bill went too wide, it risked hybridity. I hope that that is a satisfactory answer.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I simply wish to offer my hon. Friend some help in answering the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald). My hon. Friend referred to the apparent anomaly in clause 4(2), which mentions

"descriptions of work referred to in subsection (1)(a) above are a literary work, a dramatic work, a musical work, an artistic work, a sound recording, a film, a broadcast and a cable programme".

Could it be that the sound reason for excluding such activities is that there may often be an incidental reference to or pointing to the Olympic symbol in a sound recording or broadcast? Surely it would be unjust to include such references, and I am sure that my hon. Friend would not wish injustice to occur. It would not be fair for such incidental reproduction to be caught by the provisions of this otherwise highly sensible Bill.

Mr. Winterton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his extremely supportive and helpful comments on the Bill. Clearly, I do not want the Bill to range so far that it will be difficult to implement and monitor it. My hon. Friend's point is correct. Clearly, there may be many occasions when incidental references will be made and it could create a legal minefield were the Bill's scope to be as wide as my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) wanted.

I am delighted to be introducing the Bill. It is always a pleasure to introduce a Bill that has support across the House.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Before my hon. Friend finishes his speech, could he deal with two issues that arise from my reading of the Bill, which I broadly support? I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend is introducing the Bill, but does it apply to Northern Ireland? If not, why not?

Secondly, what is the Bill's single market dimension? What is the efficacy of legislating on a purely national basis now that we have a single market in this area? What is to prevent goods with the Olympic logo from being produced elsewhere in the single market, imported into this country and sold on the principle that anything that can be legally sold anywhere in the single market can be legally sold everywhere in the single market? Can my hon. Friend reassure me on that point?

Mr. Winterton: In answer to the first part of my hon. Friend's question I refer him to clauses 10 and 11, which deal with forfeiture in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. The Bill relates to all parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Garnier: And clause 18(3).

Mr. Winterton: As my hon. Friend says, the matter is also covered in another part of the Bill.

On the issue of the European Community, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies), I can only say, as I did earlier, that the British Olympic Association is one of the few national Olympic committees that does not receive Government funds and does not have exclusive use of the Olympic logo within its country. It is my understanding that legislation on the subject is already in place in other countries of the European Community.

I stress the point that I made earlier—I have taken lengthy and good legal advice. Clearly, the Bill's draftsmen have been considering such matters, and I believe that we are covered. I do not want to introduce into the debate any matters relating to subsidiarity, because I would be unnecessarily widening the scope of the debate.

I am delighted to be introducing the Bill. It will support the BOA and our athletes, improve our potential Olympic competitors and ensure that money raised from Olympic sponsorship is spent in the way that it should be—on sport and in nurturing the next generation of sportsmen and sportswomen.

I emphasise that, if we are to be at the top of the league in international sport, we need resources with which to train our athletes from a very young age. That is a major

objective of the British Olympic Association. Clearly, the more resources it has and the more extensive training it can provide, the better the results achieved by the nation in international events.

Such a development can only assist in restoring our sporting fortunes and in returning our nation's competitors to the pinnacle of sporting excellence for which we are renowned. I am happy to commend the Second Reading of the Bill to the House.

12.40 pm

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): I congratulate the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on his success in the ballot and on the excellent way in which he has presented the Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Bill. As he said, the Bill commands the full support of the Opposition as well as the wide-ranging support of hon. Members. He named many hon. Members on both sides of the House who support the Bill, but I will mention just two of them.

The whole House will recognise that my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry)—the Opposition shadow spokesman in this area—has played a prominent role in our country's sporting life. I know that the Bill is very dear to his heart, and it is fitting that the hon. Gentleman paid tribute to him.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe), to whom I referred earlier in today's proceedings. In addition to the national and international honours that he has gained on behalf of this country, he is also my parliamentary pair, and I know that he appreciates the importance of that assignment.

In discussing the Olympic symbol, we are also examining the importance of sport. On the day that we are discussing the future of sport under the terms of the Bill, it is appropriate that we remember the life of the late Fred Perry, He made an important contribution to sport in this century and he was the last British winner of the Wimbledon men's singles final. It is appropriate to his memory that we discuss this subject today.

This long overdue Bill is designed to protect the commercial rights of the British Olympic Association. It is correct to point out that similar legislation exists in most other countries, including the United States of America and Australia. The British Olympic Association, which has primary responsibility for funding our Olympic teams, receives no direct Government funding and it cannot bid for lottery money because of its particular revenue status. Therefore, it is important that the Bill enjoys a speedy passage through Parliament.

Clause 10 almost goes back to our earlier debate on the confiscation of the proceeds of crime. The Bill makes provision for

"the forfeiture of certain goods, material or articles which come into the possession of any person . . . in connection with the investigation or prosecution of a relevant offence".

It is absolutely right to include such a clause. Far too many spivs are making money from sport, taking money that is rightly the preserve of the BOA and that should be returned to sport.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde has written to the Prime Minister about matters contained in the Bill, pressing him to introduce appropriate legislation in Government time. Nevertheless, we are delighted that the hon. Member for Macclesfield has introduced a Bill that will have wide-ranging effects on investment in sport. We warmly welcome it.

12.45 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): I welcome the Bill and pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) for introducing it. It could have no more doughty fighter on its behalf. My hon. Friend has assembled a huge team of all-party supporters, and the welcome that his Bill received from the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) proves how well he did his behind-the-scenes homework on preparing the Bill for its Second Reading.

The Olympic games are special to Britain because of our national achievements but they are also special also internationally. They have a proud history and are a sign of the comity of nations and of international co-operation of a unique kind. For that reason, I particularly agree that the signs, mottos and words associated with the games should enjoy unique dignity and protection. That might be called censorship by some people, but to the extent that censorship is involved, it is right that those items should receive special protection. It is important also that their commercial exploitation benefits athletes and others connected with the games rather than only commercial interests.

That is particularly true given the history of the games. I make no apology for referring to that history briefly. Although the games are of ancient origin, it is not entirely clear where they were first held. By the end of the 6th century BC, at least four Greek sporting festivals known as the classical games had achieved major importance. The most significant were the games held at Olympia. The others were the Pythian, Nemean and Isthmian games held at Delphi, Nemea and Corinth respectively.

Similar festivals developed to the point where the Olympic games in particular became famous throughout the Greek world. There are records of champions at Olympia going back as far as 726 BC, when it was recorded that there was just one event—the stade. *[Interruption.]* I am informed by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) of a different pronunciation from an older generation—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—or a newer one. I would never suggest that my hon. Friend is from anything but the newest and latest generation. He is definitely with it.

Subsequently, other races were added. Of most importance and interest to the House perhaps is the 1,500 metres, which developed by the year 724 BC—the race in which, in modern times, my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) excelled and Britain, as the middle-distance running centre of the world, has made such a reputation.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): Does not my hon. Friend agree that the event of most relevance to the House was the pankration—a form of no-holds-barred wrestling?

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, although I recall that, although the fighting was no holds barred, and kicking and hitting were allowed, biting and gouging

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of eyes were strictly forbidden. So a certain discipline did prevail, even though Madam Speaker might not have approved of it.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): On a slightly more serious note, does my hon. Friend agree that one of the problems emerging in the Olympic games at that time—regrettably, all too familiar to us—resulted in the Olympic committee having to meet on a number of occasions to discuss the use of drugs by certain athletes? In particular, the Spartan team was accused of including drugs in its diet. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is highly regrettable that the problem has persisted in the games to the present day? Our hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) has long been associated with attempts to combat drugs through his association with the games.

Mr. Heald: I was coming to some of the more serious issues surrounding the games. I certainly agree that there is nothing new under the sun, and that there were problems with drugs even in those early years. It is a cause of sadness that those who wish to excel will sometimes let down themselves and others by resorting to drugs.

I too pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne, who has taken a clear view on this subject—that there should be no excuses, and that people found after tests to have taken drugs should not be allowed to get away with it by using some of the excuses that we so often hear. They should incur a lengthy ban.

It was in the Roman period that the games effectively came to an end, because the Romans regarded athletics with contempt and were not prepared to allow the Olympics to continue. Nevertheless, by the year 200 AD the games had had a proud continuous history from 776 BC. It was that history which, in the Victorian period, inspired Baron Pierre de Coubertin, who was the father of the modern Olympics. In a moving speech made in Paris in 1892, he said:

"Let us export our oarsmen, our runners, our fencers into other lands. That is the true Free Trade of the future; and the day it is introduced into Europe the cause of Peace will have received a new and strong ally. It inspires me to touch upon another step I now propose, and in it I shall ask that the help you have given me hitherto you will extend again, so that together we may attempt to realise, upon a basis suitable to the conditions of our modern life, the splendid and beneficent task of reviving the Olympic games."

From that moment in 1892, the baron fought hard at conference after conference to establish the Olympic games. In 1894 a meeting of Sports Ministers in Paris voted unanimously in favour of revival, and the congress was then able to set up the first modern Olympic games in April 1896.

It is perhaps worth remembering that the games have been held ever since then, through periods of immense international difficulty, wars and the worst threats to civilisation that we have known. The Olympic movement continued and brought together peoples of all countries.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Would my hon. Friend care to speculate on the poignancy of the fact that Baron de Coubertin made that speech just 22 years after the seige of Paris during the Franco-Prussian war? When he described sport as the

"free trade of the future",

he seemed to have a vision that the Olympic movement might be the precursor of the European Union of today.

Mr. Heald: I note that some colleagues are surprised at that idea. The baron certainly believed that Europe need not be divided and that its future should have co-operation at its centre. I do not think that he would have gone as far as to suggest a federal destiny for Europe, although I am sure that he would have welcomed the co-operation between nation states that we now have.

The baron was extremely eager that there should be agreement. He was convinced—

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) and many of his hon. Friends are reading from a prepared text. Bearing in mind the importance of ensuing Bills, we are clearly facing a filibuster. I suggest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Conservative Members send a copy of their prepared text upstairs to *Hansard* and that we then get on with a proper Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I assure the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) that so far there has been nothing out of order. Anything out of order would have been ruled out of order.

Mr. Heald: Without lingering too long on the point made by the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), which you ruled out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I make it clear that my notes are hand written. I accept that I have been reading, but it is a passage from the history of the Olympics with which I am anxious to deal. I do not have a prepared text. I have only an extract from the "Encyclopedia Britannica". It is relevant, I think, to what we are discussing. I am glad to have your support, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The baron was convinced that the downfall of the ancient Olympic games had been caused by outside influences that undermined the spirit of the games. For that reason he was anxious that the International Olympic Committee and its members should be regarded as ambassadors of their national sports organisations, not delegates to the committee, and that they might not accept from the Government of each country or any organisation or individual instructions that in any way affected their independence.

It is a fact that the Olympic movement has that independence, which has been its strength. The Bill seeks to protect the symbols, the motto and the words associated with the Olympic games, which means that we are considering a measure that will help the British Olympic movement and the international movement. That context is important.

In moving from the history—

Mr. Garnier: Before my hon. Friend moves on from the history of the new Olympic games, and for that matter the ancient games, will he take up what my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) was saying about the Olympic symbol, the interlinked

rings? When did the rings become an integral part of the Olympic movement? Was the symbol used in Greek and Roman times? I ask these questions out of interest and curiosity.

Mr. Heald *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The history lesson is interesting, and it could probably be said to be relevant to the Bill. However, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North is rather stretching it. It would be advantageous to the debate if we dealt with the Bill.

Mr. Heald: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was not going to take the route suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier). I merely say that the answer is 1914.

The scheme of the Bill is that the British Olympic Association will have a right to the symbols, the motto and the words associated with the Olympic movement. That right will be in statutory form. It would be an infringement of that right without the consent of the proprietor—the association—to use these representations for all purposes except those set out in clause 4, which provides that the

"right is not infringed by use of a controlled representation where—

(a) the use"—

is in a work as described in subsection (2), and the work is not one whose purpose is, or whose purposes include, the "advertising or other promotion" of goods or services.

The descriptions of works referred to are

"a literary work, a dramatic work, a musical work, an artistic work, a sound recording, a film, a broadcast and a cable programme, within the meaning of the"

1988 Act. All those forms of work are likely to be produced by commercial concerns. For example, a literary work is published for reward and a dramatic or musical work is presented to the public for reward.

Given that the Bill has two main purposes—to uphold the dignity of the symbols and signs of the movement and to ensure that their commercial exploitation is in the interests of athletes and those connected with the games—it is difficult to understand the justification for excluding a literary work that relies on the movements motto or symbols or the word "Olympic". The use of the motto, symbol or word should be the subject of a payment to the British Olympic Association to enable it to capitalise on its valuable intellectual property.

The same is true of a dramatic or musical work if the symbol is to be used. If Andrew Lloyd Webber produces a show, possibly something along the lines of "Chariots of Fire" with music, why should he not pay our athletes through the association a sum to reflect the commercial advantages that he is gaining from using the association's symbol?

It is important that we should uphold the dignity of the games. As a barrister who prosecuted in obscenity cases—the hon. Member for St. Helens, South may have had similar experiences—I saw many works that were alleged to be obscene but which were often described as "artistic", and artistic works are among those exempted in clause 4. Although such works might be "artistic", I do not believe that they are the sort of material that the Olympic movement would wish to be using its symbol, motto or the words "Olympic" or "Olympian". There should be an element of censorship, even in the case of an artistic work.

Mr. Fabricant: I am following my hon. Friend's comments with great interest. He will be aware that one of the sponsors of the Bill is the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who is the Chairman of the Select Committee on National Heritage. I note that five members of that Committee are sponsoring the Bill.

My hon. Friend may be interested to know that, at this very moment, the Committee is looking into the future of the British film industry. He mentioned "Chariots of Fire" which was a huge success. It was, however, a low-budget movie. If my hon. Friend's suggestion that fees should be paid for the use of the symbol—whether it were used as an integral or incidental part of a film—were adopted, would it not inhibit still further the production of British films?

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend raises an interesting issue, but I am not sure that I should follow it up. If the symbol is to be used, a payment, however small, should be made. In the case of low-budget films, the association might feel that it was able to levy only a small charge, but there is no reason why it should not exploit part of its commercial heritage. It is a question not only of commercial advantage but of censorship that the Olympic symbol should not be used willy-nilly in any production in a way that the founders of the movement and those who carry the torch today would not wish. I support the Bill, but I believe that that issue gives rise to legitimate concern.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I intervene to assist the House and—I hope—my hon. Friend, who is making a most interesting speech. The British Olympic Association has been closely involved with the drafting of the Bill. I appreciate that my hon. Friend is seeking to increase the amount of available sponsorship, but the British Olympic Association is very happy with the Bill, believing that to extend it further would create grave problems in policing and in other ways.

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Perhaps he wants to consider his point with the Olympic movement, but I do not see it as a bar to supporting the Bill. However, I hope that my hon. Friend is willing to look into the matter.

Mr. Garnier: I am concerned that my hon. Friend is falling into error. If he looks at clause 4, sub-section 2, about which he has been expounding, and applies his mind to, for example, films which incidentally catch in the background an advertisement or a copyright symbol of a well-known household product, drink or foodstuff, is it right and just that the Olympic movement, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield referred, should be more favoured, especially when it does not advocate such practice, than the makers of household products, which would not be able to claim damages for breaches of copyright were their logos or other copyright property to appear incidentally in a dramatic or musical work and the like?

Mr. Heald: I obviously understand my hon. Friend's point and his concern, but the Olympics are rather different from other products advertised on hoardings and elsewhere. The Olympics has a special place in Britain and internationally, so the association should have that

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special right to consent, if it wishes, to films which display its banner in the background, but only if it feels that the film suits the Olympic movement and its dignity and if it receives a commercial reward.

The costs of sending an athletics team abroad to contest the Olympics are huge and the costs of staging the Olympics run into hundreds of millions of pounds. There should be special provision in this unique case.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is no comparison between the use of the Olympic symbol and the word and the placement, if one may call it that, of certain product names? Is it not the case that certain manufacturers pay film companies and television production companies to place their product names in the viewer's line of sight?

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. Indeed, the method that he describes is one of the ways in which the Olympics is financed. Certainly, I know that in America the Olympic symbol was marketed to great effect before the Los Angeles Olympics.

Schools show films which depict the Olympics and the successes of athletes such as my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne and CD-roms are coming on stream which contain the entire history of the Olympics, so it would be wrong if the costs of producing such films, videos and CD-roms were so high that schools could not afford them. I do not think that the British Olympic Association would want to make a profit, but it would want proper recognition in films and other artistic representations and some payment, however small, for being a unique body with unique interests. I hope that I have not detained the House for too long.

1.8 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I will not detain the House for long, but I want to refer to one or two of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) in relation to the history of the Olympic games. Although the Olympic games are a very ancient institution, the current games are a relatively recent revival. As we have heard, the Olympic symbol was not invented until 1914. It is a relatively modern occurrence.

I do not want to strike a discordant note. However, we are proposing to give a Second Reading to a Bill which will give something unique to the British Olympic Association—a right of property to the Olympic symbol, "Olympiad", "Olympic" and the other words covered in the Bill. Those words are common currency, but the Bill proposes to give them a special status, to the possible disadvantage of people who already use them.

I am not a lawyer and, as I am surrounded by hon. and learned Members, I tread carefully in these matters. I am concerned about clause 2(4) and whether it protects people who have used in their company names the words covered in the Bill. Clause 2(4) states:

> "This section shall not have effect to permit the doing of anything which would otherwise be liable to be prevented by virtue of a right".

I am concerned about that, because I do not know what "a right" is in that respect.

Will the Bill affect commerce and the people who have used the words covered in the Bill for many years? In that respect, I think of Olympic Airways. The Bill could cause that airline problems because I am not sure whether, according to the definitions in the Bill, Olympic Airways has a right to its name. Clauses 5 and 6 refer to the Trade Marks Act 1994, but I am not certain whether the airline would gain any comfort from that.

The London business telephone directory reveals that the use of words like "Olympic" and "Olympiad" is widespread. I am concerned that the Bill will affect many of the people who trade under those names. The London business telephone directory has entries for Olympia Cars and Olympia Butchers of Blythe road. I am sure that it is an excellent establishment.

Mr. Bermingham: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. One could go through the telephone directory until the cows come home, but that will not stop people exporting veal calves. That is what the next Bill is all about and that is what the hon. Gentleman is trying to stop.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We are not debating the next Bill: we are debating the Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Bill, as the hon. Gentleman is perfectly aware. His point of order is an abuse of the House.

Mr. Bermingham: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If I have abused the House, I apologise.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have already ruled on that point of order.

Mr. Bermingham: I simply wanted to apologise.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Atkinson: The hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) may think that I am abusing the House, but he does not trade as the Olympia Butchers of Blythe road, W14. The Bill could have a serious impact on the ability of that company to trade properly. I stand to be corrected by my hon. and learned Friends who know much more about the law than I do, but I wonder whether such companies will be exempt under the terms of the Bill. As I understand the Bill, I do not think that those firms can claim to have a right to continue to use those names.

Olympic Airways may have its name as a registered trade mark. However, would smaller companies like Olympia Delicacies, doner kebab manufacturer, have bothered to register official trade names? Would such company names be "a right", as set out in the Bill? What about Olympia Flowers, a west London florist, and Olympia Pizza? Surely those companies have not registered their names as a trade mark. Would they be put out of business as a result of the Bill?

Earlier, we debated the Road Traffic (New Drivers) Bill which may put young pizza delivery drivers at risk of losing their licences and having to resit the driving test. Will the Bill remove the right of Olympia Pizza to trade? I should welcome some assurances from my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) that little businesses such as Olympic Bloodstock Ltd., Olympic Bus, Olympic Cars, Olympic Cash and Carry, Olympic

Electronics, Olympic Estates and so on will not be prejudiced in their ability to earn a living by anything that he does this day.

Mr. Garnier: Will my hon. Friend address clauses 15 and 16? He will find that the margin notes refer to:

"Remedy for groundless threats of infringement proceedings."

Clause 14 refers to

"Power to give directions to proprietor."

That power is given to the Secretary of State. Will my hon. Friend address those clauses and then consider whether his points about such shops are as good as he originally thought that they were?

Mr. Atkinson: Giving way to lawyers is always a dangerous pastime. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's points. I read clauses 14 and 15. I was not certain whether they posed a greater threat to the ability of Olympia Butchers of Blythe road to continue, to be honest. That is why we need assurances from my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield. If we get around to discussing it in Committee, we shall be able to examine the Bill more carefully to ensure that it does not prejudice anybody by giving the British Olympic Association a unique advantage.

Mr. Fabricant: I have looked at the scope of the Bill, and I note that it covers the five interlocking rings, the words "Citius, altius, fortius" and other words. I wonder whether my hon. Friend is relieved that it does not cover the Olympic torch. I am not sure how that would affect the Conservative party's symbol.

Mr. Atkinson: My hon. Friend is very astute. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield would not wish to do anything to prejudice the use of the Olympic torch on Conservative party literature. Again, there might be concern from Smith square at some import of the Bill.

I now refer in more detail to the Trade Marks Act 1994. In looking for some comfort in it, I wondered whether the definitions of trade marks do not already cover the Olympic sign.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell me how important he regards the Bill to be. Perhaps he would compare it with the fact that, in my area of Warwickshire and in Coventry, six people have died as a result of the veal export trade. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will compare the importance of some hon. Members wanting to make points on that matter with his views on talking out the Bill and reading the telephone directory.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That intervention has nothing to do with the Bill. The Chair will decide what is in order. So far, what I have heard has been in order—otherwise, it would have been ruled out of order.

Mr. Atkinson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Bill is important because it raises important points of principle. The hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O' Brien) might not be interested in the livelihood of businesses, but I happen to be so. It is wrong of the hon. Gentleman to accuse me of speaking on the Bill without caring about other matters. It is nonsense to suggest that.

Mr. Bermingham: Methinks the hon. Gentleman doth protest too much.

Mr. Atkinson: I heard what the hon. Gentleman said from a sedentary position. I shall continue my speech, so that we can examine some clauses in detail.

In relation to the Trade Marks Act, I was about to mention international protection of the Olympic sign. Surely that is covered by the Paris convention of 1883. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield talked about international protection, but as this country is a signatory to the Paris convention of 1883, there might be no need for the Bill because we are already covered.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: In making this intervention, I shall make a plea to the House. The debate so far has been constructive and extremely helpful. It has dealt exclusively with the matters before the House. The Bill has support right across the House, and is widely supported outside. My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) is looking at the nitty-gritty of the Bill, and he is quite right that the 1883 legislation covers the matter internationally. However, it does not cover the matter within the United Kingdom.

We have been extremely careful in drafting the Bill, and we have been in consultation with the Department of National Heritage and, naturally, with the Treasury. We have taken the best possible advice, and the scope of the Bill is as it is because we do not want to do some of the things which my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham has implied in his remarks. Commercial interests have been consulted, and they are happy with the Bill. The British Olympic Association is happy with the scope of the Bill.

I hope that, in his probing of the Bill—he has an absolute right to do that—my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham will not perhaps destroy the Bill by being rather too negative in his approach.

Mr. Atkinson: I assure my hon. Friend that I would not wish to impede the process of the Bill, because it deserves further, and more detailed, discussions.

The inquiry which I was making on the matter was that it would be fine for a company such as Olympic Airways, which has established that as its title. Small shops and businesses, however, may not be taken account of in the provisions. Often a company trades under a different name from the sign on its board, and such companies could well be caught in this legislation.

Mr. Fabricant: Has my hon. Friend made an analysis of the number of Greek restaurants in the United Kingdom with a title including the name Olympic?

Mr. Atkinson: I assure my hon. Friend that there must be thousands of such restaurants. My hon. Friend has put his finger on a main point. The words "Olympic", "Olympius" and "Olympus" belong to the Greek people. They are not the exclusive property of the British Olympic Association. When the Olympic games were revived during the 19th century, those words and the symbol were adopted.

From the moment that the Bill becomes law, a Greek restaurant owner wishing to name his restaurant the Olympic would—I dare say—be unable to do so. He

[Mr. Atkinson]

could then be said to be infringing the copyright of one of the names covered in the Bill. The words form part of the heritage and culture of the Greeks. Many Greek Cypriots in this country run businesses and have affection for those words. "Olympic Pizza" gives the idea of speed, fitness and people delivering pizzas on motorbikes.

I take my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire's point absolutely. The words are common currency. If the Bill were in any way to stop people using that title—as a Greek or Greek Cypriot person should be entitled to do—when opening up a business, it would require amendment. It is as simple as that.

If it is properly examined, the Bill can be made to work. We must talk it through carefully, and I am sorry if Opposition Members do not think that we should do that. I believe that it is right to get legislation in the House correct, and not to put into law matters which are incorrect. There are many issues today of national and international importance, but the House is perfectly entitled to discuss things of smaller importance. We should be reminded of shopkeepers and restaurateurs and consider the Bill carefully. Therefore, we must have further detailed discussions about the Bill before it becomes law.

1.24 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) not only on gaining a well-placed position in the ballot for private Member's Bills but on the subject that he selected as his Bill. It is important, as I will explain, both for positive and negative reasons.

The House will be familiar with the magnificent equestrian figure of my hon. Friend, who tried to tempt me into the sporting field on a visit to the west Falklands some years ago, where we set out one morning to try to improve our equestrian skills—he sitting magnificently on a horse, and me clinging to it in a way I had never done for a quarter of a century previously.

Mr. Fabricant: The same horse?

Mr. Arnold: I assure my hon. Friend that it was a different horse. Perhaps if it had been the same horse, I would not have suffered the fall I did—my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield knew how to check a horse's girth and to ensure that the horse was not puffed up. I did not make that check and in due course took quite a tumble for my lack of sporting experience. I know that my hon. Friend is highly qualified to speak on sporting measures.

The Bill is welcome for negative as well as positive reasons. I believe that it will improve the quality of the goods to which the Olympic symbol is attached. We all know that, at great international events, great sporting events and events of varying descriptions, for example, relating to the royal family, a vast array of some pretty tacky goods are circulated for the tourists, visitors and the public to purchase.

As the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), the Opposition spokesman, said in her usual elegant way, they are produced by spivs. Be they produced by spivs or wide boys, it is a diversion of the resources of the sportsgoing public that profits made from the sale of such hallmarked items goes to spivs and wide-boys rather than to the sporting endeavours. For that reason, I think that the Bill will be a valuable addition to the statute book, when it reaches it.

On the positive side, the Bill is of great value to formalise and to protect the symbol properly in its uses. If in the process it raises money for the development of sporting activities, it is only too valuable. In the past, I have been involved in the organising of contingents to international scout jamborees. That does not compare in expertise and skills to the preparation of contingents to the Olympics. They are immensely expensive, particularly if one thinks about the vast costs involved in sending not only the teams but the supporting teams, which are ever-more complex in this modern day and age. The equipment that needs to be sent must be kept to a very high standard and be at the point of absolute perfection when our sportsmen and women take part. It costs a vast amount.

One of the principal advantages of the Bill is that that money can be properly applied to support a good British team to go to the Olympics. If it can additionally cause funds to be gained and filtered down to the training of our young people in sports, across the wide range of sports involved in the Olympics, it must be an advantage, because I think that we do not do better in international sports because we do not catch our young at an early enough age to get them skilled in the various sports involved in the Olympics.

The Bill is particularly relevant to Britain. My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) referred to other countries in Europe and to the international scene. We are not discussing legislation that goes beyond the borders of the United Kingdom. We are discussing what happens here. When we send teams abroad to the Olympics, as we have since 1948, we deal with goods produced in this country to commemorate the Olympics being held far from these shores.

London, this great capital city of ours, hosted the Olympics in the early days of 1908 and came to the Olympic movement's rescue in 1948 in staging the revival Olympics. We are all too familiar with the agonies of the bid to bring the next Olympics to Manchester. I hope that Manchester, London and other cities will work towards bringing the Olympics here in the future. So doing will require vast sums of money, which is why the Bill is highly relevant in gathering together the money necessary to present an Olympic games of the standard required by the Olympics movement and expected by the House.

The Bill is particularly relevant to the House because a small, select band of hon. Members have played a great part in previous Olympics. Between 1931 and 1943, the hon. Member for Peterborough was Lord Burghley, who won a gold medal in the 400 metre hurdles at the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam. After 1943, he moved up the Corridor, where he succeeded as the sixth Marquess of Exeter. Also along the Corridor is another Olympic participant, in rifle shooting—Lord Swansea. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may recall from your early days in the House the then hon. Member for Chichester, Chris Chataway, who had an excellent record in the 5,000 metre race many years ago. We are honoured to have with us the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe), who has many Olympic records to his credit.

I hope that we shall shortly consider the Bill's detailed clauses and requirements. My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) raised a valid concern. The names mentioned in the Bill, such as "Olympics" and "Olympian", are, by their nature, not exclusive to that magnificent sporting contest but are used by many organisations, including, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) said, a pizza parlour and the Greek airline.

In reading through the Bill, I was interested to note that clause 15 provides a remedy for groundless threats of infringement proceedings. If the House gives organisations certain rights and responsibilities to control the use of the Olympic symbol, it is incumbent on the House to ensure that such rights are not abused.

I strongly support the Bill because it will be of immense value in adding further fire power to this country's sporting excellence. Let us hope that, in future years, as a result of resources brought forth by the Bill, British teams will give even better performances at the Olympics than they have in the past.

Mr. Bermingham *rose—*

1.33 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I shall be brief, because I have no motive other than to strongly support the Bill. Before the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) has apoplexy, I assure him that I, too, want the House to put an end to the live export of animals, which I strongly deprecate. Nevertheless, we are now here to discuss the important Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Bill, which has been presented not before time.

Few ideals have enthused the whole world so consistently throughout this century as that of the Olympics. The Olympics sum up some of the highest human ideals and deserve special protection. Those ideals are of excellence, competition, team spirit, brotherhood of man and international co-operation on a peaceful and positive basis. That is why it is so important that we should, to the best of our ability, protect the Olympic games and the Olympic movement from commercial exploitation in a world where the pressures are increasingly intense.

Therefore, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on introducing the Bill and, I hope, on enabling measures to be passed that will protect the games from commercial exploitation and take us back to the original spirit of the games alluded to earlier. It was not mentioned that, apart from the commercial pressures, another major difference between the games then and now was that all the competitors were naked and only one female was allowed to participate—the high priestess Demeter, who seems to have been absent from more recent Olympic games.

The United Kingdom is rare in not already giving proper protection to Olympic trademarks. The Bill puts right a long-standing anomaly and provides protection, not just to the symbols, but to other elements associated with the Olympic movement. The Bill has a positive as well as a negative—protective—side. It will enable sponsorship for athletes to be collected by the British Olympic Committee by the licensing and use of symbols related to the Olympic games. That is particularly important in this country, where there is no Government support, which is, in itself, quite unusual in the international context.

Trademarks are an important part of commerce; they are an important symbol of human activity in the modern world. They are more than just symbols, they represent ideals and, in the popular imagination, they are linked to whatever they represent. I can give no better example than that of Cartier. People often buy a product exclusively because it bears the symbol and trademark of a specific manufacturer or trader equated with high quality.

I mentioned the name of Cartier because, throughout the world, many people attempt to copy the symbol illicitly in order to sell the product at more than its value would otherwise be. That will apply to the Olympics if the symbol remains unprotected. I do not want that to happen—I want the Olympic games to be properly protected in this country as they are elsewhere. I want the British Olympic Committee to use the facility to raise sponsorship to support our athletes and our contributions to future Olympics. For those reasons, I strongly support and welcome the Bill, and hope that it passes through the House swiftly.

1.37 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I shall be brief, as was the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), unlike his colleagues, who made extremely lengthy, verbose and pointless speeches.

I do not mean to be unkind—I can easily read the Bill. We do not pass retrospective legislation, so anyone called Olympic or Olympia is protected and will not be hurt by the legislation. If clauses 17 and 18 mean what they say, a person who makes a frivolous objection because someone has chosen to use Olympic or Olympia as his or her name will be caught by the law. Therefore, anyone with such a name does not need to worry.

As for the history lesson from the Government, a parliamentary private secretary, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald), gave us some wonderful information which was totally useless and pointless. I should be grateful if he would give me the briefing document so that I can read it to see what bits were missed out.

The Bill is long overdue and I congratulate the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on introducing it. The Bill will do a lot of good and it will help many people in the future. It may even create jobs; indeed, if we move on to the next Bill, we may create still more jobs. I welcome the Bill.

1.40 pm

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on his good fortune in winning the ballot and introducing the Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Bill. Like the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), I wish to move on to the next Bill on the Order Paper, the Protection of Calves (Export) Bill, on which I shall speak in support. I hope, therefore, that my hon. Friend will not view it as a discourtesy to him or to his Bill if my contribution to this debate is shorter than I would have liked it to be.

I put on record my support for sport. It is immensely important not just for our young people but for all of us—particularly parliamentarians, who have so little

[Mr. Michael Stephen]

opportunity for physical exercise. It is important that our young people should be taught from the very earliest age how to look after their physical as well as their mental health. Those who are at the pinnacle of sporting achievement—our Olympic sportsmen and sportswomen—set a fine example in that regard.

I pay tribute to the work of the Sports Council and I am very grateful that, even in times of financial stringency, the Government have been able to support it with public funds. However, the level of funding is not enough. As the economy continues to improve, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor will find more money for the Sports Council.

In the interim, I see no reason why additional funds should not be found for the British Olympic Association from commercial sources. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield on his ingenuity in discovering a source from which the British Olympic Association may derive funding—the commercial use of the Olympic symbol and name.

Sport is important not only in terms of our physical health and well-being but as a source of national pride. We are justifiably proud of the achievements of our Olympic sportsmen and women. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins)—whose constituency my own surrounds—who was a very distinguished Olympic athlete.

I conclude by illustrating to the House the importance of sport as a source of national pride. That fact was summed up only a few days ago by the headline in one of our newspapers which read, "Strewth! We beat the Aussies."

1.42 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Like the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) and my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen), I shall be brief. I support the Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Bill totally, and I wish to raise two points to which reference has not been made in the debate so far.

First, the Bill is very welcome, but I fear that it may also be too late. The British Olympic Association has pressed for legislation of this nature for some years. When it first requested such legislation, there was a reasonable chance that the action it sought—a trademark infringement action in order to protect its use and exploitation of the Olympic symbol—would work.

In the past few years, however, there have been some attacks on that legal principle. I believe that the American organisers of the soccer World cup had great difficulty protecting the World cup symbol and sponsorships from deliberate, and often massive, infringements by international companies. Although this legislation is welcome, I hope that its promoter, my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), will review with the Minister, the Government's Law Officers and the British Olympic Association the extent to which it can be made watertight. I fear that there are very strong and highly lucrative reasons for people to try to upset the Bill as soon as it passes into law.

Secondly, the Bill is one leg of a two-legged animal. As my hon. Friend said in introducing it, the Bill parallels powers that are already available in many other countries. Equally, many other countries have the power to claim tax relief for expenditure by sponsors and by Olympic associations in raising money for their teams. Such a power is not available in the United Kingdom.

For years, in Finance Bill and other debates, the Government have been pressed to give the tax relief that other countries find essential. Together with the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), on an all-party basis I sought a meeting with a Treasury Minister on that concession. In view of what I am about to say, I shall not name him because he might immediately be sacked from the Cabinet, of which he is now a member. He said, "I am in favour in principle, but what chance do I have when the entire Cabinet pays obeisance to only one sport—cricket?"

We did not manage to secure that tax relief, but I hope that the interest generated by my hon. Friend's Bill will provide another chance. My hon. Friend, whose reputation for not entirely toeing the Government line is well known, may consider pursuing the issue in debates on future Finance Bills, as many others and I have done in the past. I wish the Bill well. I just wish that it had come earlier.

1.45 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) mentioned that his Bill has all-party support. The signatories to it range from senior parliamentarians, such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), to the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms Hoey)—who is my Member of Parliament in London, and who, until not long ago, was shadow junior Minister for sport. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) competed in the Olympics, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe).

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield on his good fortune in winning a high place in the ballot. He presented his Bill well, and it has the support of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. The article in *The House Magazine* dated 23 January succinctly describes the purposes of his Bill, so I shall not detain the House by repeating his words.

My hon. Friend's Bill is supported by not only Back Benchers but the Government. On 12 December 1994, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage welcomed the announcement by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield of his intention to introduce a Bill to protect the commercial use of Olympic symbols. The Department acknowledged that it would allow the British Olympic Association exclusive rights to market the use of the Olympic rings and emblem, the motto "Citius, altius, fortius" and the words "Olympic", "Olympian" and "Olympiad".

My hon. Friend the Minister said:

"I fully support these measures to be introduced by Nicholas Winterton to protect the Olympic symbols. They will be of significant benefit to British athletes, and have been widely backed by sporting organisations and commercial businesses.

The proposed legislation will give the British Olympic Association exclusive rights to market the Olympic symbols. This will enable them to raise extra money through commercial royalties, which will be used to help elite sport. Athletes hoping to attend the next Olympic Games in Atlanta will be among the first to benefit."

The Bill has been given the overwhelming support of the House, and I am happy to count myself among those who have risen to speak in support of my hon. Friend the

Member for Macclesfield. I should like to allay some of the fears raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) and for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald).

My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham was worried about shops and businesses that used the words "Olympic" or "Olympiad" in their logos. I hope that I an not trespassing here on territory that my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield intends to cover. Clause 4(4) states:

> "In the case of a representation of a protected word, the Olympics association right is not infringed by use which is not such as ordinarily to create an association with—
>
> (a) the Olympic games or the Olympic movement, or
>
> (b) a quality ordinarily associated with the Olympic games or the Olympic movement."

I can fully appreciate that, on first reading that clause, members of the public might be confused, but careful study of the Bill puts it beyond doubt that pizza shops, butchers shops and even Olympic Airways would not be caught by it—so I draw that to their attention.

I hope that my hon. Friend's Bill will be given a fair wind and will soon pass into law.

1.51 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I shall try to be brief, so that we can get on. I congratulate the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on his Bill. My party is delighted to have among its members a well-known Olympian, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), who, in his day, led the British Olympic team to some effect.

Perhaps many hon. Members share my view that sport has generally been rather poorly treated, so any attempts, such as the one in the Bill, to improve its status and to give it a leg up are most welcome. It needs investment particularly. The Bill is likely to benefit sport in that respect.

I understand that we are trying to protect the Olympic symbol and words from unauthorised commercial exploitation, and that the Bill gives the Secretary of State the right to grant the British Olympic Association the exclusive licence to exploit the symbols in question—an important step forward.

The United Kingdom is one of the few nations not to give statutory protection to the Olympic symbols. The BOA is one of the few Olympic committees not to receive Government funds. On both these fronts, I believe that the Bill will prove beneficial.

I agree with the hon. Member for Macclesfield that the Bill will give British sportsmen and women great encouragement, in the knowledge that Parliament wants them to go out and compete successfully on behalf of their country.

We must remove anything that disadvantages our Olympic movement, and that is why I welcome the Bill. The BOA does not benefit from Government funds; its ability to sustain the service that it gives to competitors depends chiefly on private sponsorship. It is, therefore, very important that we give the association the chance to use these protected symbols to generate sponsorship funds that will enable it to continue its important role. That role is to promote sport in our country.

On behalf of the Liberal Democrat party, I welcome the Bill, and wish it every success in its remaining stages.

1.54 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): I shall briefly speak in support of the Bill, which was so ably and robustly introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). I shall not speak for long, primarily because it is important that we debate the Protection of Calves (Export) Bill. I look forward to hearing what the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) has to say. My second reason for not speaking at length is that I am suffering from a pretty bad cold. I would not be able to speak for very long, even if I wanted to do so.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield has, among his supporters, five members of the Select Committee on the National Heritage. Although my name does not appear in the list of supporters, as a member of that Select Committee I wish very much to give my support to the Bill, which on the whole is an excellent measure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) talked about the Olympic spirit. I agree that that spirit or ideal is to be admired. It would be fallacious, however, if we were to say that it has always been achieved. I remind hon. Members of the nadir that it reached in 1936, with the racist Berlin Olympics. We spoke earlier of the use of the Olympic symbol in films. What could have been more perverse than the Leni Riefenstahl film, "Triumph of the Will", which purported to suggest that the Olympic games somehow supported the Nazi idea of racism? I remind hon. Members of the various boycotts, including of the Los Angeles and Moscow games. We all remember, of course, the massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich games.

Last Friday, I attended a Cambridge Union debate. It had nothing to do with sport, but I met an historian from Cambridge university who proposed an interesting thesis. He suggested that, in 100, 200 or 300 years' time, Britain would be remembered for two great achievements. He discounted the British empire and scientific achievements, but thought that Britain would be remembered for the spread of the English language and the creation of so many sports that are played throughout the world.

Although we have invented international games such as football and tennis, we have not shown an ability to win them. It is primarily for that reason that I support the Bill. I am aware that in my constituency there are inadequate sums available for the training and travel of athletes who could reach international status.

An athlete called Spencer Duval recently won the British cross-country championships. I hope that he will be taking part in the Olympic games in 1996. I know his family well because, apart from any other reason, his father, Derrick Duval, is the chairman of my local Conservative association. Spencer has had to train in the United States and the United Kingdom. He needs sponsorship, which he is given to some extent. It is clear that the difficulties that he faces are shared by other athletes in the United Kingdom.

Relatively small countries such as the former East Germany experienced success in capturing Olympic awards. That tells us that it is possible, when money is available and there is sufficient will, to become a world leader in international sports. At present, apart perhaps from athletics, Britain is far from a world leader in sports,

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

despite the fact that many sports that are played at the Olympic games were first developed in the United Kingdom.

I support the Bill. I believe that it will help to create additional moneys for the training of British athletes. I hope that the moneys will be used wisely and I should be interested to know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield has had any information from the British Olympic Association as to how they will be used. Are we going to set up training camps—if that is the correct term—for British athletes to enable them to start winning the gold, silver and bronze medals that Britain deserves to win at the Olympic games? I wish the Bill well and commend it to the House.

1.59 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) on his tremendous hard work, diligence and persistence. The impressive list of right hon. and hon. Members who are supporting him is a tribute to his hard work and the contents of this important Bill.

I shall first give a few background details of the Bill, with which the House should be familiar and which it is important to place on the record, and then deal with some of the points that have been made.

Parliament will be aware of the historic significance and resonance of the Olympic symbols, the five interlocking Olympic rings, the motto of the Olympic movement, citius, altius, fortius, and the terms "Olympic", "Olympian" and "Olympiad" in world sport. No property exists in the Olympic symbol and its associated terms which, used on their own, are in the public domain and no persons have any copyright or other tangible or intangible commercial property in the symbols per se, although they may have property in an original work, design or trade mark incorporating the symbols.

It is thus possible for anyone to use the unadorned symbols on their own. Applications to register a trademark or design containing the symbols are accepted if they are part of a wider design and not passed off as goods or services that might be used in or associated with the Olympic games.

The British Olympic Association is responsible for promoting the Olympic movement in the United Kingdom. It is a company limited by guarantee, established in accordance with the principles of the Olympic charter and its constitution is approved by the International Olympic Committee. The BOA owns and licenses trademarks that incorporate the Olympic rings together with the representation of the Union Jack. Companies sponsoring the British Olympic team, for example, are given the right to use the trademark for marketing purposes. None of the marks, however, has the same impact or marketability as the instantly recognisable five-ring symbol and associated terms.

The properties associated with the five-ring symbol and associated terms derive entirely from their association with the Olympic movement. The Government support the Bill, which would ensure that the benefit of the commercial use of the properties should be restricted to businesses responsible for supporting the Olympic movement and the British Olympic team.

The extra funding derived from the marketing rights to the Olympic symbols in the United Kingdom will enable the BOA, which depends entirely on the private sector for funding, to develop further sporting excellence in Britain and help ensure the continuing success of British participants in the Olympic games.

The debate about protecting the Olympic symbols in the United Kingdom dates back to 1981 when the Nairobi treaty, under the auspices of the World Intellectual Property Organisation—a United Nations agency—vested the rights of the Olympic symbols in the International Olympic Committee. The Government have not signed the treaty and are reluctant to do so, as they consider it more appropriate for United Kingdom legislation to vest the rights in a United Kingdom body.

That is accepted by the International Olympic Committee and, in addition to conferring the benefits already described, the proposed legislation would honour a commitment made by the Government to the international Olympic Committee in the course of the unsuccessful Manchester Olympic bid to regulate the use of Olympic symbols in the United Kingdom. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield, because, if the Bill is passed, he will have enabled the British Government to fulfil their pledge.

I am sure that we would all agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield that the British Olympic team should be as well prepared as possible. He also said, quite accurately, that the British Olympic Association does not receive any Government funding. Indeed, it does not even receive resources such as free accommodation. Other bodies associated with elite athletes, such as the Sports Aid Foundation, receive accommodation free from the Sports Council.

It is worth reminding the House that although, as I think the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) said, it is not possible for the BOA to claim lottery funding for individual athletes, which would breach the revenue regulations of the lottery, the BOA is perfectly able to apply for lottery funding for a project, which could be mainly capital in nature, but have a revenue tail that may, in some way, be used to help our athletes. Therefore, although the form of words used my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield was entirely accurate, it is perhaps useful to remind the BOA and other organisations interested in the Olympics that, in certain circumstances, they may gain access to lottery funds.

The main point of the Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield explained so well, is that the BOA will receive funds for the licensing of the Olympic symbols and associated words, which it will be able to use to support our athletes. It is absolutely vital to support, protect and guarantee the protection of the symbols to enable the BOA to help athletes.

I am sure that, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be interested to hear that the British Amateur Rugby League Association had not been asked whether it would support the Bill. I am also sure, as my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield said, that it would have supported the Bill had it been asked. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may also like to know that last night I was told that rugby league may figure in the Sydney Olympics in 2000. If it

were true, I am sure that both of us would look to forward rugby league, the most popular form of football in Sydney, being played there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield said in his able speech that the Bill had the strong support of the Department of National Heritage, which is true. We very much hope that the House will give the Bill a Second Reading.

My hon. Friend was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) whether the Bill applied to Northern Ireland. As my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield said, it does indeed apply to Northern Ireland. Incidentally, the Government are about to set up a United Kingdom Sports Council that covers the whole of the United Kingdom and, for the first time, Northern Ireland will be part of such a body.

Rather curiously—I know not for what reason—Northern Ireland is not part of the current Sports Council in Great Britain. Northern Ireland will not only be covered by my hon. Friend's Bill, but will be part of what I hope will be an extremely important body for the promotion of sport in this country.

The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green paid a generous tribute, which we would all wish to join, to the late Fred Perry. I believe that Mr. Perry's father was a Labour Member of Parliament, which the hon. Lady refrained from mentioning. Fred Perry was a great British sportsman and it is fitting that the House of Commons should pay tribute to him. The hon. Lady asked whether the British Olympic Association could claim lottery funding for individual athletes, and no doubt she will read *Hansard* for the answer.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) gave an extremely interesting history of the Olympic movement, which I will read later to catch up on any of the historical details that I might have missed. He said that some might claim—although he would not—that the Bill might be regarded as censorship because it stopped others from using the Olympic symbol. However, as my hon. Friend said, it is important to emphasise that it should not be regarded as censorship. It involves the protection of a legitimate symbol and it is akin to trade marks. No one would suggest that trade marks legislation was censorship. It is important to understand that the strong purpose of the Bill is to provide funds for our athletes.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Like everyone, I am in favour of the Bill. I have just returned to the Chamber having checked the definition of infringement. The Minister will be aware that there is often great controversy about the Olympics. For example, I seem to recall that campaigners against the Moscow Olympics wore printed tee-shirts that carried the Olympic symbol and the words, "Don't go to Moscow." Would such a genuine expression of political opinion or the use of the Olympic symbol in a controversial cartoon leave people open to prosecution?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. No doubt it is a matter that lawyers would like to consider. However, as neither the hon. Gentleman nor I am a lawyer, I share the expression on his face. That point can be answered in more detail in Committee. I would have thought that there would be a case to answer although frivolous cases, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware from his study of the Bill, have a remedy.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I want to intervene quickly to help the House, and the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) in particular. The legislation seeks to stop commercial exploitation. As the promoter of the Bill, I believe that where people produce something for a specific campaign, they would continue to have the right to do so, but if they sought to make lots of money, that would be a complication. Knowing the hon. Member for Brent, East as I do, I suspect that he is involved more in campaigns than in commercial exploitation.

Mr. Sproat: I dare say that that is roughly right. However, we have all known good campaigns that have fallen into the hands of people who wanted to make money out of them. In those circumstances, the use of tee-shirts referred to by the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) could fall foul of the Bill. However, we can pursue that matter at greater length on another occasion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern), in another scholarly intervention on the already scholarly speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield, referred to the Spartans using drugs at one of the early Olympics. I was not aware of that. I would be very interested to learn—although not now—exactly what drugs were used in those days.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West raised an extremely important point about drugs, and to few sports are they more important than to the Olympic games. Government agencies, through the Sports Council and the sports councils in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, spend more than £900,000 a year on combating drugs. The British Government are absolutely determined to stamp out cheating through the use of drugs in international sport. The methods we use are respected around the world. When I was in Australia last week, I visited the Australian sports drugs agency, where people told me how much they admired our attempt to stamp out drugs in the Olympics and other sports.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) made a point that exercised several hon. Members. He asked whether the use of the words "Olympic" and "Olympian" or the use of the symbol in matters of general trade is banned by the Bill? He referred very fairly to several businesses, including pizza parlours, butchers, garages and restaurants which have called themselves "Olympic". It is not the intention of the Bill to ban such genuine commercial use of the word "Olympic". Those who have been using the word "Olympic" or the symbol for years past will not be banned by the Bill. It is important that the point that my hon. Friend rightly made is answered authoritatively.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) made the important point that one consequence of the Bill will be not only to raise money for the British Olympic Association that can be used to fund British athletes at the Olympic Games—that is clearly the main point of the Bill, and hon. Members have supported it—but, as a by-blow, to help to guarantee that goods associated with the Olympics and that have the Olympic symbol on them will be of reasonably high quality.

[Mr. Sproat]

The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green used the word "spivs". We do not want the Olympic games to be associated with such a trade, nor do we want tacky goods. The BOA will have to license the use of symbols to those who wish to use them to promote their goods. The BOA will ensure that its goods or services are of a suitably high standard. That is another extremely important benefit of the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) referred to Cartier watches and having the name "Cartier" put on other watches, and how that defrauded Cartier of money. I am sure that that is correct. The Bill would prevent exactly such cheating.

My hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen), in his brief intervention, talked about the great importance of support for sport in general for young people. He will know that we have recently restructured sports councils. As I mentioned in passing, we are about to set up a United Kingdom Sports Council, and we are about to set up an English sports council. It is an oddity—we have never before had an English or United Kingdom sports council.

The particularly relevant point is that we have specifically said that a place will be specifically reserved on the United Kingdom and English sports councils for somebody representing Olympic sport. We will obviously reserve places for non-Olympic amateur sport—for professional sport. I hope that the House will agree that that shows the importance that we place on Olympic sport and that it supports and complements the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham also said that he approved any method by which a legitimate increase in funding by commercial methods could be brought about. The Bill is clearly such a method. The national lottery allows us to add further support to our Olympic challenges—if we can find ways to obtain lottery funds for capital projects to help our Olympic athletes, I am sure that it will be possible to do just that.

Such lottery funding will be able to work hand in hand with the money that will arise from use of the Olympic symbols. My hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham rightly pointed to the tremendous surge in national pride when our athletes do well, whether at cricket, as my hon. Friend mentioned, or in the Olympic Games. To achieve those victories, of course, we must ensure that our athletes are properly supported, and the Bill certainly makes an important start in providing that support.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I note that the Minister has now spoken for 20 minutes, and that a number of his colleagues—including the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald), the parliamentary private secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—spoke at length. Will the Minister tell us whether he also intends to talk out this Bill?

Mr. Sproat: What an extraordinary intervention. Of course I have no intention of doing so. I have made it clear that I support the Bill. Many hon. Members have sat through the entire debate on the Bill, and to be respectful to them and to the House I shall answer every speech that has been made. There were a number of speeches to which, although I will not take too long, I intend to reply courteously.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West said that, although he supported the Bill, it was a Bill too late. I hope that he is wrong. I take his point that, during the World cup, there were a number of what might seem to the layman as alleged abuses of the copyright of World cup symbols. Companies will have learnt from the way in which they felt cheated when, having paid good fees to become sponsors of the World cup, they found that competitors in their own market sector were finding a way of muscling their way in. I very much hope that the Bill will help to make matters better, and that we will not see that sort of thing in the forthcoming Olympic games.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) quoted my press release of 12 December, which correctly stated that I was strongly in favour of the measure. The Department of National Heritage and the Government are strongly in favour of the Bill. My hon. Friend also confirmed—in a more legalistic way—the entire accuracy of the fact that shops, butchers, pizza parlours and restaurants should not be worried by the measure.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) spoke for the Liberal Democrats in the regrettable absence of the former great Olympic athlete, his hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). The hon. Gentleman gave his support to the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), speaking as a member of the National Heritage Select Committee, also gave his support.

I do not think that anybody in the House felt that the Bill should not be supported, although one or two hon. Members felt that points might arise later in Committee that will be worth going into. With those few brief words of general support for the Bill, I commend it to the House.

2.22 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall respond briefly to the debate. I thank all those, on both sides of the House, who have spoken in favour of the Bill. I do not want to name those hon. Members, because it would take too long

I hope that the concerns that my hon. Friends the Members for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) and for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) expressed were dealt with, not only by the ministerial response and one of my interventions but by the helpful advice given by my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier).

I welcome the House's support, especially that of the hon. Members for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) and for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey). It is tremendous to have such positive support, and I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question put, That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House:—

The House proceeded to a Division:

Mr. Stephen *(seated and covered)*: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance on whether there is any way in which time can be found today for hon. Members who wish to support the Protection of Calves (Export) Bill to speak.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe) *(seated and covered)*: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for hon. Members who participated in the

debate, but did not express their opposition to the Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Bill, to call a vote to waste time and interfere with other hon. Members when the whole House is anxious to deal with the next Bill in the time remaining?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It may not be desirable, but it is perfectly in order.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North) *(seated and covered)*: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will note that a Minister said that the Government support the Bill, yet a parliamentary private secretary has gone through the Noes Lobby. I think that that should be noted.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a not a point of order for the Chair.

The House having divided: Ayes 48, Noes 0.

Division No. 63] **[2.24 pm**

AYES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bermingham, Gerald
Boateng, Paul
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Chidgey, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cox, Tom
Dowd, Jim
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gapes, Mike
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Harvey, Nick
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate
Janner, Greville
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keen, Alan
Kirkwood, Archy
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Livingstone, Ken
McAllion, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Maddock, Diana
Maginnis, Ken
Martlew, Eric
Miller, Andrew
Morley, Elliot
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Robathan, Andrew
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Sedgemore, Brian
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nicholas Winterton and
Mr. Piers Merchant.

NOES

Nil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Atkinson and
Mr. Michael Fabricant.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do immediately resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill.—[*Mr. Nicholas Winterton.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Committee what day?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Friday 10 February, Sir.

PROTECTION OF CALVES (EXPORT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 10 February.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a Cabinet Minister—the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—to send his parliamentary private secretary to the House to organise a filibuster to block my private Member's Bill? Is that not contempt of the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is quite in order; otherwise I should have ruled it out of order.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have just witnessed what many hon. Members, irrespective of their party, believe to be a shambles. There was clearly a great deal of support for the Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Bill. Will you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, bring the matter to Madam Speaker's attention on Monday? She, like you, looks after the interests of Back Benchers and should be made aware of what has happened.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I assure the hon. Gentleman that Madam Speaker will not have to wait until Monday.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As the Bill has just been carried with no votes against it and it was well noted yesterday that it had the support of every party in the House and was likely to be nodded through in a few seconds, is it not disgraceful that the Tory Government—the Whips and all the rest—have put a gag on our people who wanted to talk about the export of calves? They did so when millions of people in Britain are protesting about it. That shows up the Government for what they are—it stinks to high heaven—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for the Chair, and the hon. Gentleman knows it.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to make a totally unsubstantiated allegation—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have finished with bogus points of order.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sorry—I call Mrs. Clwyd.

Mrs. Clwyd: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise to ask your guidance on a matter of great concern to many people in south Wales. I should normally have made my point of order under Standing Order No. 20 but, as you know, I am precluded from doing so on a Friday.

The reason for my point of order is the casualty department in the Prince Charles hospital in Merthyr, which is a matter of concern to my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and me. Its patients have been told not to go to the casualty department because of a shortage of doctors. The casualty rota for the next few days has blank spaces, which means that there are no doctors on duty. May we have a statement on the subject next week?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair, but I am sure that the those sitting on the Front Bench will have taken notice.

BUILDING SOCIETIES (JOINT ACCOUNT HOLDERS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 10 February.

INSURANCE COMPANIES (RESERVES) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [7 January], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 10 February.

CHARITIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 10 February.

WATER CHARGES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 March.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 8th February, the Speaker shall—

(1) put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Redwood relating to Local Government Finance (Wales) not later than Seven o'clock; and

(2) put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew relating to the draft Children (Northern Ireland) and Children (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Orders not later than Ten o'clock.—[*Mr. Wells.*]

Contemporary Leisure plc

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

2.40 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I wish to raise today a serious issue which has implications for local government nationally and for standards of behaviour—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The hon. Gentleman is on his feet. I call Mr. Gapes.

Mr. Gapes: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The debate also has implications for standards of behaviour in public life. In 1988, the Conservative Government introduced the Local Government Act 1988 which forced local authorities to put out their contracts for leisure services to competitive tender by 1 January 1993. That move is now being followed by steps to force white collar and professional jobs out to compulsory competitive tender.

A number of companies were set up—many of them by former or serving local authority staff—explicitly to compete for those leisure management contracts. One such company was Contemporary Leisure, which was originally incorporated on 4 December 1989 as Leicester Ltd., a shelf company. Its directors were David James Bryant, the former director of leisure of Westminster city council and director of leisure of Leicester city council, and Thomas Kiernan, who was the area manager of recreation services for the London borough of Camden until early 1990.

On 26 February 1990, Leicester Ltd. changed its name to Contemporary Leisure. In September 1990, Bryant and Kiernan were joined as directors by Douglas Stewart, the director of leisure at Hackney council. As the BBC "File on Four" programme revealed on 31 January 1995, while Stewart was still the director of leisure at Hackney and a director of Contemporary Leisure, Contemporary Leisure did paid consultancy work for a company called Whitewater—Britain's own Whitewater scandal—and Hackney council gave Whitewater a contract for the refurbishment of the Kings Hall leisure centre. Publicity material released by Contemporary Leisure in an attempt to gain local government contracts mentioned that Whitewater Leisure Ltd. was one of its clients.

On 18 June 1990, the shareholders of Contemporary Leisure were listed as Douglas Stewart, with 94 ordinary and 3,900 preference shares; Tom Kiernan, with 94 ordinary and 3,900 preference shares; and Robert Hulbert with 95 ordinary and 3,900 preference shares. At that time, Mr. David Bryant had 15 ordinary shares which by 1992 had increased to 110 ordinary shares, with 3,900 non-preference shares and 34,000 preference shares.

The "File on Four" programme revealed this week that Robert Hulbert was deputy director of leisure at Glasgow city council at the same time as he was a shareholder of Contemporary Leisure, but he did not declare that interest. It was also revealed how in 1991 Contemporary Leisure had attempted to get contracts from Bolton council by deception and had falsely claimed to have contracts with Erewash council and Glasgow council. Mr. Hulbert was subsequently sacked by Glasgow city council for gross misconduct over the matter.

Within three months, Mr. Hulbert was working for Contemporary Leisure under the false name of John Smith. However, Mr. Hulbert's association with Contemporary Leisure was to prove embarrassing for the company, because it raised concerns among other local authorities with which the company hoped to win contracts, and Mr. Hulbert was later bought out. The 1993 accounts of Contemporary Leisure reveal that the profit of the group before exceptional items of taxation was £77,519. The footnote revealed a payment of £95,000 as an exceptional item, giving an overall loss of £17,481. That exceptional item was an

"ex gratia settlement agreed to be paid to a former employee and related professional expenses."

That employee was Robert Hulbert.

The accounts revealed also a net cash inflow of £428,000 and a net cash outflow of £685,000, leaving a £235,000 deficit that had to be financed by issuing £102,000 in shares and a new £100,000 bank loan. Mr. Hulbert's departure and the earlier departure of Douglas Stewart, the three directors in 1994 were David Bryant, Thomas Christopher Kiernan and Charles Michael Bartholomew, who was appointed on 24 June 1992.

In 1994, a fourth director listed was Moneytime Ltd.—an investment company with 15 shareholders that owned 41,000 shares in Contemporary Leisure in 1994.

The company, using its network of contacts, worked hard to win local government leisure contracts. By 1993, it had won contracts to manage leisure facilities for Three Rivers district council, the London borough of Redbridge and for Croydon, Bournemouth and Kingston upon Thames. It also won contracts for ground maintenance with Bromley and Elmbridge, and a catering contract in Bath. It expanded into managing the Harlow theatre and the Tropicana swimming baths in Weston super Mare owned by Woodspring council. It even set its eyes on growth in Canada, where it won a contract.

The company had big plans to diversify into activities in which it claimed "expertise"—ground maintenance, theatre management, leisure developments and management of leisure facilities overseas. In the company's 1993 annual report, its chairman, David Bryant, stated:

"Within three years the company has made remarkable progress. It has gone from four employees to over 1,000, moved from a loss of £20,000 to an operating profit in leisure management in the UK of £122,000, achieved an annualised turnover of over £15 million, is a significant investor in leisure facilities, has great financial stability and is probably the largest unlisted leisure management company in Great Britain. The company is now medium sized and international. The achievement was marked by Contemporary Leisure becoming a plc."

Within a few months, the company was in serious trouble.

Cash flow problems mounted. There were discussions with a number of councils to reschedule payments over the winter of 1993-94. Mr. Hulbert's association with the company was ended. Complaints started about high chlorine levels and algae in Redbridge swimming baths, smelly changing rooms, the pools being too cold, run-down supplies and lack of cleaning materials. Staff in Croydon had to use a cash-and-carry to buy in bulk because they could not obtain items from the company. Redbridge council had to step in twice to force the company to bring the pool up to scratch following complaints from local swimming clubs.

The company's association with the London borough of Redbridge—my local authority—began in 1991. The then ruling Conservative group agreed to put the management of the council's three swimming pools out to competition for a six-year contract. Contractors were invited to tender on 18 March 1991. Four companies, including the council's direct services organisation, registered an interest.

Under the relevant legislation, Redbridge was required to allow all tenders, even if they were considered unsuitable. In the event, only two bids were received. City Centre Leisure and Saxon Moore Leisure did not submit tenders. An internal tender evaluation was carried out by council officers. The lower tender, of £654,000, was received from Contemporary Leisure. The other tender was from the council's own direct services organisation—involving no redundancies—and was £142,000 more expensive, coming in at £796,000.

Contemporary Leisure was, according to the evaluation exercise, a newly established company with only two weeks' experience of running leisure facilities. When it was inspected by council officers, it had no track record. The official report entered a great many caveats and warnings, yet the Conservative group on Redbridge council voted to give the tender to Contemporary Leisure. The minutes record the Labour group's opposition to the decision.

The council hoped to save a great deal of money, but it recognised in its documents that the exercise would cost it £101,000 in redundancy payments in the first year. In the long term, however, it thought that there would be savings. Because of the subsequent problems, those savings have turned to dust.

The following year, Contemporary Leisure won the contract in Redbridge for the management of the golf course, again pipping the direct services organisation, whose bid came in second of the many that were received. Redundancy notices were issued to local employees, as was a six-year contract.

In Redbridge, things seemed fine for a few months, but by January 1994 the company was getting behind with its payments. Redbridge was owed a considerable amount of money, and the company was calling for a rescheduling of payments through the winter to try to deal with its cash flow problems.

It was agreed at the initiative of the then chair of the recreation committee, Councillor Hyams, that that could be done; but by September 1994 it had become clear to many people in Redbridge council that the losses being made on the golf contract were undermining the company and that there were still problems with the swimming pools. Urgent discussions were held, and by November it was clear to Redbridge council—it had already become clear to a number of other councils, including Croydon, which had already made representations as early as August 1994 to the Department of the Environment—that things with Contemporary Leisure were going very badly wrong.

When Redbridge contacted the Department of the Environment for advice on what to do, the council hoped that the Department would move quickly. Regrettably, at that stage it did not, although DOE officials have been helpful in this matter to a number of councils in recent weeks. I wish, however, to register

[Mr. Gapes]

my concern that there was no early action before the company collapsed and was put in the hands of the administrator.

These councils were concerned about protecting their staff, their services and their facilities—swimming baths, golf courses, and so on—but under the 1988 Act it appeared that they would have to shut down those operations and cut their services. That is why they urged the Department to take action before Contemporary Leisure went under. That did not happen. On 5 December, the High Court placed an order on the company, and an administrator was appointed. The company's employees in Redbridge and elsewhere were written to and told that they were being made redundant.

This traumatic event caused enormous anguish for people in the run-up to Christmas. Then, my local authority and others had to try to see what could be done to resolve this problem. My council found the situation worse than it had feared. Redbridge council expects to have to pay up to £200,000 this financial year to sort out the mess. It had to pay unpaid wages to many of the workers of Contemporary Leisure. It faced possible liability for bills to utilities which had not been paid by Contemporary Leisure. It has discovered that stocks of cleaning materials, toilet rolls and other items had been run down by the company throughout the period that it had been in control.

Redbridge, like other authorities, had a bond, but it is not clear whether the bond will be sufficient to meet the costs that the authority faces. At a time when it faces cuts in its standard spending assessment and a potential £8 million to £10 million deficit over the next year necessitating cuts in services and an increased council tax, the authority is being hit by a company set up by the former director of leisure of Westminster council, which, ironically, is benefiting from its SSA, while Redbridge is being punished.

Councils thought about withdrawing from contracts. However, if they had withdrawn early, they would have lost their bonds. Many councils got together as early as the autumn of 1993. A Contemporary Leisure users' group was set up to co-ordinate the position of councils that had problems with the company.

Contemporary Leisure thought that it could escape from the problem. It started to approach local authorities to propose an alternative. Mr. Bryant had been the director of leisure at Westminster council in the mid-1980s. The assistant director at that time was Roger Bottomley. Both men were intimately involved in the affairs of Westminster council in the 1980s. Bottomley, like Bryant and some others in local government, had seen the opportunities open to councils through compulsory competitive tendering. With a number of Westminster colleagues and others, they set up a company called City Centre Leisure to launch an in-house bid for Westminster's leisure contracts. They were successful in getting one of them and the other was won by a small company called Civic Leisure.

City Centre Leisure subsequently lost its Westminster contract, which meant that it was looking for new work. To meet the problems of the ex-Westminster director of leisure, David Bryant, and his company Contemporary Leisure, and given the potential of City Centre Leisure, being run by his deputy, Mr. Roger Bottomley, Mr. Bryant proposed that City Centre Leisure should take over the contracts of a number of local authorities that had been previously won by Contemporary Leisure.

As *Leisure Week* revealed in its issue of 18 November to 1 December 1994, City Centre Leisure eventually decided to pull the plug on the arrangement. It was not able to deal with the possible start-up costs that would be incurred; in any event, many local authorities were extremely unhappy at the proposal.

Difficulties are being faced throughout the country. Thirteen local authorities and thousands of employees have faced difficulties, insecurity and financial loss. There are some people who face the prospect of losing a great deal of money. That is all because of legislation that enables CCT to apply to leisure services. Is it a one-off problem or is the Minister going to tell us that the difficulties are due to over-stretch and bad management within a particular company?

We need some assurances from the Government. Will the Minister recognise the need to change their position on companies that default on their contracts? Will he assist councils that are left to pick up the pieces? There is no provision for default by notice, but companies can default by termination of a contract, leaving terrible problems.

When are the Government going to table the exemption orders for Redbridge, Croydon and the other authorities which they need legally to do what they have had to do to pick up the pieces? Under the present legislation, the authorities have to re-tender the contracts, presumably next year. Will the Minister allow Redbridge the time needed for the negotiations between the political groups about the re-tendering process in an authority with no overall control? What plans does he have to prevent this happening in other forms of CCT?

Above all, will the Minister refer the issue of CCT in local government to the Nolan committee? There are serious questions to be asked about the role of people working for private companies while still serving, or immediately after having served, as local government officers. Does he agree that there should be no provision to allow shareholding or the acceptance of directorships or consultancies by senior local government officers in or with any company in a related sphere subjected to CCT? What is good for the ministerial goose is good for the local government gander. Many of us are concerned about the way in which CCT has developed. There is a whiff of corruption and some form of local government mafia. I should be grateful for some ministerial reassurance.

3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert B. Jones): The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) has raised a number of issues and put me under some pressure of time to reply, but I shall do my best. He has anticipated at least part of what I was going to say, in that the collapse of Contemporary Leisure or any private contractor does not discredit compulsory competitive tendering any more than it would discredit the competition process generally.

It is a fact of commercial life that companies come and go. In this instance, the failure of Contemporary Leisure seems to have occurred because of the particular

management of the company. It had entered into unfavourable contracts and over-stretched its resources. I noted what the hon. Gentleman said about the company's circumstances and, if he has reason to believe that there has been any improper behaviour or fraud, he should refer the evidence to the police.

As for the general temptations of local government officers, there are already adequate safeguards against corrupt dealings between them and private contractors. It is illegal for officers not to declare a pecuniary interest in contracts, and the safeguards would be necessary whether or not tendering was compulsory.

Of course, other companies, those which are competent and competitive, remain active in local government CCT. Most CCT contractors, whether private sector or in-house, operate without serious problems, providing quality services and value for money.

It is extremely important to keep the collapse of Contemporary Leisure in perspective. First, only a handful of local authority contractors have folded or withdrawn since CCT began. Secondly, council in-house teams are themselves not immune from commercial pressures and the consequences of mismanagement; nor should they be. They operate under financial constraints and have to meet a statutory financial objective.

They sometimes fail to do so, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be aware that, if an authority does not deal promptly with the financial problems of a direct organisation, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can use, and has used, his powers to intervene. Intervention can take the form of a direction requiring work to be re-tendered or even for the authority to cease carrying out the activity.

There are certainly lessons to be drawn from Contemporary Leisure's demise about how authorities should go about putting work out to tender. They should not be going blindly into arrangements with contractors but should, as a matter of course, be protecting themselves against possible failures by assessing the financial health of tenderers. They should also investigate the resourcing of contractors' bids, and contractors in turn should be open to reasonable requests to justify the details of their proposals.

It is a misconception that CCT requires authorities to accept the lowest bid, regardless of whether it would deliver the service described in the specification. It is true to say that authorities need specific and well-founded reasons if they are going to reject the lowest bid. Quality is an important consideration, especially in the management of sports and leisure facilities, and I accept that authorities will want to have regard to that factor in assessing bids. Any authority may wish to reject a bid that fails to meet the specification or is from a company in an unsustainable financial position.

If, despite those precautions, a service provider collapses, it can, of course, lead to difficulties, especially when the service is high profile, provided directly to the public. Some authorities affected by Contemporary Leisure's collapse have been able to assign the work to other private contractors. Others have had to bring the work in-house while the contracts are being re-tendered.

My Department has co-operated with those authorities to legitimise their position by arranging an order exempting them from the CCT regime. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said about the co-operation of officials. We are proposing to exempt nine authorities affected by the collapse, until the end of March next year, which is ample time for re-tendering.

My officials were in touch with the affected authorities when Contemporary Leisure's difficulties were first apparent. They made clear to them that if the company withdrew from contracts any application for a temporary exemption from CCT, pending re-tendering, would be treated sympathetically. Within a matter of days of the Department's being told that contracts with Contemporary Leisure had been terminated, we wrote to the authorities telling them that Ministers were minded to make an order in their favour—the so-called letter of comfort. Procedures are now in motion for making the formal exemption order.

Under present legislation, an authority would be acting ultra vires if it undertook work without first having exposed it to competition, even if it takes the work on temporarily while re-running the tender exercise. A specific exemption order is needed from the Secretary of State to legitimise a council's position. Further legislation would be needed if authorities were to bring services back in-house temporarily without the Secretary of State's sanction in circumstances such as the financial collapse of a contractor or his total failure to perform to specification. I would certainly be prepared to consider such a change, but I would need to be satisfied that any new provision would not be misused so that, for example, an authority overlooked satisfactory arrangements with an alternative private sector provider in their haste to bring the work back in-house.

Councils in any case should routinely make plans for dealing with contingencies. Also, if appropriate, they should ensure that they are safeguarded against any possible financial loss by arranging for the contractor to enter into a performance bond. Authorities adopt those safeguards as a matter of course.

The authorities who have brought Contemporary Leisure's work back in-house can do so only for a short time because the CCT legislation requires them to put the work out to tender again. The authorities should seize the opportunity for advantages in that process. There are some 15 or so private sector companies known to be in the field who may be keen to bid—indeed, there may be more. My Department has commissioned an analysis of potential markets in certain service areas and its main conclusion is that firms bidding for local authority contracts are only a small proportion of firms that are capable of bidding. Authorities can only gain from taking steps to maximise competition.

The authorities have an opportunity to review and update specifications and to encourage imaginative approaches. They should not let their experience with Contemporary Leisure deter them from looking closely at what the private sector can offer. It is open to authorities to make arrangements direct with private contractors and there are examples of authorities doing so. On the other hand, there is nothing in the present legislation preventing authorities from inviting bids from the private sector which involve some investment in facilities as well as the provision of a management service. If private contractors want a longer contract period in which to recoup their investment than is available under the contract in the legislation, a variation can be offered to them once a contract has been made.

[Mr. Robert B. Jones]

In the latter half of last year, my Department issued several consultation papers dealing with various aspects of the guidance on competition procedure, including the length of contract periods and the use of performance bonds. I am aware that some sports and leisure contractors are particularly keen to have extended contract periods for their activity.

I am pleased to say that we received a very good level of response to our consultation exercise and my Department will be making amended regulations and revising the guidance currently included in circular 10/93. Where necessary, proposals will be subject to further consultation. The intention will be to consolidate the guidance available on CCT services by autumn 1995 and, wherever it makes sense, to bring into line the guidance on blue and white collar services.

I hope that the matter has been set in context for the hon. Gentleman and I hope that he will contribute his thoughts to the consultation process being undertaken. Meanwhile, I hope that my comments will be helpful to him and his council.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nine minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 23 January 1995

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Development of Tourism Act 1969

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has to eliminate the anomaly whereby grants under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969 are now suspended in relation to England but not the other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dorrell: I have no plans to reinstate grants available under section 4 of the Development of Tourism Act 1969 in England.

DEFENCE

Service Personnel

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the combat effectiveness of the armed forces requires discrimination on the grounds of sex or race.

Mr. Soames: Combat effectiveness does not require discrimination on the ground of race. Some areas of employment do, however, remain closed to service women, although the scope for extending the employment of women is under review. In order to maintain combat effectiveness, however, it is unlikely that the employment of women will be extended to all front line posts of the armed forces; such exclusions are consistent with national and European law.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish a table setting out the ethnic composition of the armed forces at each rank in the Army, the Navy and the Royal Air Force at the latest available date.

Mr. Soames: A breakdown of the ethnic composition of each of the armed forces will be published shortly. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House at that time.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of armed forces sexual harassment policies.

Mr. Soames: I shall arrange for a copy of the Army and Royal Air Force documents on sexual harassment to be placed in the Library of the House shortly. The Royal Navy's policy document is nearing completion and a copy will be placed in the Library when it has been finalised.

Household Cavalry

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the ethnic minorities are now serving in the Household Cavalry; and if he will make a statement on the progress that has been made following the investigation into recruitment practices by the Commission for Racial Equality.

Mr. Soames: It is a basic principle of ethnic monitoring in the Army that individual privacy should be maintained and that statistical data should protect that privacy. Ethnic monitoring in the Army does not therefore distinguish the units to which individual soldiers and officers belong. The Commission for Racial Equality investigation is continuing. No findings have yet been notified to my Department.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the number and *(b)* percentage of women at each rank in the Army, Navy and Royal Air Force at the latest available date.

Mr. Soames: The information requested, as at 1 October 1994 the latest date for which information is available, is as follows:

Rank	*Number of women in the rank*	*Percentage of women in the rank*
Royal Naval Services		
Commodore	1	2.4
Captain	5	1.4
Commander	16	1.3
Lieutenant Commander	65	2.5
Lieutenant	266	7.5
Sub-Lieutenant	131	10.8
Warrant Officer	9	1.0
Chief Petty Officer	118	1.5
Petty Officer	393	5.4
Leading Rate	985	9.5
Able Rate	1,838	11.0
Ordinary Rate/Junior	279	19.2
Army		
Brigadier	3	1.5
Colonel	12	2.3
Lieutenant Colonel	45	2.7
Major	180	3.8
Captain	554	12.8
Lieutenant/2nd Lieutenant	366	11.4
Warrant Officer (Class 1)	35	1.9
Warrant Officer (Class 2)	103	2.0
Staff Sergeant	209	3.1
Sergeant	557	4.7
Corporal	1,055	5.6
Lance Corporal	1,229	6.6
Private (Classes 1–3)	1,823	5.3
Private (Class 4)/Junior	696	9.6
Royal Air Force		
Group Captain	2	0.5
Wing Commander	37	2.9
Squadron Leader	163	4.7
Flight Lieutenant	554	9.0
Flying Officer/Pilot Officer	283	17.1
Warrant Officer	23	1.4
Flight Sergeant/Chief Technician	54	1.1
Sergeant	448	4.5
Corporal	1,037	6.1
Junior Technician/Senior Aircraftwoman/Leading Aircraftwoman	3,568	14.0
Aircraftwoman	143	30.7

This information has been extracted from the quarterly tri-service statistical return, "tri-service personnel statistics 9", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Judicial Procedures

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken to ensure that court-martials and other judicial procedures within the armed forces comply with the terms of the convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Mr. Soames: Courts-martial and other judicial proceedings within the armed forces are provided for in the service discipline Acts approved regularly by Parliament. Their procedures are regarded as consistent with the convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

European Common Foreign and Security Policy

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the progress of the European common foreign and security policy.

Mr. David Davis: I have been asked to reply.

The CFSP has been in operation for a little over a year. A number of common positions and joint actions have been agreed and implemented by EU member states on a range of international issues, including support for the middle east peace process; extending the non-proliferation treaty; promotion of the stability pact in Europe; election monitoring in South Africa and Russia; and humanitarian relief in Bosnia, most notably manpower and financial support for the EU administration of Mostar.

The CFSP is a relatively new tool: we are determined to use it to best effect. Already, EU member states are becoming accustomed to developing common approaches and dealing with complex and difficult international issues collectively. We welcome this progress: it is self-evidently in the interests of EU member states that they should be able to harness their collective weight in the international arena.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Joint Negotiating Machinery

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the operation of the joint negotiating machinery and Whitley Council agreements in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: Industrial relations machinery in the Northern Ireland civil service is covered by the Central Whitley Council for non-industrial civil servants and the Central Joint Consultative Council for industrial employees. Negotiation and consultation between management and trade unions also take place at departmental and local level where this is appropriate. These arrangements continue to work well.

I understand that the joint council machinery for health and personal social services staff is to be abolished from 1 April 1995. From that date, employers and staff organisations will negotiate locally the pay and other conditions of service of health and personal social services staff.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how the resources element of the rate support grant allocated to district councils is calculated for the 1995–96 financial year; and what was the basis for the calculation in the 1994–95 financial year.

Mr. Moss: As there is no specific rate support grant in Northern Ireland, I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the general exchequer grant which is payable to district councils. There are two elements: derating and resources. The resources element is calculated by subtracting the derating element, which is statutory based, from the total relevant amount available in any one year and is distributed among councils using the set formula. This was the basis used for both the 1994–95 and 1995–96 financial years.

Brendan Smyth

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he made to *(a)* the Irish Attorney-General, *(b)* his officials, *(c)* other Ministers in the then Irish Government and *(d)* officials in the Irish Government over delays in extraditing Brendan Smyth from Ireland at any time between (i) April 1993 and February 1994 and (ii) subsequently; to whom representations were made; what was the nature of those representations; and on what date or dates representations were made.

Sir Patrick Mayhew *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* None.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what research he has conducted into allegations that the Government receive a greater sum from the Department of Social Security's benefit clawback scheme for legally aided litigants than they actually pay out in civil legal aid to those people; and if he will publish that research.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The compensation recovery unit of the Department of Social Security does not record whether a person who recovers compensation is legally aided. Accordingly, it cannot say how much of the unit's recovery is attributable to legally-aided cases. We are considering how this information might be collected.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what studies his Department has done into the crisis concerning the cash limiting of the civil legal aid budget in New South Wales in late 1992 and early 1993.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I am aware of the cash limiting of the legal aid budget in New South Wales, and the consequences that this had.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate he has of the underspend on the legal aid budget for *(a)* civil legal aid and *(b)* criminal legal aid for the current financial year.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The latest available projections suggest that the total net cost of legal aid will be about £1.310 billion in 1994–95, £95 million below provision. Of that total, net expenditure on civil legal aid will be around £604 million, £41 million below provision, and expenditure on criminal legal aid will be about £476 million, £15 million below provision. The remaining

expenditure relates to advice and assistance and the duty solicitor schemes.

Sexual Harassment

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps are being taken to examine the implications of the decision of the Dover magistrates court not to hear the sexual harassment case brought by the Crown Prosecution Service on behalf of a British crew member on Stena Sealink's Fantasia ferry on the ground that the alleged incident occurred on a foreign registered vessel; and if he will make a statement in respect of United Kingdom citizens employed on foreign-flagged vessels.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I understand that the case was dismissed because the court was not satisfied it had the necessary territorial jurisdiction. In general, courts will have jurisdiction for an offence committed in territorial waters, on a British ship, or if the accused is a British subject. Where the offence is committed on the high seas, the matter is likely to fall within the jurisdiction of the country with which the ship is registered.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many appeals against a refusal of asylum on safe third country grounds were made to the Immigration Appeals Authority in 1994; and how many of these appeals were dismissed by the special adjudicator.

Mr. John. M. Taylor: There were 763 appeals heard by the special adjudicators in 1994 where the Secretary of State had certified that the person's claim to asylum was without foundation. Four hundred and twelve of these appeals were dismissed by the special adjudicator under the special appeal procedures for claims without foundation. While these appeals included appeals against a refusal of asylum on safe third country grounds, the figures kept do not distinguish between the different types of cases within the overall category of those certified to be without foundation.

Mr. Bryce Taylor

Mr. Byers: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what sums of legal aid have so far been awarded to Mr. Bryce Taylor in respect of the action being taken against him by Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No payment has as yet been made from the legal aid fund in respect of the action between HRH the Princess of Wales and Mr. Bryce Taylor. The final cost to the legal aid fund will depend on the outcome of the case, and, if appropriate, any legal aid cost will be subject to taxation by the court.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Child Labour

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will discuss with high street retailers the practice of commissioning garments from suppliers who employ child labour in their fabrication.

Mr. Charles Wardle: As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology explained in his answer to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on 19 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *592*, goods produced by unacceptable labour practices are generally indistinguishable in appearance from the same type of goods produced by other means. Moreover, the varied and complex channels of production and their distribution mean that there are severe practical difficulties in identifying their origin.

The majority of high street retailers have stated that they would not knowingly source from suppliers whose garments have been manufactured using illegal child labour. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade would be prepared to discuss this issue when he next meets representatives of the retail industry.

British Gas (Complaints)

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the trend of complaints against British Gas by gas consumers.

Mr. Eggar: The Gas Consumers Council is responsible for investigating consumer complaints and the Office of Gas Supply, Ofgas, is responsible for monitoring British Gas's activities as a public gas supplier. The number of complaints about British Gas received by these bodies in the last three years as follows:

	OFGAS	*GCC*
1992	1,624 (328)	25,280
1993	1,658 (329)	20,428
1994	2,192 (320)	24,359

Note: The figures in brackets represent the number of Ofgas complaints subsequently referred to the GCC. The GCC totals include those cases referred from Ofgas.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made in the negotiations with United States authorities regarding proposals by British Nuclear Fuels plc to import radioactively contaminated nitric acid from the US Energy Department nuclear complex at Harford.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 1 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1025*.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the policy position set out by EC Energy Commissioner elect, Christos Papoutsis, during the confirmation hearings before the European Parliament on 9 January, in regard to the uneconomic status of recycled commercial plutonium for nuclear fuel and the attendant problems of safeguarding plutonium.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government's policy on the question of whether to reprocess or to seek alternative spent fuel management options is that this is a matter for the owners of the spent fuel.

With regard to the remarks referred to by the hon. Member, I am informed that Mr. Papoutsis made it clear at the time that he was speaking in a personal capacity.

Nuclear Review

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the conclusions of the nuclear review.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 19 October 1994, *Official Report*, column *239*.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the matters discussed, and agreements reached, at the European Union negotiations with the United States Government in Washington on 10 to 12 January on the 10-year extension of the US-EURATOM nuclear co-operation agreement of 1959.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Negotiations are continuing between the European Commission and the United States aimed at developing a new agreement for nuclear co-operation to replace the existing agreement which is due to expire on 31 December 1995. A copy of the Commission's press release reporting the outcome of the latest negotiating round has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. It would be inappropriate to go into the details of the negotiations while talks continue.

Printing Industry (Paper Costs)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has had from the printing industry about changes in the cost of paper over the last 12 months.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has received no direct representations from the printing industry. Ministers and officials in the Department have regular contact with the British Printing Industries Federation and are aware of the sector's concerns about paper price increase.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what studies his Department has made into the change in the costs of paper for the printing industry in the last 12 months.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Department is aware of the increase in paper prices over this period but has not made any specific studies into the subject.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the change in *(a)* the cost of paper for the printing industry, *(b)* the average cost of raw materials and *(c)* the average change in the cost of finished products over the last 12 months.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Price indices for raw materials purchased and for home sales by the printing and publishing industry can be obtained from the Central Statistical Office's "Business Monitor", MM22, tables 3 and 4, or alternatively from CSO's central shared database. Access to both is available in the Library of the House. Separate details for the cost of paper purchased by this industry are not available from official sources.

Barnsley and Doncaster (Exports)

Mr. Illesley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the value of exports from Barnsley and Doncaster to *(a)* European community countries, *(b)* European free trade area countries, *(c)* Arab League countries and *(d)* the rest of the world for the most recent period for which figures are available.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information is not available since the official statistics of trade of the United Kingdom are not compiled for individual regions within the UK.

British Gas (Killingworth)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment has been made of the impact on Newcastle university of the loss of research and development resources at British Gas, Killingworth.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand that British Gas places research contracts with universities throughout the United Kingdom on the basis of their capabilities. The existing work programmes at Newcastle university will continue in accordance with the contracts and new proposals will be considered, along with those from other universities, in the same manner as before.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what offer of regional assistance was made to British Gas to retain employment for those persons who are employed at Killingworth.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No offer of regional selective assistance has been made to British Gas and no application for such assistance has been received.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current capacity of the United Kingdom's renewable energy supplies; what is his target for renewable generating capacity by the year 2000; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The total electrical capacity of the United Kingdom's renewable energy supplies operational at the end of 1993 was estimated to be 1,749 MW DNC—declared net capacity—including 256.4 MW DNC of capacity under non-fossil fuel obligation arrangements.

The Government are working towards a figure of 1,500 MW DNC of new electricity generating capacity from renewable energy sources by the year 2000.

Figures are published annually in the "Digest of UK Energy Statistics".

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment has been made as to the impact of the closure of research and development facilities at Killingworth on developing technology and employment prospects in such technology within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand that much of the work carried out at engineering research station at Killingworth will be transferred to the gas research centre at Loughborough. Appropriate equipment and facilities will be moved there and the research staff are being strongly encouraged to relocate. I understand that British Gas does not believe there will be an adverse impact on the prospects for developing technology or employment in such technology.

Nuclear Materials (Safeguards)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 11 January 1995, *Official Report*, columns *184-85*, if he will update the total of notifications of withdrawal of nuclear materials from

safeguards, indicating the uses to which the materials were put and whether any withdrawals were permanent.

Mr. Eggar: There have been four notifications of withdrawal of nuclear material from safeguards since my answer last year. All were permanent withdrawals and involved small amounts of nuclear material for R and D or analytical purposes, or depleted uranium for sources shielding.

Indonesian Aircraft

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he learned of the Indonesian Government's interest in setting up a plant in Europe to assemble N250 aeroplanes; and what action he proposes to take.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade met the Indonesian Minister for Research and Technology on 22 December 1994 when future plans for the Indonesian N250 aircraft were raised. I understand that these plans have also been discussed with UK aerospace companies. Decisions on participation will be a commercial matter for the companies concerned.

Yorkshire Mining Museum

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how long his Department will take to pay the £102,063 non-quota grant from the European regional development fund to the Yorkshire mining museum, once the funds are received from the European Commission; and what recompense he will make to the museum for the delay in receiving funds.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This project was not funded by the European regional development fund non-quota programmes but as a single project. The grant has been received from the European Commission and payment to the Yorkshire mining museum was made on 20 January by the Department of the Environment. There are no compensation provisions.

Uranium Storage

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what type of uranium is stored at Chapelcross.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 19 January 1995]:* Depleted uranium.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally in the last two days to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions he or his Ministers met representatives of Ian Greer Associates informally in the last month and discussed matters relating to the interests of the clients of Ian Greer Associates.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* None.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions in the last month he or his Ministers met representatives of Ian Greer Associates informally to discuss matters relating to the interests of the clients of Ian Greer Associates.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* None.

HPC Virus

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to invoke Crown use in relation to the use of the virus HPC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Crown use provisions remain available as a last resort.

Although concern has been expressed concerning the supply and cost of test kits for the hepatitis C virus, the supply is adequate and continuing competition can be expected to ensure value for money.

HEALTH

Community Care

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to remove from NHS approved registered lists firms or individuals involved in significant community care fraud.

Mr. Sackville: National health service contracting authorities already have powers under the various public contracts regulations to exclude from tenders suppliers who have been convicted of a relevant offence or who have been guilty of gross professional misconduct. These powers are used in appropriate cases, but are matters for decision by each contracting authority in the light of the known facts of each case.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the absenteeism rate for the Medicines Control Agency in each year since 1991;

(2) what was the absenteeism rate for National Health Service Estates in each year since 1991;

(3) what was the absenteeism rate for the NHS Pensions Agency in each year since 1991;

(4) what was the absenteeism rate for her Department in each year since 1991.

Mr. Sackville: The absenteeism rate for 1993 for the Department of Health including the Medicines Control Agency, National Health Service Estates and NHS Pensions Agency is 9.7 working days absence per staff year. Information for the Department, excluding the three agencies, for 1993 cannot be separately identified. Information is not available for 1991 and 1992.

1. Source: Occupational health service.
2. Working days absences exclude weekends and bank holidays for staff working a "Monday to Friday" week.

Cancer

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of *(a)* the cost of the organisational audit developed by the Macmillan Fund in measuring the effectiveness of cancer care services and

(b) the minimum standards for breast cancer care proposed by the Macmillan Fund.

Mr. Sackville: No such work has been commissioned centrally.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many specialist breast cancer consultants there are in the NHS;

(2) what is the average cost of supporting a cancer patient *(a)* at home and *(b)* in hospital.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Utting Report

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps her Department has taken in response to the criticisms made in the Utting report of 1991.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the Children Act report, copies of which are available in the Library.

Residential Child Care

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions she has had with local authorities and other providers of residential child care about standards of such care; and what proposals she has made for tackling current problems.

Mr. Bowis: Ministers and officials have regular discussions with representatives of local authority and independent sector organisations on a wide range of issues including that of residential care for children.

For the Government's report on action in this area, I refer the hon. Member to the Children Act report, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Harvey : To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential child care staff there were with relevant qualifications in each year since 1980; and what information she has about the turnover rate of *(a)* qualified and *(b)* unqualified residential child care staff.

Mr. Bowis: Information on qualifications and turnover of residential child care staff was collected in 1993 by the Local Government Management Board and published in "Social Services Workforce Analysis: 1993 Survey", copies of which are available in the Library. Information on qualifications and turnover of local authority social services staff is not available centrally.

EC Butter

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which regional health authority and district health authorities use European Community intervention board butter (i) for patients' use and (ii) for use in hospital coffee shops; and if she will make a statement;

Mr. Sackville: We are not aware of any regional or district health authorities currently buying intervention board butter. The main national health service purchasers are NHS trusts, of which the vast majority buy in the butter under national contract arrangements for use in hospitals in accordance with EEC regulation No. 2191/81, as amended. Eligible consumers within any hospital may include hospital in-patients and out-patients, and the hospital staff using the hospital catering facilities.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will state in respect of the appointment of the chairman of the Doncaster royal infirmary NHS trust *(a)* the salary awarded, *(b)* the term of office and *(c)* the number of hours per week required to be devoted to the job.

Mr. Sackville: Mr. Raymond Tonkinson was appointed as chairman of the Doncaster royal infirmary and Montagu hospital national health service trust for a two-year term, from 17 October 1994 until 30 November 1996. He is entitled to receive an annual remuneration of £17,145. Trust chairmen are normally expected to devote 16 to 24 hours a week to their duties.

Mortality Rates

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys intends to publish the figures on standardised mortality ratios by social class derived from the 1991 census.

Mr. Sackville: Standardised mortality ratios by social class are published 10-yearly. Those based on data from the 1991 census will be included in a volume in the decennial supplement series planned for publication in late 1997. The latest available information is in the occupational mortality decennial supplement 1979–80, 1982–83, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mental Health Task Force

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how and when the NHS executive and the mental health task force plan to review progress with local action plans to improve mental health services in London for severely mentally ill people, in accordance with the task force report on priorities for action.

Mr. Bowis: Progress is being carefully monitored by the national health service executive's regional offices. The mental health task force has worked with the regional offices to review local action plans and has recently completed a programme of follow-up visits to the district health authorities in London to check progress.

Blood

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to disallow the sale for profit of blood donated to the national blood transfusion service; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The national blood service does not sell for profit the blood which is freely donated by our volunteer donors.

Skin Donations

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to amend the wording on organ donor cards to refer specifically to skin donation after death; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Both the organ donor card and the national health service organ donor register already include among other options a request that "any part of my body can be used for the treatment of others".

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on progress towards a national skin bank in the last three months.

Mr. Sackville: The United Kingdom Health Departments have commissioned a review to look into the current arrangements for the retrieval, storage and use of tissue, including skin, in the United Kingdom. The findings are not yet complete; when they are we shall give careful consideration to what skin banking arrangements will be needed for the future.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the level of underdrawing on capital allocations in each of the last five years by region *(a)* as a cash total and *(b)* as a proportion of total allocation made for that year.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is shown in the table.

1989–90 Capital Underspending

Region	Cash (£000's)	As a percentage of cash limit
Northern	2,205	3.92
East Anglia	4,034	11.99
Oxford	256	0.68

1990–91 Capital Underspending

Region	Cash (£000's)	As a percentage of cash limit
Yorkshire	1,268	1.25
Trent	95	0.08
Oxford	141	0.30
South Western	176	0.21
North Western	111	0.11

1991–92 Capital Underspending

Region	Cash (£000's)	As a percentage of cash limit
Northern	1,712	2.27
Yorkshire	4,140	6.07
Trent	175	0.13
East Anglia	8,959	17.94
North East Thames	6,865	8.81
South West Thames	2,576	5.81
Wessex	136	0.18
Oxford	356	0.72
South Western	3,196	3.53
West Midlands	2,203	1.19
North Western	195	0.16

1992–93 Capital underspending

Region	Cash (£000's)	As a percentage of cash limit
Northern	6,838	9.25
Yorkshire	1,983	3.53
Trent	269	0.25
East Anglia	2,563	5.16

1992–93 Capital underspending

Region	Cash (£000's)	As a percentage of cash limit
North West Thames	1,587	2.01
North East Thames	5,094	8.66
South East Thames	941	0.91
South Western	1,331	2.73
West Midlands	6,114	4.72
Mersey	477	2.57
North Western	197	0.18

1993–94 Capital underspending

Region	Cash £000's	As a per centage of cash limit
Northern	14,734	20.69
Yorkshire	3,583	21.52
Trent	167	0.44
North West Thames	1,232	13.11
North East Thames	11,216	24.48
South West Thames	12,436	265.67[1]
Wessex	1,442	4.88
Oxford	107	0.39
South Western	2,719	15.05
West Midlands	36,363	37.14
Mersey	793	-58.42[2]
North Western	10,687	13.41

[1] South West Thames' final capital limit was £4.681 million. After taking account of receipts, net spend was -£7.897 million—capital receipts exceeded spending by this amount—making the underspend against the cash limit £12.436.

[2] Mersey Regional health authority's final cash limit was -£1.907 million after transfers to trust external financing limits. After taking account of receipts, net spend was -£2.7 million—capital receipts exceeded spending by this amount—making the underspend against the cash limit £0.793 million.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current level of underdrawing on capital allocations in each region.

Mr. Sackville: All regional health authorities currently expect to draw down all of their capital cash limits in 1994–95.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the average time taken to approve new capital schemes in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was *(a)* total NHS expenditure, *(b)* current expenditure on the hospital and community health services, *(c)* capital expenditure on the hospital and community health services, *(d)* expenditure on the family practitioner services, *(e)* expenditure on centrally funded NHS services and *(f)* expenditure on personal social services in England in each year since 1974–75 giving each in (i) cash terms, (ii) adjusted using the relevant pay and prices index and (iii) adjusted using the gross domestic product deflator;

(2) if she will give for each year since 1974–75 total capital spending on hospital and community health services and spending in net terms after deducting proceeds from land and property sales *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* adjusted using the GDP deflator and *(c)* adjusted using the relevant index of NHS prices.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* The information will be placed in the Library.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give the per capita spending on health and personal social services in cash terms and adjusted for NHS pay prices and for input volume for each year for which estimates have been made from 1989–90 to the latest available year for *(a)* all ages, *(b)* births, *(c)* zero to four years, *(d)* five to 15 years, *(e)* 16 to 64 years, *(f)* 65 to 74 years and *(g)* 75 years and over, giving the amount spent on (i) hospital and community health services, (ii) family practitioner services, (iii) personal social services and (iv) total in England.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Estimates of spending per head by age group for the personal social services and for the family health services are no longer produced. The latest available are shown in the table.

Estimates for the hospital and community health services are still produced annually, but as a result of changes in data resources, definitions and the methodology used, comparable figures for a series of years cannot be produced. The latest estimates are also shown in the table.

Hospital and community health services 1992–93

	All ages	*Births*	*0 to 4*	*5 to 15*	*16 to 64*	*65 to 74*	*75 and over*
£'s cash	420	1,750	390	175	265	725	1,605

Family health services 1989–90

	All ages	*Births*	*0 to 4*	*5 to 15*	*16 to 64*	*65 to 74*	*75 and over*
£'s cash	105	120	80	60	95	170	240
1992–93 prices Real terms	125	145	95	70	115	205	285
1992–93 Adjusted for FHS pay and prices inflation	140	155	105	80	125	225	315

Personal social services 1989–90

	All ages	*Births*	*0 to 4*	*5 to 15*	*16 to 64*	*65 to 74*	*75 and over*
£'s cash	85	35	115	115	30	110	475
1992–93 prices real terms	100	40	135	135	35	130	565
1992–93 adjusted for PSS pay and price inflation	105	45	140	140	35	135	580

Notes:
All figures rounded to nearest £5.
Estimates do not include capital expenditure.

Health Services (Demand)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give the most recently available estimates of the percentage changes in demand on the hospital and community health services due to demographic change for each year from 1972–73 to 1999–2000.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* The available information is shown in the table.

Estimated percentage change in demand on the hospital and community health services due to demographic changes

Year	*Increase over previous year Per cent.*
Estimated	
1975–76	0.1
1976–77	0.2
1977–78	0.3
1978–79	1.0
1979–80	1.3
1980–81	1.1
1981–82	0.6
1982–83	0.7
1983–84	0.9
1984–85	0.9
1985–86	1.1
1986–87	0.8

Estimated percentage change in demand on the hospital and community health services due to demographic changes

Year	*Increase over previous year Per cent.*
1987–88	1.5
1988–89	1.1
1989–90	1.0
1990–91	0.9
1991–92	0.8
1992–93	1.1
Projected	
1993–94	0.8
1994–95	0.7
1995–96	0.6
1996–97	0.7
1997–98	0.6
1998–99	0.6
1999–2000	0.5

Notes:

1 Estimates for years 1975–76 to 1980–81 are based on the following age bands: births, age bands 0 to 4, 5 to 15, 16 to 44, 45 to 64, 65 to 74, 75 to 84, and 85 and over.

Estimates from 1981–82 are based on; births, age bands 0 to 4, 5 to 15, 16 to 44, 45 to 64, and single year age groups between aged 65 to 89, and aggregated years 90 and over.

2 Figures are based on data from the 1991 census.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give for April to September 1987 and for each subsequent six month period *(a)* the numbers of people admitted from waiting lists to hospital for in-patient treatment, *(b)* the numbers of people removed from in-patient waiting lists for reasons other than treatment, *(c)* the numbers of people admitted from waiting lists for day case treatment, *(d)* the numbers of people removed from day-case waiting lists for reasons other than treatment, *(e)* the numbers of people on in-patient waiting lists who self deferred and *(f)* the numbers of people on day-case waiting lists who self deferred.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* The information requested for admissions and self-deferrals is given in the tables. Information on the number of people removed from waiting lists for reasons other than treatment is not held centrally.

Admissions

6 months to:	*Ordinary*	*Day case*
September 1987	801,755	268,631
March 1988	924,677	347,273
September 1988	941,363	359,213
March 1989	938,864	392,646
September 1989	939,516	420,536
March 1990	934,164	454,266
September 1990	910,557	465,603
March 1991	888,291	496,554
September 1991	918,376	534,998
March 1992	938,842	601,316
September 1992	901,687	638,905
March 1993	879,834	691,201
September 1993	829,580	712,016
March 1994	800,632	768,249
September 1994	796,780	849,379

Self Deferrals

Number at:	*Ordinary*	*Day case*
September 1987	40,766	8,977
March 1988	39,115	8,361
September 1988	40,753	8,433
March 1989	37,098	8,769
September 1989	38,224	9,905
March 1990	36,441	9,735
September 1990	39,274	11,865
March 1991	36,115	11,998
September 1991	33,868	12,469
March 1992	30,965	13,151
September 1992	35,992	18,134
March 1993	35,800	19,095
September 1993	41,550	24,142
March 1994	39,189	25,185
September 1994	43,538	34,946

Note:
The numbers relate to the numbers who are waiting on the last day of the six-month period who have self-deferred and do not represent the total number who have self-deferred over the period.

TREASURY

Nicaragua (Debt Relief)

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures the Government will take to encourage EU partners' support for the International Monetary Fund and Paris Club proposals to grant Nicaragua further debt relief.

Mr. Nelson: The Government will continue to press other Paris Club creditors at all international meetings to offer all eligible countries including Nicaragua debt relief consistent with the agreement reached by the Paris Club last December. We will also continue to press for action on multilateral debt, along the lines we proposed in Malta and Madrid, for those countries which will still have unsustainable debt liabilities to the multilateral institutions even after generous Trinidad terms debt relief.

Golden Shares

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what undertakings Her Majesty's Government retain a golden share; and in what circumstances rights relating to that golden share are to be used by Her Majesty's Government.

Sir George Young: The table shows all the companies in which the Government holds special—or "golden"—shares. Where this is applicable, the table shows the expiry date on or before which the Government may redeem a special share. Special shares are held by—or on behalf of—the Secretary of State with policy responsibility for the privatised industry. The rights attaching to individual special shares vary and it is not possible to define in advance the circumstances in which they will be exercised.

Companies in which special shares are held

Company	*Expiry date*
Cable and Wireless	—
Sealink Stena Line	—
BT	—
British Aerospace	—
VSEL Consortium	—
British Gas	—
Rolls-Royce	—
BAA	—
Eastern Electricity	31 March 1995
East Midlands Electricity	31 March 1995
London Electricity	31 March 1995
Manweb	31 March 1995
Midlands Electricity	31 March 1995
Northern Electric	31 March 1995
Norweb	31 March 1995
Seeboard	31 March 1995
Southern Electricity	31 March 1995
South Wales Electricity	31 March 1995
South Western Electricity	31 March 1995
Yorkshire Electricity Group	31 March 1995
National Grid Company	—
National Grid Holding	—
National Power	—
PowerGen	—
Scottish Power	—
Scottish Hydro-Electric	—
British Technology Group	31 March 1997
British Technology Group International	31 March 1997
Northern Ireland Electricity	—
Belfast International Airport	—

Crown Buildings (Insurance)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the main buildings, in which the Crown has an interest, for which there is neither buildings nor contents

insurance cover; what considerations underlay the decision not to take out insurance cover; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The Government's long-standing policy on insurance is that decisions on whether to insure commercially should be made on value-for-money grounds. Across Government as a whole, the cost of paying premiums could be expected to exceed the value of claims met by insurance companies. Therefore, use of commercial insurance, including buildings or contents insurance cover, by Government Departments and other Crown bodies is confined to a very small number of cases where special considerations apply.

Investment

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the levels of investment in the United Kingdom and in the United Kingdom's main international competitors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: Information on investment levels is set out in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development annual publication, "National Accounts", available in the House of Commons Library.

VAT

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the European Commission's latest proposals for imposition of VAT in circumstances currently exempt under the sixth VAT directive, and its implication for charities.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The latest proposals from the European Commission which would affect the exemptions in the sixth VAT directive date from July 1992. No conclusions have been reached, and any possible impact on charities would in any case by negligible. The UK's zero rates are not affected.

Administrative Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his estimates of the budgeted and actual expenditure on *(a)* Her Majesty's Treasury administration and *(b)* Inland Revenue administration, for each year from 1979 to 1994 in 1993 prices.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 19 January 1995]:* The table details the administration expenditure for HM Treasury and Inland Revenue going back to 1979–80 in 1993–94 prices. The table compares the gross voted administrative expenditure, including capital, less appropriations in aid-budget-to the outturn expenditure-actual-for the same expenditure. Over the period, there have been several significant changes to the way public expenditure is recorded. The most significant changes have been the delegation to Departments for capital expenditure on information technology in 1980–81; of accommodation costs in 1983–84 and of superannuation in 1993–94. There have also been some machinery of Government changes, including in 1992–93 the transfer of some of the DTI's regulatory functions to the Treasury. Recalculation of the figures to compensate for these changes could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Administration expenditure 1979–90 to 1993–94 at 1993–94 prices £'000

	Inland Revenue			*HM Treasury*		
	Gross	*Receipts*	*Net*	*Gross*	*Receipts*	*Net*
1979–80						
Budget	1,119,064	–56,672	1,062,392	23,690	–935	22,754
Actual	1,095,171	–56,672	1,038,499	23,073	–972	22,101
1980–81						
Budget	1,205,609	–58,803	1,146,806	26,817	–998	25,819
Actual	1,173,089	–47,299	1,125,790	25,315	–1,106	24,209
1981–82						
Budget	1,173,955	–61,536	1,112,419	31,509	–1,410	30,099
Actual	1,123,844	–61,536	1,062,308	29,252	–1,599	27,653
1982–83						
Budget	1,140,582	–59,824	1,080,757	37,221	–1,537	35,684
Actual	1,134,764	–59,824	1,074,940	36,007	–1,491	34,517
1983–84						
Budget	1,338,337	–66,532	1,271,805	47,572	–1,161	46,411
Actual	1,327,700	–66,532	1,261,168	46,046	–1,317	44,730
1984–85						
Budget	1,342,929	–66,873	1,276,055	48,729	–1,345	47,384
Actual	1,341,829	–66,873	1,274,956	45,661	–1,628	44,033
1985–86						
Budget	1,407,281	–65,555	1,341,726	48,159	–1,489	46,670
Actual	1,407,201	–65,555	1,341,645	46,772	–1,495	45,278
1986–87						
Budget	1,492,638	–67,886	1,424,751	47,936	–1,767	46,169
Actual	1,491,212	–67,886	1,423,325	45,966	–1,686	44,280

Administration expenditure 1979–90 to 1993–94 at 1993–94 prices £'000

	Inland Revenue			HM Treasury		
	Gross	Receipts	Net	Gross	Receipts	Net
1987–88						
Budget	1,542,576	–78,314	1,464,262	53,282	–1,796	51,486
Actual	1,536,849	–78,314	1,458,534	51,451	–1,670	49,782
1988–89						
Budget	1,532,516	–74,966	1,457,550	54,733	–1,743	52,990
Actual	1,506,931	–74,691	1,432,240	51,740	–1,673	50,067
1989–90						
Budget	1,594,402	–72,384	1,522,019	50,912	–1,855	49,057
Actual	1,588,420	–72,384	1,516,036	49,413	–1,730	47,683
1990–91						
Budget	1,534,456	–68,994	1,465,463	53,809	–1,710	52,099
Actual	1,528,990	–68,994	1,459,997	51,869	–1,886	50,183
1991–92						
Budget	1,747,570	–102,262	1,645,308	63,835	–1,732	62,104
Actual	1,733,464	–102,262	1,631,202	61,590	–1,887	59,703
1992–93						
Budget	1,762,968	–98,478	1,664,490	64,862	–1,678	63,124
Actual	1,694,685	–98,478	1,596,207	62,190	–2,268	59,922
1993–94						
Budget	1,843,192	–171,278	1,671,914	86,913	–16,286	70,627
Actual	1,820,538	–159,089	1,661,449	82,070	–16,367	65,703

Schedule E Tax

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce a tax allowance under schedule E tax, so that an individual, employed through an agency, who has to meet his or her own accommodation and travel expenses when having to work away from home under contract, is able to set such expenses against tax as in the case of an employee required to work at a remote location to his or her usual place of work.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* This is a matter which we keep under active review, but to date it has not been possible to find a solution which does not infringe the general rule that the tax relief is not available for the normal costs of home–to–work travel.

Home Ownership

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will identify those measures in each of his last two Budgets which were specifically intended to promote home ownership; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* The last two Budgets have given general encouragement to home ownership by promoting sustained economic growth. In addition, they have included specific measures to encourage local authority and housing association tenants to become home owners.

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff in his Departments have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these records were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* Eight Treasury staff have reported offers of employment from an outside employer since February 1993, one of which was followed by an application to join the company concerned.

In addition, 56 staff in other Departments responsible to the Chancellor have reported offers of employment from outside employers since February 1993, 53 of which were followed by applications to join the company concerned.

PRIME MINISTER

MI5 Headquarters

Mr. Cox: To ask the Prime Minister what are the procedures that need to be followed by a hon. Member to be able to visit the MI5 headquarters; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: It is not normal practice for the Security Service to host visits to Thames house by hon. Members.

Seals

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) of 24 March 1994, *Official Report*, columns *343-44*, what was the outcome of the discussions with Russia on seal hunting.

The Prime Minister: The British mission in Moscow raised this issue with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March last year, and left the Russians in no doubt of the strength of United Kingdom public opposition to the practice of seal culling. We continue

to take suitable opportunities to raise this matter with the Russians.

Weapons of Torture

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set up a Government inquiry into the sales of weapons of torture by British companies to states where Amnesty International has documented torture.

The Prime Minister: The Government give careful consideration to proposals for the export of weapons. In considering such proposals, special care is taken over the political and military implications of allowing consignments to go overseas. Particular attention is paid to countries with poor human rights records, where equipment might be used for internal repression. I do not therefore believe there is any need for a Government inquiry.

Social Development Summit

Ms Corston: To ask the Prime Minister if he will participate in the world summit on social development on 6 to 12 March in Copenhagen.

The Prime Minister: I will make a decision on attendance nearer the date.

Ms Corston: To ask the Prime Minister what consideration he gave to sending an official British representative to the preparatory meeting in New York sponsored by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and the United Nations Development Programme for the world summit on social development in Copenhagen in March.

The Prime Minister: Officials from the Foreign Office, Overseas Development Administration and Department of Employment are in New York attending the final preparatory committee meeting for the world summit on social development, which will take place in Copenhagen in March. Some of those officials attended the seminar sponsored by UNRISD and UNDP, which took place in the week prior to the preparatory committee meeting.

Holocaust Museum

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if he will support the creation of a Holocaust museum in London comparable with those in other major capital cites in Europe and north America.

The Prime Minister: I understand that the imperial war museum is considering creating a new museum which would cover the holocaust and other 20th century acts of genocide. That is a matter in the first instance for the trustees of the imperial war museum to consider.

Nex Steps Agencies

Mr. Steen: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *275*, if he will list the Government Department next steps agencies with regional offices in the west country specifying in each case *(a)* its location, *(b)* the number of staff in each and *(c)* the annual cost.

The Prime Minister: The table lists next steps agencies with offices in the west country. The information requested about these offices is not held centrally. This is a matter for the next steps agencies concerned.

NEXT STEPS AGENCIES WITH OFFICES LOCATED IN THE WEST COUNTRY

ADAS Agency
Army Base Repair Organisation
Defence Research Agency
Disposal Sales Agency
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency
Driving Standards Agency
Employment Service
Government Property Lawyers
HM Prison Service
Highways Agency
Hydrographic Office
Insolvency Service
Land Registry
Marine Safety Agency
Meteorological Office
Ordnance Survey
Radiocommunications Agency
RAF Training Group
Social Security Benefits Agency
Social Security Child Support Agency
Social Security Contributions Agency
Social Security War Pensions Directorate
Valuation Office
Vehicle Certification Agency
Vehicle Inspectorate

Departments operating fully on Next Steps lines:
Customs and Excise
Inland Revenue (excluding Valuation Office)

Nolan Committee

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place a transcript of each day's proceedings of the Nolan committee in the Library as it is published.

The Prime Minister: Publication of transcripts of each day's proceedings is a matter for the Committee on Standards in public life. I understand that copies are available from the company appointed by the committee to prepare its official transcript. The Library can, of course, subscribe to this service.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has for sanctions to be available in the case of a witness who deliberately misleads the Nolan committee.

The Prime Minister: There is no reason to believe that such circumstances will arise.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister whether Ministers have informal meetings on matters of public policy with lobbying groups in the course of meetings which they are attending in a private capacity.

The Prime Minister: Ministers do not hold or attend meetings on matters of public policy in a private capacity.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister following the letter he has received from Miss Pamela Dix of Woking, secretary of United Kingdom Families of Flight 103 of 21 December 1994, if he will amend his answer to the oral question from the hon. Member for Linlithgow on 15 December 1994, *Official Report*, column 1068.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to him on 10 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *20*.

Home Ownership

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Prime Minister if it remains the policy of Her Majesty's Government to promote home ownership; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* Yes. Owner-occupation in the United Kingdom has risen from just over 54 per cent. in 1979 to over 66 per cent. now. Home ownership is more affordable than for many years. Surveys show that owner-occupation is the preferred housing choice of about 80 per cent. of people. The Government remain fully committed to promoting the continued growth of sustainable home ownership, both by prudent management of the economy and through specific policies to help people become home owners.

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by the Department or agency.

Mr. David Hunt: I have been asked to reply.

In the Departments and agencies for which I and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have responsibility the information for the calendar year 1994 is as follows:

1.

Title:	The General Management Development Programme.
Objectives	To contribute towards achieving results through corporate and executive development.
Organisation	Sundridge Park Business School.
Total cost	£37,392.
Number of attendees	6.
Responsibility of attendees	Business and Support Managers in Business Suppliesdivision, HMSO
Evaluation	Verbal feedback and written course appraisals from attendees

2.

Title:	Strategic Management Programme
Objectives	To help senior managers develop their strategic management skills, enabling them to apply these skills in the context of their own organisations
Organisation	Henley management college
Total cost	£10,516
Number of attendees	1
Responsibility of attendees	Senior managers in HMSO
Evaluation	Verbal feedback and written course appraisal from attendees

No staff attended any other external training and tuition courses in 1994 where total costs for the individual exceeded £5,000.

EMPLOYMENT

Low Pay

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of *(a)* male and *(b)* female employees and the total number of employees estimated to be on low pay for each of the standard regions of the United Kingdom; and if he will publish comparable available data for each of the member states of the European Union.

Mr. Oppenheim: Definitions of low pay are arbitrary and take no account of particular circumstances. There is therefore no definition of low pay upon which such an analysis can be based.

Training Schemes

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide for each of the past five years and for *(a)* those unemployed for six to 12 months, *(b)* those unemployed for 12 to 24 months and *(c)* those unemployed for more than 24 months, the percentage of those leaving adult training schemes who progressed to (i) full-time work, (ii) part-time work, (iii) self-employment, (iv) further education or training and (v) unemployment in, respectively, Southampton, Itchen, Southampton and Hampshire.

Mr. Paice: Information is not available for individual constituencies and local authorities. Information for Hampshire training and enterprise council is given in the table. It is not possible to give separate figures for those unemployed for 12 to 24 months and more than 24 months.

Employment Training
Percentage of leavers in each outcome three months after leaving July 1989–March 1990 leavers in Hampshire TEC area

	Full-time work *Per cent.*	*Part time-work* *Per cent.*	*Self employment* *Per cent.*	*Further education and training*[1] *Per cent.*	*Unemployment*[2] *Per cent.*
Unemployment duration before starting training					
6–12 months	31	6	7	2	46
Greater than 12 months	24	10	3	1	53

Employment Training
Percentage of leavers in each outcome three months after leaving 1990–91 leavers in Hampshire TEC area

	Full-time work *Per cent.*	*Part-time work* *Per cent.*	*Self employment* *Per cent.*	*Further education and training*[1] *Per cent.*	*Unemployment*[2] *Per cent.*
Unemployment duration before starting training					
6–12 months	20	5	5	3	58
Greater than 12 months	14	14	1	2	56

Employment Training
Percentage of leavers in each outcome six months after leaving 1991–92 leavers in Hampshire TEC area

	Full-time work *Per cent.*	*Part-time work* *Per cent.*	*Self employment* *Per cent.*	*Further education and training*[1] *Per cent.*	*Unemployment*[2] *Per cent.*
Unemployment duration before starting training					
6–12 months	16	7	5	4	61
Greater than 12 months	9	12	2	3	66

Employment Training
Percentage of leavers in each outcome six months after leaving 1992–93 leavers in Hampshire TEC area

	Full-time work *Per cent.*	*Part-time work* *Per cent.*	*Self employment* *Per cent.*	*Further education and training*[1] *Per cent.*	*Unemployment*[2] *Per cent.*
Unemployment duration before starting training					
6–12 months	23	6	2	3	58
Greater than 12 months	12	8	2	4	66

Employment Training
Percentage of leavers in each outcome six months after leaving 1993–94 leavers in Hampshire TEC area

	Full-time work Per cent.	*Part-time work Per cent.*	*Self employment Per cent.*	*Further education and training[1] Per cent.*	*Unemployment[2] Per cent.*
Unemployment duration before starting training					
6–12 months	30	9	3	7	45
Greater than 12 months	16	7	2	5	60

Source:
ET/TFW national follow-up survey
Notes:
[1] Includes those on another Government training programme.
[2] Includes those in a jobclub.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Rwandan Refugees

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of African states which met in Nairobi earlier this month to consider the problem of Rwandan refugees who refuse to return home; and if he will make logistical support available to assist African states who seek to break the hold of the defeated Rwandan Government on the refugee camps in Zaire.

Mr. Baldry: We welcome the involvement of regional Governments in efforts to solve the problems of Rwandan refugees. We are supporting international action to secure the safe return of Rwandan refugees to their homes from the camps in Zaire and elsewhere and will look carefully at any firm proposals for logistical support when received.

Iraq

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from the Overseas Development Administration team that recently visited the Iraq-Iran border on the number of refugees moving from Iraq to Iran and the reasons for their movement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 19 January 1995]:* It is estimated that some 645,000 Iraqi refugees are currently in Iran, of whom 500,000 arrived before 1991, and the remainder following the Gulf war. The ODA team visited the area bordering the southern Iraq marshes and focused on the needs of recent refugees. There are around 5,000 in the camp at Himmet on the Iranian side of the border. At present, fewer than 50 persons a week are succeeding in crossing the border. Many more, possibly up to 250,000, may be unable to reach the border because of Iraqi military action. Informants told the team that many people are fleeing not just because of Saddam Hussein's brutal suppression of opposition in the south and destruction of the marshlands, but also increasingly because of economic hardship due to the loss of their livelihood and human rights abuses in the whole of central and southern Iraq.

Israel

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress being made in transferring British and multilateral development funds to the Palestinian national authority while securing the proper accountability for the appropriate expenditure of those funds.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 19 January 1995]:* British bilateral aid to the Palestinians in the current financial year is expected to amount to £6.5 million. Some £3.5 million comprises bilateral know-how projects and support for projects managed by British non-governmental organisations. These are subject to our normal monitoring and accounting procedures. The remaining £3 million was a contribution towards the net salaries of the Palestinian civilian police. The payment mechanism used, which included monitoring and audit of disbursements by the Crown Agents, ensured full accountability for our funds.

In addition, we contribute to multilateral programmes including those of the World bank, the European Community and United Nations agencies. These funds are subject to the accountability requirements of the institutions concerned. Full details of multilateral assistance to the Palestinian authority are not available. The World bank estimates that since the Israeli-Palestinian declaration of principles in September 1993 it has disbursed $61 million from funds under its management. The European Community expects to have disbursed some 56 million ecu—£44 million—by the end of February.

Nigeria

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being planned by the World bank and African development bank to block loans to Nigeria until democracy is restored.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* Under their articles of agreement, the World bank and African development bank are required to take only economic and technical considerations into account in their decisions on lending.

South Africa

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his Department's specific policy to encourage small British firms to invest in South Africa.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* The British investment in South Africa promotion scheme aims to help the development of small and medium enterprises in South Africa, particularly those from disadvantaged communities, by promoting and assisting new investment in South Africa by small British businesses.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the ODA is prepared to fund small British businesses in the field of information technology who wish to work in South Africa.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him today. Small British businesses in the field of information technology are eligible under the scheme.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is ODA policy to assist small British firms which wish to do business in South Africa; and what proportion of the budget for South Africa is geared towards funding small British businesses.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him today. The sum allocated for the British investment in South Africa promotion scheme is £2 million. We do not set spending targets for our aid programme to South Africa by sector or project.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the result of ethnic monitoring of the ownership of British firms that have received contracts from the ODA for work in the field of information technology in South Africa.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* ODA does not monitor the award of contracts to British firms under aid programme by ethnic ownership.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the ODA is prepared to fund small black British firms which have viable projects with black South African partners in the field of information technology in South Africa.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* The selection of projects agreed for funding under the aid programme to South Africa is made in the context of the priority areas of focus we have agreed with the South African Government. Where projects involve the supply of British goods and services, we employ our normal competitive tendering arrangements.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much British development aid money in South Africa is being spent on *(a)* large British firms, *(b)* medium-size British firms and *(c)* small British firms in the field of information technology.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* We do not collate information on British firms, contracted under the aid programme, according to their size.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Extradition

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the changes in extradition procedures applying in Ireland of which he has been informed by the Irish Attorney-General; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I have not been informed by the Irish Attorney-General of any such changes since the latest amendments to the extradition legislation of the Republic of Ireland which came into force on 22 August 1994. Any changes in their internal procedures are a matter for the Irish authorities.

Brendan Smyth

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his oral answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column 448, to the supplementary question by the hon. Member for Thurrock in the matter of Brendan Smyth, if he will explain his reference to a holiday alleged to have been taken in Ireland by the hon. Member for Thurrock; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I was mistaken. I have written to the hon. Member.

EDUCATION

Youth Service

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the spending on the youth service in each local education authority for *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1992–93, *(c)* 1993–94 and *(d)* 1994–95.

Mr. Boswell: The table sets out net recurrent expenditure by LEAs in England on the youth service for 1991–92 and 1992–93, the latest year for which figures are available. These figures are in actual terms and are drawn from LEAs' own returns of their expenditure to the Department of the Environment.

Youth Service

£000

LEA	*Net recurrent expenditure 1991–92*	*Net recurrent expenditure 1992–93*
Corporation of London	46	16
Camden	2,015	1,791
Greenwich	1,613	2,746
Hackney	2,549	3,565
Hammersmith	1,771	1,635
Islington	2,748	2,311
Kensington and Chelsea	1,712	2,063
Lambeth	1,937	1,850
Lewisham	992	1,464
Southwark	2,747	2,208
Tower Hamlets	4,639	4,217
Wandsworth	3,047	3,116
Westminster	2,816	2,623
Barking	593	1,107
Barnet	1,295	1,272
Bexley	1,076	1,108
Brent	2,224	2,733
Bromley	875	981
Croydon	1,595	1,657
Ealing	1,137	1,007
Enfield	1,142	1,108
Haringey	915	804
Harrow	515	621
Havering	1,067	1,240
Hillingdon	904	1,850
Hounslow	1,836	2,036
Kingston upon Thames	782	820
Merton	783	889
Newham	1,670	1,770
Redbridge	1,176	1,311
Richmond upon Thames	723	748
Sutton	765	1,055
Waltham Forest	1,761	1,866
Birmingham	2,987	5,673
Coventry	1,600	1,802
Dudley	1,022	1,181

Youth Service

£000

LEA	Net recurrent expenditure 1991–92	Net recurrent expenditure 1992–93
Sandwell	1,070	964
Solihull	528	656
Walsall	3,116	1,110
Wolverhampton	2,302	2,420
Knowsley	2,124	1,473
Liverpool	3,107	3,635
St. Helens	733	131
Sefton	1,352	1,331
Wirral	2,082	2,352
Bolton	1,231	1,401
Bury	851	1,088
Manchester	2,874	3,057
Oldham	897	1,096
Rochdale	1,507	1,408
Salford	1,096	937
Stockport	892	1,024
Tameside	2,000	2,255
Trafford	1,038	1,141
Wigan	1,314	1,289
Barnsley	468	960
Doncaster	2,054	1,832
Rotherham	1,358	1,842
Sheffield	4,464	4,423
Bradford	3,518	3,494
Calderdale	710	1,384
Kirklees	2,961	3,380
Leeds	7,457	3,199
Wakefield	1,252	1,252
Gateshead	804	880
Newcastle upon Tyne	823	3,035
North Tyneside	659	608
South Tyneside	462	527
Sunderland	1,836	1,688
Isles of Scilly	1	2
Avon	5,548	5,875
Bedfordshire	1,914	2,302
Berkshire	3,830	4,236
Buckinghamshire	4,174	4,849
Cambridgeshire	3,120	3,497
Cheshire	3,565	3,328
Cleveland	4,460	4,590
Cornwall	1,336	1,638
Cumbria	1,371	1,671
Derbyshire	10,956	10,666
Devon	3,882	3,854
Dorset	3,071	3,605
Durham	1,749	4,901
East Sussex	1,748	2,009
Essex	7,405	8,150
Gloucestershire	2,388	2,816
Hampshire	3,654	3,871
Hereford and Worcester	1,891	2,136
Hertfordshire	4,122	4,257
Humberside	5,499	6,158
Isle of Wight	603	752
Kent	5,660	5,372
Lancashire	7,941	8,510
Leicestershire	3,783	5,318
Lincolnshire	1,558	1,860
Norfolk	2,765	2,902
North Yorkshire	2,527	3,146
Northamptonshire	2,328	2,258
Northumberland	2,949	3,139
Nottinghamshire	6,780	6,504
Oxfordshire	1,919	2,267
Shropshire	2,512	2,608
Somerset	1,416	1,788
Staffordshire	5,746	8,104
Suffolk	1,102	1,155

Youth Service

£000

LEA	Net recurrent expenditure 1991–92	Net recurrent expenditure 1992–93
Surrey	3,712	4,081
Warwickshire	1,469	1,209
West Sussex	2,623	2,861
Wiltshire	2,647	4,089
England Total	251,739	273,850

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to place the funding of the youth service on a statutory footing.

Mr. Boswell: No further legislation is planned. In the case of the youth service, local authorities have a need to decide, within the resources available to them, the appropriate level of provision in order to fulfil their duties deriving from sections 41 and 53 of the Education Act 1994. The Government do not determine this centrally.

Mature Students Allowance

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what are the implications for students of the withdrawal of the mature students allowance starting in the academic session 1995–96;

(2) what sources of finance are available to mature students; and what assessment she has made of the impact on the living standards of such students of the removal of the mature students allowance in 1995–96;

(3) if he will make a statement on the withdrawal of the mature students allowance for students beginning higher education in 1995–96 following the paper "Main Rates of Student Grants and Loans for 1995–96".

Mr. Boswell: The older students allowance is currently payable under the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations as part of a means-tested mandatory award for eligible students on designated courses. It is not targeted at any specific maintenance need which the student may have and its retention could not be justified in the present financial climate. It remains available to eligible students who are already on their courses, but not to new students starting courses on or after 1 September 1995. A range of other sources of financial support for older students exists depending upon their individual circumstances and the type of course they attend.

Teachers Salaries

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list for each local eduction authority *(a)* the current annual cost of teacher salaries, *(b)* the cost of a 2 per cent. increase in teachers' pay for 1994–95 and *(c)* the cost of a 2.5 per cent. increase in teachers' pay.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table sets out the 1992–93 expenditure recorded by LEAs in England on teaching staff salaries in nursery and primary, secondary and special schools. These are the latest available figures for LEA-maintained schools. To provide an estimate of the cost of pay awards, the 1992–93 figures have been uprated by the 1993 teachers' pay award, 1.5 per cent. to arrive at notional 1993–94 baselines on which cost of hypothetical increases in teachers' pay for 1994–95 of 2 per cent. and 2.5 per cent. has been calculated. These estimates take no

account of changes in teacher numbers or other factors that will have affected the teachers' pay bill. The actual increase in teachers' pay 1994–95 was 2.9 per cent.

LEA expenditure on teachers' salaries

Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Special Schools	1992–93 (actual) (£000)	1992–93 (in 1993–94 terms) (£000)	2 per cent. increase (£000)	2.5 per cent. increase £(000)
Corporation of London	428	434	9	11
Camden	36,778	37,330	747	933
Greenwich	57,441	58,303	1,166	1,458
Hackney	42,157	42,789	856	1,070
Hammersmith	25,144	25,521	510	638
Islington	40,339	40,944	819	1,024
Kensington and Chelsea	15,969	16,209	324	405
Lambeth	45,081	45,757	915	1,144
Lewisham	43,850	44,508	890	1,113
Southwark	43,037	43,683	874	1,092
Tower Hamlets	57,235	58,094	1,162	1,452
Wandsworth	41,485	42,107	842	1,053
Westminster	29,064	29,500	590	737
Barking	34,134	34,646	693	866
Barnet	61,723	62,649	1,253	1,566
Bexley	43,229	43,877	878	1,097
Brent	48,628	49,357	987	1,234
Bromley	37,052	37,608	752	940
Croydon	56,379	57,225	1,144	1,431
Ealing	48,569	49,298	986	1,232
Enfield	57,216	58,074	1,161	1,452
Haringey	46,196	46,889	938	1,172
Harrow	38,397	38,973	779	974
Havering	49,716	50,462	1,009	1,262
Hillingdon	32,850	33,343	667	834
Hounslow	48,372	49,454	989	1,236
Kingston upon Thames	26,672	27,072	541	677
Merton	34,380	34,896	698	872
Newham	55,156	55,983	1,120	1,400
Redbridge	48,178	48,901	978	1,223
Richmond upon Thames	25,951	26,340	527	659
Sutton	26,067	26,458	529	661
Waltham Forest	49,215	49,953	999	1,249
Birmingham	226,986	230,391	4,608	5,760
Coventry	68,241	69,265	1,385	1,732
Dudley	61,409	62,330	1,247	1,558
Sandwell	67,116	68,123	1,362	1,703
Solihull	44,663	45,333	907	1,133
Walsall	57,957	58,826	1,177	1,471
Wolverhampton	52,823	53,615	1,072	1,340
Knowsley	34,957	35,481	710	887
Liverpool	106,122	107,714	2,154	2,693
St. Helens	40,656	41,266	825	1,032
Sefton	58,695	59,575	1,192	1,489
Wirral	71,520	72,593	1,452	1,815
Bolton	58,731	59,612	1,192	1,490
Bury	33,786	34,293	686	857
Manchester	98,210	99,683	1,994	2,492
Oldham	57,609	58,473	1,169	1,462
Rochdale	44,279	44,943	899	1,124
Salford	51,731	52,507	1,050	1,313
Stockport	58,114	58,986	1,180	1,475
Tameside	46,054	46,745	935	1,169
Trafford	39,523	40,116	802	1,003
Wigan	72,263	73,347	1,467	1,834
Barnsley	40,094	40,695	814	1,017
Doncaster	61,082	61,998	1,240	1,550
Rotherham	59,486	60,378	1,208	1,509
Sheffield	95,070	96,496	1,930	2,412
Bradford	113,897	115,605	2,312	2,890
Calderdale	40,476	41,083	822	1,027
Kirklees	83,022	84,267	1,685	2,107
Leeds	144,719	146,890	2,938	3,672
Wakefield	65,138	66,115	1,322	1,653
Gateshead	41,420	42,041	841	1,051
Newcastle upon Tyne	54,297	55,111	1,102	1,378
North Tyneside	43,475	44,127	883	1,103
South Tyneside	31,785	32,262	645	807
Sunderland	64,315	65,280	1,306	1,632
Isles of Scilly	599	608	12	15
Avon	179,711	182,407	3,648	4,560
Bedfordshire	116,753	118,504	2,370	2,963
Berkshire	133,913	135,922	2,718	3,398
Buckinghamshire	116,645	118,395	2,368	2,960
Cambridgeshire	121,295	123,114	2,462	3,078
Cheshire	193,359	196,259	3,925	4,906
Cleveland	136,127	138,169	2,763	3,454
Cornwall	86,734	88,035	1,761	2,201
Cumbria	94,791	96,213	1,924	2,405
Derbyshire	187,005	189,810	3,796	4,745
Devon	179,197	181,885	3,638	4,547
Dorset	99,774	101,271	2,025	2,532
Durham	122,305	124,140	2,483	3,103
East Sussex	115,326	117,056	2,341	2,926
Essex	279,683	283,878	5,678	7,097
Gloucestershire	87,598	88,912	1,778	2,223
Hampshire	281,689	285,914	5,718	7,148
Hereford and Worcester	133,454	135,456	2,709	3,386
Hertfordshire	195,847	198,785	3,976	4,970
Humberside	184,702	187,473	3,749	4,687
Isle of Wight	24,255	24,619	492	615
Kent	257,412	261,273	5,225	6,532
Lancashire	290,367	294,723	5,894	7,368
Leicestershire	192,009	194,889	3,898	4,872
Lincolnshire	94,889	96,312	1,926	2,408
Norfolk	129,927	131,876	2,638	3,297
North Yorkshire	137,936	140,005	2,800	3,500
Northamptonshire	117,669	119,434	2,389	2,986
Northumberland	62,703	63,644	1,273	1,591
Nottinghamshire	204,216	207,279	4,146	5,182
Oxfordshire	102,211	103,744	2,075	2,594
Shropshire	87,570	88,884	1,778	2,222
Somerset	83,851	85,109	1,702	2,128
Staffordshire	201,758	204,784	4,096	5,120
Suffolk	126,106	127,998	2,560	3,200
Surrey	151,970	154,250	3,085	3,856
Warwickshire	90,879	92,242	1,845	2,306
West Sussex	128,140	130,062	2,601	3,252
Wiltshire	105,215	106,793	2,136	2,670
England Total	9,371,750	9,788,184	195,764	244,705

Discretionary Awards

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the highest and lowest maximum discretionary awards provided by local education authorities in England for *(a)* further education students and *(b)* higher education students.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is not collected centrally. The provision of discretionary awards is a matter for local education authorities which determine the distribution and size of awards in the light of local needs and priorities.

Special Needs

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals she has to develop a national strategy for special needs students in the 16-plus age range to supply a national progression for them after statutory schooling; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The Education Act 1993, the code of practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs and the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 already provide a comprehensive framework for the progression of students with special educational needs from schools to post-16 education, training or employment.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many school playing fields there were in each local education authority in each of the last four years.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table sets out data from the Sports Council's register of recreational land, giving the number of school sports pitches by local education authority in England as at July 1994. Information for earlier years is unavailable.

Not all local education authorities have submitted full returns and the figures should be interpreted with caution. The register excludes playing fields on sites with an area of less than 0.4 hectares, so a number of small school playing fields are not recorded.

Local Education Authorities	*Sports pitches*
Avon	263
Barking and Dagenham	288
Barnet	22
Barnsley	194
Bedfordshire	451
Berkshire	509
Bexley	0
Birmingham	216
Bolton	363
Bradford	309
Brent	36
Bromley	0
Buckinghamshire	286
Bury	245
Calderdale	96
Cambridgeshire	329
Camden	64
Cheshire	1,618
City of London	0
Cleveland	733
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	664
Coventry	545
Croydon	332
Cumbria	599
Derbyshire	807
Devon	447
Doncaster	649
Dorset	421
Dudley	145
Durham	656
Ealing	98
East Sussex	233
Enfield	366
Essex	759
Gateshead	120
Gloucestershire	551
Greenwich	49
Hackney	6
Hammersmith	12
Hampshire	753
Haringey	14
Harrow	0
Havering	86
Hereford and Worcester	1,107
Hertfordshire	1,633
Hillingdon	97
Hounslow	43
Humberside	838
Isle of Wight	104
Islington	0
Kensington and Chelsea	0
Kent	1,579
Kingston upon Thames	69
Kirklees	104
Knowsley	157
Lambeth	10
Lancashire	1,816
Leeds	481
Leicestershire	791
Lewisham	2
Lincolnshire	505
Liverpool	245
Manchester	148
Merton	30
Newcastle upon Tyne	151
Newham	47
Norfolk	569
North Yorkshire	822
North Tyneside	175
Northamptonshire	401
Northumberland	595
Nottinghamshire	1,443
Oldham	168
Oxfordshire	496
Redbridge	133
Richmond upon Thames	101
Rochdale	314
Rotherham	385
Salford	226
Sandwell	90
Sefton	167
Sheffield	521
Shropshire	405
Solihull	205
Somerset	261
South Tyneside	112
Southwark	3
St. Helens	123
Staffordshire	772
Stockport	397
Suffolk	575
Sunderland	173
Surrey	568
Sutton	13
Tameside	269
Tower Hamlets	3
Trafford	209
Wakefield	292
Walsall	283
Waltham Forest	5
Wandsworth	29
Warwickshire	384
West Sussex	960
Westminster	0
Wigan	263
Wiltshire	294
Wirral	226
Wolverhampton	278
Total	37,799

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the basis for action by the Further Education Funding Council for England and against the governing bodies of colleges; and if she will make a statement on the adequacy of those powers.

Mr. Boswell: Under section 5(7) of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, the Further Education Funding Council for England may make any grants, loans or other payments to the governing body subject to terms and conditions which enable the council to require the repayment in whole or in part of sums paid by the council if any of the terms and conditions are not complied with and require the payment of interest in respect of any sums not so repaid. The council is required to keep this power under review. The instruments of government for further education corporations also require the statement of accounts to comply with any directions given by the council.

In the event of mismanagement, breach of duty or unreasonable actions by a governing body, responsibility rests with my right hon. Friend. She is satisfied that the range of powers available to her and the council are, taken together, adequate.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the absenteeism rate for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in each year since 1991.

Mr. Goodlad: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office diplomatic wing administration does not collect statistics on absenteeism centrally.

Comprehensive sick leave records are not available for 1991, 1992 and 1993; details could be completed only at disproportionate cost.

In the case of ODA, the figures for sick leave are available but will take a little time to produce. I shall write to the hon. Member when they are available.

Rwanda

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to assist with the establishment of an international criminal tribunal with regard to militia murders in Rwanda.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom was a co-sponsor of Security Council resolution 955 of 8 November 1994 which established an international criminal tribunal for Rwanda.

We have recently indicated to the prosecutor of the tribunal that we will be contributing up to £200,000 to fund UK staff and to provide equipment for his office.

UN Social Development Programme

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the formal representations made by Her Majesty's Government since 1993 in the preparation of each of the three drafts of the UN declaration and action programme on social development, giving the dates of each.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have participated actively in each of the four preparatory committee meetings held in New York to agree the documentation for the world summit for social development. The dates for these are: 1 to 11 February 1994, 22 August to 2 September 1994, 24 to 28 October 1994—an intersessional meeting—and 16 to 27 January 1995. We have also been very active in the many EU co-ordination meetings that have taken place in Brussels and New York, putting forward many suggestions for strong texts on the three core issues which have been taken up by the EU as a whole.

East Timor

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he supports United Nations policy that Indonesia should resolve the dispute over East Timor through a referendum of the people of East Timor.

Mr. Goodlad: We support the UN Secretary-General's efforts to promote a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable settlement to the question of East Timor, taking account of the wishes and interests of the East Timorese. He informed the Foreign Ministers of Portugal and Indonesia on 9 January of his intention to facilitate the convening of an "all-inclusive intra-East Timorese dialogue" to help establish an atmosphere conducive to achieving a solution, which we welcome. The question of a referendum did not arise.

Chinese Foreign Minister

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects a visit from the Chinese Foreign Minister to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Goodlad: We would welcome a visit to the United Kingdom by the Chinese Foreign Minister but, as yet, no dates have been discussed with the Chinese Government.

Harjit Singh

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the report on the hearing of 26 November 1994 into the case of Harjit Singh has now been prepared by his officers in the high commission in New Delhi.

Mr. Baldry: We understand that the hearing in the case of Harjit Singh, which was scheduled for 26 November was postponed yet again. The next hearing is scheduled for 28 January.

Kenya

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has yet received an invitation to help Kenya adopt a new constitution suited to multi-party democracy; and what has been his response to this request for assistance.

Mr. Baldry: We have not yet received a formal request from the Kenyan Government to provide an expert to help take forward the process of constitutional reform. If we do, we shall give it careful consideration.

Nigeria

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many opposition leaders are currently in prison in Nigeria; and what representations he has made on this issue to the Nigerian Government.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* A number of political leaders are currently in detention. With our European Union partners we have made several representations to the Nigerian Government calling for the release or proper trial of those detained.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which specific human rights abuses in Nigeria he has raised with the Government of that country.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* With our European Union partners we have called for the release or early trial of all political detainees, and for the lifting of travel restrictions on political activists. We have deplored repressive decrees issued by the Nigerian Government, including the proscriptions of media houses and increases in the power to order detention without trial. We continue to raise these issues with the Nigerian Government, with our partners and bilaterally, raising individual cases of abuse wherever appropriate.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to which Nigerian military or security personnel he has denied visas in line with European Union policy.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* It is not our policy to reveal details of individual visa applications. Since June 1993, however, in line with agreed European Union measures against Nigeria, visas have not been issued to members of the military and their dependants, except in a small number of exceptional cases.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the impact on Nigeria of the decision by European Foreign Ministers to suspend co-operation in the military sphere with the Nigerian Government.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* Since the European Union measures against the Nigerian military were announced in 1993, Nigerian military personnel have ceased to attend military training courses in the European Union. The British military assistance team to the Nigerian national war college was withdrawn in June 1993.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arms sales have taken place to Nigeria since the annulment of the June 1993 election.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* It has been the policy of successive Governments not to give details of individual arms sales. Information on transfers of major equipment is contained in the UN register of conventional arms, copies of the United Kingdom return to which are in the library.

In December 1993, with EU partners, we announced that all new applications for export licences for defence equipment would be reviewed, on a case-by-case basis, with the presumption of denial.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there has been consideration of an embargo on the importation of Nigerian oil until democracy is restored in that country.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* The European Union measures against Nigeria will be reviewed, or strengthened, in the light of progress towards a return to democratic civilian rule. All options will, of course, be considered.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being taken by the United Nations Commission for Human Rights to investigate human rights abuses in Nigeria.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* The 51st session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights will meet from 30 January to 10 March. The EU will be making a strong statement about its concerns regarding human rights abuses in Nigeria.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisons Ombudsman

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the salary paid to the prisons ombudsman;

(2) how many staff work in the prisons ombudsman's department; what is their role; and what salaries they are paid.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The prisons ombudsman is paid at a rate equivalent to the civil service grade 5 salary scale which ranges from £38,341 to £56,953.

The prisons ombudsman's office currently has ten staff, two assistant prisons ombudsmen, five higher executive officers, two administrative officers and a personal secretary. Their role is to assist with investigations of complaints from prisoners about their treatment in prison. The salary scales for the grades are:

Assistant Prisons Ombudsman (Grade 7)	£25,837–£40,012
Higher Executive Officer	£16,000–£21,564
Administrative Officer	£9,393–£12,450
Personal Secretary	£13,322–£16,320

A third assistant prisons ombudsman and another higher executive officer will join the staff in January.

Prisoners (Unlocked Hours)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of prisoners held in establishments at *(a)* Doncaster, *(b)* Lindholme, *(c)* Wolds, *(d)* Wakefield, *(e)* Durham women's wing and *(f)* New Hall, Wakefield, prisons, were unlocked for a total of at least 12 hours on the last week day of each month for the last six months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 18 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the percentage of prisoners held in Doncaster, Lindholme, Wolds, Wakefield, Durham women's wing and New

Hall prisons, who were unlocked for a total of at least twelve hours on the last weekday of each month for the last six months.

All prisoners at Doncaster, Lindholme, Wolds, Durham women's wing and New Hall were unlocked for at least twelve hours on the last weekday of each month for the last six months. Prisoners at Wakefield are currently unlocked for 11.6 hours on weekdays.

More detailed information is given in the following table:

Average number of hours unlocked per prisoner

	July	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*
Durham	12.75	12.75	12.75	12.75	12.75	12.75
Lindholme	15.5	15.5	15.5	15.5	15.5	15.5
New Hall	12.0	12.0	12.0	12.0	12.0	12.0
Wakefield	11.6	11.6	11.0	11.6	11.6	11.6
Wolds	13.75	13.75	13.75	13.75	13.75	13.75
Doncaster	14.5	14.5	14.5	14.5	14.5	14.5

Secure Units

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the number of prisoners being held in special secure units in England and Wales on 10 January;

(2) under what security category each prisoner is classified who is at present being held in a special secure unit;

(3) what is the number of special secure units in prisons in England and Wales.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 23 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about special secure units in prisons in England and Wales.

There are three special secure units in prisons in England and Wales, at Full Sutton, Parkhurst and Whitemoor prisons.

At present only the unit at Full Sutton is in use. On 10 January this year it held eight prisoners, all of whom are category A (exceptional escape risk).

Prison Education Officers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison education officers were employed in each year since 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the number of prison Education Officers employed each year since 1991.

Teaching staff, are not and have not been Prison Service employees. The Prison Service does not maintain central records of the numbers of staff deployed to prison Education Departments by the various education providers.

Prison Staff

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* prison officers and *(b)* prison auxiliaries were employed in each year since 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 23 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prison officers and prison auxiliaries employed by the Prison Service since 1990.

I attach a table showing the number of prison officers and prison auxiliaries employed by the Service at 1 April each year since 1990. This is with the exception of 1991 where the figures are for 1 October, as April figures are unavailable.

The figures for prison officers include the figures for senior officers and principal officers. All specialist officers and prison officers in initial training are also included.

Year	*Prison officers*	*Prison auxiliaries*
1990	20,785	994
1991[1]	21,421	1220
1992	23,029	1278
1993	23,994	1436
1994	23,756	1621
1995[2]	24,237	1840

[1] As at 1 October
[2] As at 1 January

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the absenteeism rate for the United Kingdom Passport Agency in 1991, 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Figures are available only for absenteeism due to sickness in the United Kingdom Passport Agency. The information is recorded in terms of days absence per staff member per year and is as follows:

	Days
1991	16.69
1992	15.96
1993	15.01

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the absenteeism rate for Her Majesty's Prison Service in 1991, 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 23 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the absenteeism rate for Her Majesty's Prison Service in 1991, 1992 and 1993.

Figures are not collected centrally on absenteeism, but we do have information on sick absence, which accounts for virtually all absence from work other than leave. The average number of days sick absence per uniformed prison officer per year in 1991–92 was 13.97; in 1992–93 it was 12.76; and in 1993–94 it was 13.05. These statistics relate to basic grade prison officers, senior officers and principal officers who together comprise nearly two–thirds of all Prison Service staff.

The sick absence of other staff is recorded by the Home Office, but cannot be separately identified for Prison Service staff.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the absenteeism rate for the Home Office in 1991, 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Howard: Figures are not collected centrally on absenteeism.

The average number of working days lost through sick absence per staff year in the Home Office, including its agencies was as follows:

1991—9.9
1992—9.0
1993—10.6

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the absenteeism rate for the Forensic Science Service in 1991, 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Maclean: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Forensic Science Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Dr. Janet Thompson to Mr David Chidgey, dated 23 January 1995:

You recently tabled a Parliamentary Question about the absenteeism rate for the Forensic Science Service in 1991, 1992 and 1993. As you know, the arrangement now is that the Chief Executive of an Executive Agency, with the agreement of the Minister, replies to Members of Parliament on operational matters. I am therefore replying on behalf of the Forensic Science Service.

The average number of days sick absence per member of staff per year in 1992–93 was 6.4, and in 1993–94 was 6.61. These figures include long term sick absences.

The figures for 1991–92 were recorded centrally by the Home Office and cannot be identified separately.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the absenteeism rate for the Fire Service College in 1991, 1992, and 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the chief executive of the Fire Service College, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from N. K. Finlayson to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 19 January 1995:

Your Parliamentary Question asking for information about the absenteeism rate for the Fire Service College in 1991, 1992 and 1993 has been referred to me by the Home Secretary for reply, as the matter falls within my delegated authority.

I regret that the information for the College is not available in the form requested for the dates requested. The College became an Executive Agency on 1 April 1992. Prior to that date and since, details of sickness absences have been included as part of the overall figures for the Home Office.

For the 12 months ending in September 1994 the average number of sick days per member of staff was 7.7 days.

Prisoners (Paracetamol)

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what policy guidelines are issued to prison staff on the prescribing and administration of paracetamol to inmates; and what variations exist between different prisons.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. John Gunnell dated 23 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question concerning the policy guidelines on the prescribing and administration of paracetamol.

There are no specific policy guidelines issued on the prescribing of individual drugs with the exception of controlled drugs. Each prison is supervised by a qualified pharmacist and arrangements for the distribution of drugs is agreed between the pharmacist and the prison medical officer, according to local requirements.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training programmes are available for staff at Doncaster prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. John Gunnell, dated 23 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply, in the absence of the Director General from the office to your recent Question about training programmes available to staff at Doncaster prison.

All Prisoner Custody Officers (PCOs) undergo initial training to a specification approved by the Prison Service before certification. I am advised by the Director of Doncaster prison that the following in-service training programmes are provided:

Weekly Continuation Training of Prisoner Custody Officers, including security practices, control and restraint, first aid, suicide awareness, hostage incidents and anti-bullying.

Specialist Courses for Prisoner Custody Officers include: hostage negotiations, the escort and movement of category A prisoners, drug testing and identification, use of short duration breathing apparatus, sentence calculation, drug dog handler training and dealing with young offenders.

Training for non-Prisoner Custody Officers, who have each received a minimum of forty hours training including personal security, prisoner and premises security, race relations, health and hygiene and being first on the scene at a hostage incident.

Management Training, which included a specialist senior management course prior to the opening of Doncaster. Operational directors have attended the Command of Serious Incidents course at the Prison Service College.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners can be accommodated in the health care centre at Doncaster prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. John Gunnell, dated 23 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Doncaster prison.

The Health Care Centre at Doncaster can accommodate 59 patients. Twenty-seven places are in three wards, 12 are in double rooms and the remainder in single rooms.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what numerical criteria were contained in the contract between the Home Office and the Premier Prison Service Ltd. at Doncaster; and how many *(a)* escapes from court, *(b)* escapes from the prison, *(c)* grievance resolutions, *(d)* assaults on prisoners and *(e)* assaults on staff there were in the first six months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. John Gunnell, dated 23 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply, in the absence of the Director General from the office to your recent Question about the contract with Premier Prison Service Limited to run Doncaster prison.

The contract for managing Doncaster prison, a copy of which is held in the House of Commons library, specifies a range of performance criteria, against which the performance of Premier Prison Service is measured.

The following are the principal criteria:

Escapes from the prison: there should be no more than two by the end of the first year of operation and thereafter no more than one in each year of operation.

Escapes from escort: there should be no more than eight in each year for the first three years and no more than six in the fourth year.

Time out of cell: prisoners on normal location should be out of their cell for a minimum 12 hours per day.

A positive regime: prisoners on normal location should be able to participate in at least a minimum of 12 hours each day of regime activities, including education: adult prisoners should have access to a minimum of six hours of education and training each week, young prisoners under 17 should be provided with 15 hours of education and training each week.

Visits: the statutory minimum as set out in Prison Rules must be met.

Grievances: ninety per cent of grievances capable of resolution at prison level must be resolved within seven days.

Assaults: there should be no more than 148 assaults on prisoners by the end of the first year of operation, and no more than 77 assaults on staff by the end of the first year of operation. The contractor will be in default when both of these targets are exceeded.

In general, Premier Prison Service do not have a contractual obligation to supervise prisoners at court, since the court escort and custody service in that area has been contracted to Group 4 Court Services Ltd. They are, however, responsible for Category A prisoners taken from Doncaster prison to court. None has escaped from the custody of their escorting officers at court, or on journeys to an from court.

There has been one escape from Doncaster. On 10 August 1994, a prisoner escaped through the visitors exit with the help from a visitor. The prisoner was recaptured and criminal proceedings are pending.

There have been 546 resolved grievances in the first six months of operation of Doncaster prison.

At 31 December 1994, the latest date for which figures are available there had been 38 proven assaults by prisoners against other prisoners and 93 proven assaults against staff.

Prisoners (Shopping)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many private shopping visits were made by prison officers for inmates in prisons in England and Wales during the week of 2 to 7 January.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 23 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about private shopping trips made by prison officers for inmates during the week of 2 to 7 January.

On 19 December the Home Secretary announced in the House that the practice of prison officers going shopping at the behest of prisoners had stopped. Purchases will take place only through the prison canteen. No private shopping trips by prison officers were reported during the week of 2 to 7 January.

Prisoners (Phone Calls)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the prison policy followed in prisons in England and Wales where private phone calls made by inmates can be paid from public expenditure.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 23 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the policy followed in prisons in England and Wales where private phone calls made by prisoners can be paid from public expense.

Following the installation of cardphones in all establishments, prisoners are required to purchase phonecards from their earnings or private cash to make personal calls. Prisoners are only allowed access to an official telephone to make urgent legal and compassionate calls. Prisoners are expected to pay for all calls using an official telephone, unless the governor is satisfied that the prisoner has insufficient funds to meet the cost of the call or the cost is so small as to not justify its collection.

Prison Security

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is the policy of his Department to instruct prison governors and chief officers to visit every area of the prison for which they are responsible on a daily basis.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 23 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about instructions on managers visiting the areas for which they are responsible.

Under Standing Order 3A, the governor exercises a close and constant supervision of the prison. All parts of the prison where prisoners are located, including the hospital, are visited and inspected daily by the governing governor or another of the

establishment's governors. The remainder of the prison will be inspected by such other managers as the governor designates.

Prison Governors Association

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to meet the chairman and officers of the Prison Governors Association.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Home Secretary has no present plans to meet the chairman and officers of the PGA, nor has the association made such a request. I last met with the Prison Governors Association on 15 November 1994.

Solitary Confinement

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have spent more than a total of one month in solitary confinement in the latest year for which figures are available; and what is the extra cost per prisoner per month of solitary confinement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. David Nicholson, dated 23 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many prisoners have spent more than a total of one month in solitary confinement in the latest year for which figures are available; and what is the extra cost per prisoner per month of solitary confinement.

No prisoners in England and Wales are kept in solitary confinement, which is a form of punishment designed to deprive a prisoner of all human contact.

Under Prison Rule 43, however, and Young Offender Institution Rule 46, governors may remove prisoners from association with other prisoners for the maintenance of good order and discipline or in their own interests. Information is not available in the form requested, but on 30 June 1994 the number of prisoners segregated under Prison Rule 43 and YOI Rule 46 were:

	30 June 1994
Good order and discipline:	310, of which 152 for a period of more than one month;
In own interests:	887 held in rule 43 units or segregation unit on rule 43/46.

Information on the cost of holding prisoners under these Rules is not available.

Immigration

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases he is aware of involving persons released on bail from Immigration Act detention by the Immigration Appeals Authority who have subsequently absconded or otherwise failed to comply with the terms of bail; and in what time period these cases arose.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Data Centre, Bootle

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the privatisation of the data centre in Bootle; what redundancies have ensued; if these redundancies were referred to by the Sema Group in its bid to take over the running of the centre; and what funding his Department provided towards the cost of redundancies.

Mr. Howard: Home Office administrative information technology services have been the subject of a market test under the Government's "Competing for Quality" programme. As previously announced in reply to a question on 19 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *176*, following the conclusion of the test, it was decided to award a contract for the supply of these services to Sema Group plc. Its bid was judged to represent best value for money following an evaluation on the basis of the full costs to the Home Office of the competing bids.

With some limited exceptions, staff in the undertaking were transferred to Sema Group under the terms of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981. The Home Office did not make any staff redundant: subsequent redundancies by Sema Group are a matter for the company.

In submitting its bid, Sema Group made it clear that the number of staff required for the provision of services under the contract would be dependent on the outcome of an operational review which they would conduct, if awarded the contract.

All payments to Sema Group in connection with the services subject to the market test, including payments associated with their transitional and restructuring costs, have been made in accordance with the contract for the supply of IT services, the precise details of which are commercial in confidence.

Welsh Language

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are being made by the Data Protection Registrar to ensure use of the Welsh language in its operation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Data Protection Registrar tells me that application forms for registration are currently available in Welsh; that entry on to the register resulting from a Welsh language application is made available to the applicant in Welsh; that the letter confirming registration is also in Welsh; that arrangements are made for letters received in Welsh to be answered in Welsh; and the Office's Wales-based investigation officer is able to conduct interviews and provide oral information through the medium of Welsh.

I understand that the registrar will be reviewing these arrangements before preparing a plan for submission to the Welsh Language Board in accordance with the provisions of the Welsh Language Act 1993.

Sentences

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the proportion of defendants who received *(a)* custodial and *(b)* non-custodial sentences following conviction by magistrates in England and Wales in each year since 1988;

(2) How many persons were sentenced to a term of imprisonment following conviction by magistrates in England and Wales in each year since 1988.

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the table. The 1994 data will not be available until the autumn.

Number and percentage of defendants sentenced at magistrates' courts by year, type of offence and type of sentence
England and Wales

	1988		1989		1990		[1]1991		[1]1992		[1]1993	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Indictable offences												
Total sentenced	289,060	100	250,967	100	256,211	100	252,518	100	243,447	100	239,851	100
Immediate custody	19,068	7	13,107	5	11,259	4	13,050	5	11,796	5	13,898	6
Non-custodial sentence	269,992	93	237,860	95	244,952	96	239,468	95	231,651	95	225,953	94
Summary non-motoring offences												
Total sentenced	454,595	100	469,312	100	464,061	100	451,210	100	468,928	100	451,239	100
Immediate custody	2,569	1	3,992	1	3,607	1	4,221	1	3,486	1	3,218	1
Non-custodial sentence	452,026	99	465,320	99	460,454	99	446,989	99	465,442	99	448,021	99
Summary motoring offences												
Total sentenced	713,920	100	720,988	100	703,284	100	711,889	100	722,164	100	663,963	100
Immediate custody	2,092	—	4,541	1	4,812	1	5,772	1	5698	1	7,8900	1
Non-custodial sentence	711,828	100	716,447	99	698,472	99	706,117	99	716,466	99	656,063	99
All offences												
Total sentenced	1,456,925	100	1,441,267	100	1,423,556	100	1,415,617	100	1,434,539	100	1,355,053	100
Immediate custody	23,729	2	21,640	2	19,678	1	23,043	2	20,980	1	25,016	2
Non-custodial sentence	1,433,196	98	1,419,627	98	1,403,878	99	1,392,574	98	1,413,559	99	1,330,037	98

[1]Improvements in the data collection methods used by the Metropolitan police district have led to increases in the number sentenced in these years.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his reply of 10 January, *Official Report*, column *89*, how many of the offers of awards made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority under the tariff scheme in November have led to appeals.

Mr. Maclean: Seven.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many payments were made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority in *(a)* November 1994 and *(b)* December 1994 in the bands (i) £1,000 to £4,999, (ii) £5,000 to £9,999 and (iii) £10,000 and above.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not currently available.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offers of payment were made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority in September, October and December 1994; and in which of the tariff bands these awards fell.

Mr. Maclean: The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority made 605 offers of award in the following bands:

	Awards offered		
Band	*September*	*October*	*November*
1	9	77	68
2	1	8	18
3	8	48	95
4	—	4	9
5	5	20	40
6	—	5	7
7	9	44	43
8	1	4	11
9	1	6	4
10	1	4	5
11	—	3	6
12	3	15	11
13	1	1	1
14	—	—	1
15	—	1	—
16	—	2	1
17	1	1	1
19	—	—	1

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many awards were made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94.

Mr. Maclean: The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board made 36,638 awards in 1992–93 and 40,635 in 1993–94.

Prison Service

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the Prison Service's annual report to be published; and what is the reason for its delay.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 23 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the publication of the Prison Service's Annual Report and the reason for its delay.

Although it relates to a past period, publication of the 1993–94 Prison Service Annual Report has been delayed to allow the Report to be updated to reflect the events at Whitemoor and Parkhurst. The report is expected to be published soon.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what special instructions he has given to the assistant chief constable of Essex police with regard to the export of livestock through Brightlingsea.

Mr. Maclean: None. The policing of such events is an operational matter for the chief constable.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 12 December, *Official Report*, column *495*, concerning overseas travel at public expense by spouses of Ministers what proportion of the spouses' visit was dedicated to official visits and business.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* On the two occasions concerned, programmes were drawn up for the spouse by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with practically all the spouse's time dedicated to official visits and duties.

Ethnic Minority Funding

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the distribution of section 11 funds for 1995–96.

Mr. Nicholas Baker *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* Allocations for existing projects which will still be running in 1995–96 should be notified to grant recipients shortly. We hope to announce the outcome of applications for new projects starting in 1995–96 by the end of February.

Young Offenders

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many serving prisoners were sentenced, pursuant to *(a)* section 53(1) and *(b)* section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933; and how many of these prisoners are now serving their sentences in adult prisons and young offenders' institutions, respectively.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 23 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many serving prisoners were sentenced pursuant to (a) section 53(1) and (b) section 53(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933; and how many of these prisoners are now serving their sentences in adult prisons and young offenders' institutions, respectively.

On 30 November 1994, 54 young offenders were held under section 53(1); all apart from two were held in young offender institutions or a remand centre. Nine young offenders were held under section 53(2) life; of these one male was held in an adult establishment. 353 young offenders were held for determinate sentence under section 53(2) of whom 26 were held in adult institutions. Sentenced young offenders include some 21 year olds.

TRANSPORT

Roads Programme

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to include a measure of employment effects when assessing the local impacts of new roads.

Mr. Watts: The Department's current appraisal methods do not attempt to measure the indirect local economic impacts of road schemes, such as employment. A succession of studies has concluded that to include a measurement of indirect effects in addition to the direct economic benefits risks double counting.

Drivers' Hours

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will urge the European Council of Ministers to tighten regulations governing drivers' hours; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: We see no need at present for any significant change in the European Community rules on driving hours and rest periods. However, we do attach importance to more consistent and rigorous application and enforcement of existing rules throughout the Community. The Transport Council expressly agreed that objective during the German presidency. With a view to strengthening enforcement, the European Commission has published a draft regulation proposing an addition to the tachograph that would require the digital recording of drivers' hours on smart cards.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in each of the last five years for which figures are available, how many offences were identified by the vehicle inspectorate in relation to drivers' hours in *(a)* Derbyshire and *(b)* North Yorkshire; and what percentage these figures represent of the overall national figures.

Mr. Norris: The figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Licensing Authority Staff

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many licensing authority staff were employed by the licensing authorities by traffic area on *(a)* 1 April for each year since 1989 and *(b)* at present.

Mr. Norris: The table gives total numbers of staff employed in each traffic area office in support of the traffic commissioners-licensing authorities.

Traffic Area	*1 April 1989*	*1 April 1990*	*1 April 1991*	*1 April 1992*	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*Present*
North Eastern (Newcastle)	46.5	42.0	6.0	—	—	—	—
North Eastern (Leeds)	66.0	63.0	61.0	63.0	60.5	60.5	58.0
North Western (Manchester)	104.0	96.5	86.5	71.5	70.0	70.0	67.0

Traffic Area	1 April 1989	1 April 1990	1 April 1991	1 April 1992	1 April 1993	1 April 1994	Present
West Midland (Birmingham)	77.0	73.5	64.0	47.5	47.5	50.0	46.0
Eastern (Nottingham)	60.0	59.5	36.5	—	—	—	—
Eastern (Cambridge)	57.0	55.0	46.5	64.0	63.0	60.0	56.5
South Wales (Cardiff)	46.0	37.0	31.0	28.5	28.5	30.0	29.0
Western (Bristol)	63.0	62.0	67.5	58.5	57.5	56.5	54.0
Metropolitan (London)	112.5	104.5	74.5	—	—	—	—
South Eastern (Eastbourne)	86.0	84.0	68.5	63.5	61.0	61.0	56.0
Scottish (Edinburgh)	80.0	77.0	71.0	61.0	61.0	58.0	44.5
	798.0	754.0	613.0	457.5	449.0	446.0	411.0

Goods Vehicle Operator Licences

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many goods vehicle operator licences were *(a)* revoked, *(b)* suspended, *(c)* curtailed and *(d)* subject to formal penal warnings by traffic area in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Norris: The figures requested are contained in the appendices to the annual reports of the licensing authorities which are available in the Library of the House.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many public inquiries were held for goods vehicle operator licences for each of the last five years for which figures are available by traffic area; and if he will give, in each case, the reason for the public inquiry.

Mr. Norris: The figures requested are contained in the appendices to the annual reports of the licensing authorities which are available in the Library of the House. To set out the reason for the public inquiry in each case could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Seat Belts

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has of *(a)* the number and *(b)* percentage of people in cars not using seat belts in *(a)* front seats and *(b)* rear seats; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The Transport Research Laboratory carries out six-monthly surveys of seat belt wearing rates. The most recent survey in October 1994 indicated that nationally 92 per cent. of drivers, 93 per cent. of front seat passengers and 67 per cent. of rear seat passengers were wearing seat belts in cars.

Cycling

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusions he has drawn about planning for cyclists following his recent trip to Holland; and what plans he has to meet representatives of cycling organisations to discuss his Department's future policies for cycling.

Dr. Mawhinney: My recent visit to the Netherlands will be useful in developing ideas based on last year's Government statement on cycling policy. I shall be meeting representatives of the cyclists public affairs group to continue discussions on a number of issues.

Traffic Commissioners (Public Inquiries)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce guidelines to ensure consistency in the judgments reached by traffic commissioners in respect of public inquiries held by traffic commissioners; and if he will make a statement as to the merits of education or revocation where previous offences have been proven.

Mr. Norris: Traffic commissioners must judge each individual case on its merits, and it is up to the traffic commissioner concerned, having full regards to all the circumstances, to decide whether revocation or another course is preferable in a particular case. The traffic commissioners and their deputies have regular meetings, however, to discuss the general handling of cases, and the senior traffic commissioner issues guidelines on specific aspects of the legislation, in order to promote consistency.

Hedge Planting

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure the maximum provision of hedge planting on the boundaries of new and widened roads for which his Department has a responsibility.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. John Fraser, dated 23 January 1995:

The Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the provision of hedges along trunk roads and motorways.

The Highways Agency fully recognises the importance that hedgerows can have in integrating roads into the adjoining landscape, and the benefits they can bring to nature conservation. For this reason we are keen to see hedgerows retained, and in some cases restored, along boundaries wherever possible.

However, due to the difficulties associated with gaining access to maintain properly boundary hedgerows and fencing, it is our usual practice to provide hedgerows as accommodation works through negotiation with adjacent landowners. We estimate that, on average, around 100km of hedgerow are put back into the landscape in this way each year.

Any feature provided as an accommodation work becomes the property of the landowner once the establishment maintenance is complete, usually after three years. Because of this, some landowners are unwilling to accept hedge planting and we are not empowered to offer any inducements to persuade them to do so. In exceptional circumstances, where hedgerows are deemed essential to the integration of the road, and landowners are unwilling to accept hedge planting as an accommodation work, we may therefore undertake to plant hedges and maintain them throughout the life of a road scheme.

Advice on the use of the hedgerows in landscape design is included in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, Volume 10 (the Good Roads Guide), a copy of which is in the House of Commons library.

Driving Skills Training

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to encourage the use of

driving skills training as a response to driving without due care and attention offences.

Mr. Norris: We have no training plans related specifically to drivers who have committed offences, but my right hon. Friend will shortly be launching a voluntary training scheme for drivers who have recently passed the driving test. I welcome the fact that certain police forces are providing driver rectification schemes.

London Transport (Funding)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what sum is available to London Transport in its current financial year for the support of services considered desirable for social reasons; what criteria are applied by him or adopted by London Regional Transport; and what is the appropriate level of support in pence per passenger mile on those services.

Mr. Norris: The total Government grant available to London Transport in the current financial year is £373 million, excluding the ring-fenced provision for new lines. London Transport is responsible for decisions on the allocation of Government grant and its other resources, and on the general level and structure of services. Social benefits are among the factors taken into account by London Transport in so doing. There is no presumption in favour of any particular level of support per passenger mile.

Accident Prevention

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he is giving to the research findings of Douglas Stewart of the department of engineering at the university of Aberdeen in relation to accident prevention for child pedestrians and the use of pedestrian guard rails.

Mr. Norris: The Department is aware of Dr. Stewart's research on these subjects. Our research programme into accident causation will continue to look at ways of effectively evaluating these and other initiatives.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport from which individuals and organisations he seeks advice on the design of road curves.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Tam Dalyell, dated 23 January 1995:

The Minister for Local Transport and Road Safety, Mr. Stephen Norris, has asked me to write to you in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about advice on the design of road curves.

The Agency and previously the Department of Transport have provided advice on the design of road curves for many years. This advice reflects the results of monitoring the performance of the network and special studies which have been carried out, in the main, by the Transport Research Laboratory.

Additionally, experience abroad is monitored through our various contacts, e.g., Members of the Permanent International Association of Road Congresses, and relevant technical papers are examined to see if any points emerge which require follow up.

Finally the requirements are exposed to peer group review from time to time through professional meetings etc. Where the Highway Agency's engineers find fully substantial evidence that the advice is in need of amendment then revised guidance is issued. There is full liaison with the Scottish Office, Welsh Office and DOENI over their requirements.

Unmanned Crossings

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the accident between a minibus and a train on the East Suffolk line at the Brampton level crossing on 21 December 1994; and what changes he is proposing to order for unmanned crossings as a consequence.

Mr. Watts: The collision between the 09.05 Ipswich to Lowestoft Sprinter train and a camper van occurred at about 10.15 am on 21 December on the automatic, open-level crossing at Brampton station, Suffolk. There was no derailment nor any injury to those on board the train. The driver of the van was seriously injured and was taken to hospital; the passengers, six children, were shaken but uninjured.

The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate and Railtrack are investigating the circumstances of this collision. There are no plans to alter the protection at this crossing at present. Railtrack and the Health and Safety Executive will continue to conduct publicity campaigns and research on level crossing safety.

Opencast Coal (Transport)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ensure the transport of opencast coal by rail rather than road.

Mr. Watts: It is for local authorities to consider the use of rail and other alternatives to road when appraising planning applications for opencast coal extraction. The Government provide grants for the use of rail for freight where justified by environmental and other benefits.

Rail Freight

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what volume and value of freight was carried by British railways for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Watts: This information is contained in tables 1.12 and 5.11 of "Transport Statistics Great Britain 1994", a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Questions

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the reason for the delay in replying in full to the hon. Member for Pembroke's question, tabled on 17 November 1994, for which the hon. Member received a holding answer on 23 November 1994.

Mr. Norris: A number of errors occurred in the processing of this question. I am writing to the hon. Member with full details and an apology.

Railway Station, Stratford

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions and on what dates he, Ministers or former Ministers in his Department met persons in Stratford, London, to discuss matters relating to the implications of building a new railway station at Stratford.

Dr. Mawhinney: There have been numerous meetings between present and former Ministers in my Department and persons interested in the implications of providing a station on the channel tunnel rail link at Stratford. I will be

meeting representatives of the Stratford Promoter Group shortly about their proposals for a station.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions and on what dates he or Ministers or former Ministers in his Department informally met representatives of Decision Makers Ltd. to discuss matters relating to the development of a station at Stratford.

Dr. Mawhinney: Neither I nor my ministerial colleagues have held any such meetings to discuss matters relating to the development of a station at Stratford; records of the informal meetings of former Ministers are not kept by my Department.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions in the last six months civil servants in his Department met persons representative of interests in Stratford to discuss matters relating to proposals for a new Stratford station.

Dr. Mawhinney: There have been many meetings between officials in my Department and persons whose interests include a station on the channel tunnel rail link at Stratford.

Railway Station, Ebbsfleet

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date he was personally briefed on Ebbsfleet by representatives of Decision Makers Ltd. either formally or informally.

Dr. Mawhinney: I have received no such briefing.

Through Ticketing

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many stations in *(a)* Grampian region, *(b)* Tayside region, *(c)* Highland region, *(d)* Scotland and *(e)* England will be capable of selling tickets to all destinations in the United Kingdom under the proposals published by the Rail Regulator, what is the ratio of stations to head of population for each of these areas, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts. *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* The number of stations capable of selling tickets to all destinations will be unchanged.

The Rail Regulator is currently consulting on a range of options for ticket retailing obligations at stations. No decisions on the number of stations required to sell through tickets will be made until the consultations exercise is completed.

WALES

Civil Servant Travel

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which airlines have been granted preferred carrier status for civil servant travel to overseas destinations.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office has not granted preferred carrier status to any airline. The preferred carrier for any particular civil servant's travel depends on the circumstances of the journey concerned and the value for money.

Farm Hygiene Inspections

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many farms were visited by Agricultural Development Advisory Service officers for the purposes of carrying out hygiene inspections in Wales in each year since 1990.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The number of dairy farm hygiene inspection visits undertaken by ADAS in Wales is as follows—in financial years:

Year	*Number*
1990–91	2,721
1991–92	2,888
1992–93	2,557
1993–94	2,790
1994–95—to 31 December 1994	1,939

Opencast Mining

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list of all sites for which approval has been sought for opencast mining operations, or on which opencast mining is currently taking place, indicating the latest estimate of annual tonnage extracted.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the total volume of opencast coal mined in Wales for each year since 1975 together with its percentage share of the total volume of coal mined and his comparable estimates for the next five years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Figures for the production of opencast coal are not held centrally. However, the County Planning Officers Society has published figures from 1983–84. The figures relating to Wales are as follows:

Year	*Thousand tonnes*	*Percentage of UK total*
1983–84	1,547	10.5
1984–85	1,738	11.7
1985–86	2,174	14.2
1986–87	1,522	10.4
1987–88	1,677	10.3
1988–89	1,748	9.7
1989–90	2,088	11.2
1990–91	1,865	10.2
1991–92	2,402	12.6
1992–93	2,423	13.6
1993–94	2,504	15.4

The future production of opencast coal in Wales will depend on the commercial plans of the coal operators and planning decisions.

Dental Services

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many salaried dentists were employed by each family health service authority in Wales in December 1994; and how many unfilled vacancies there were.

Mr. Richards: On 1 December 1994 there were three salaried dentists in post in Dyfed, Gwynedd and Powys. There were three unfilled vacancies in Gwynedd.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dentists in Wales were providing NHS treatment in each of the family health services authority areas in each year since December 1990.

Mr. Richards: Information, relating to the number of dentists at 30 September, is given in the table:

Number of dentists providing NHS treatment[1]

FHSA	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Clwyd	111	105	102	114	117
Dyfed	98	101	105	104	105
Gwent	125	139	135	135	138
Gwynedd	69	65	66	67	66
Mid Glamorgan	134	123	133	126	125
Powys	34	36	35	34	33
South Glamorgan	131	129	127	133	133
West Glamorgan	135	134	128	130	132
Wales	837	832	831	843	849

[1] Principals, assistants and vocational trainees. Each dentist is included in the FHSA in which the majority of time is spent.

Mr. Ainger : To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent on providing the services of salaried dentists, including all establishment costs, employed by each Welsh family health services authority in 1992–93, 1993–94 and to date in 1994–95.

Mr. Richards: Expenditure on salaried dentists has been incurred by three FHSAs in Wales. Details of these are as follows:

	1993–94 £	*1994–95 (to 31.12.94)* £
Dyfed FHSA:		
Remuneration	16,553	17,271
Expenses	66,789	28,206
	83,342	45,477
Gwynedd FHSA:		
Remuneration	18,228	18,702
Expenses	83,103	20,231
	101,331	38,933
Powys FHSA:		
Remuneration	nil	18,920
Expenses	nil	14,620
Wales	184,673	117,950

Sources: FHSA annual accounts for 1992–93, 1993–94, FHSA FIS returns for December 1994 and FHSA capital budgets for salaried dentists for 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Cormorants and Goosanders

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what requests he has from individuals and organisations to issue licences to shoot cormorants and goosanders on any Welsh river other than the River Wye; and what has been his decision in response to those requests.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Very few applications have been received to kill birds on other rivers in Wales in recent years and no licences have been issued.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the first licences were issued for the shooting of cormorants and goosanders on the River Wye.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: On 14 December 1994.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cormorants and goosanders have been shot on the River Wye following the issuing of licences by his Department.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Up until 18 January 1995, three goosanders and no cormorants had been shot under current licences.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which organisations requested that licences be issued for the shooting of cormorants and goosanders on the River Wye.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None. The applications were from individual fishery owners.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he requested advice from the Countryside Council for Wales on the issuing of licences for the shooting of cormorants and goosanders on the River Wye.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In November 1994 as far as the current licences are concerned.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice was sought by his Department before issuing licences for the shooting of cormorants and goosanders on the River Wye.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Advice and recommendations were provided by Agricultural Development Advisory Service wildlife consultants. These took account of comments by the Countryside Council for Wales and information provided by the National Rivers Authority.

A-level Students

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with representatives of Welsh local education authorities and further education colleges concerning competition for students wishing to follow A-level courses.

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend has had no discussions with Welsh LEAs or FE colleges regarding this matter.

Discretionary Awards

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration has been given to the Calonste Gulbenkian Foundation report into discretionary awards; and what action he proposes in the light of its findings.

Mr. Richards: I refer the hon. Member to the reply, given to the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Boswell) on 23 November *Official Report*, columns *177–98*, by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the maximum annual discretionary award available to *(a)* further education students and *(b)* higher education students in each of the county councils in Wales.

Mr. Richards: The amount and conditions of a discretionary awards for students on courses of further education or courses of higher education which are not designated for mandatory awards purposes are entirely a matter for local education authorities. LEAs may also make discretionary awards to students on designated courses of higher education who are personally ineligible

to receive mandatory awards. The amount and conditions of such an award must be the same as for a mandatory award for that course.

Further Education Access Fund

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much of the total Welsh further education access fund each further education college received on behalf of its students in 1992–93, 1993–94 and to date in 1994–95.

Mr. Richards: Details of allocations of access funds to further education institutions in Wales in the years 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95 are given in the following table.

Allocation of access funds

Institution	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £
North East Wales Institute[1]	68,218	—	—
Llandrillo Technical College	17,045	24,302	32,304
Welsh College of Horticulture	3,754	3,961	5,274
Coleg Llysfasi College	1,064	1,280	1,705
Carmarthen College of Technology and Art	19,155	19,155	24,955
Pembrokeshire College	9,955	9,955	13,047
Coleg Ceredigion	5,504	6,015	8,010
Welsh Agricultural College[1]	6,554	—	—
Gwent Tertiary College	38,325	40,976	54,566
Gwynedd Technical College[2]	5,349	7,385	9,835
Coleg Pencraig[2]	1,408	2,263	3,014
Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor	2,471	3,425	4,560
Merthyr Tydfil College	4,536	7,385	9,835
Aberdare College	5,881	5,881	7,217
Bridgend College of Technology	7,033	7,266	9,676
Rhondda College	1,001	1,221	1,626
Ystrad Mynach College	6,725	8,427	11,223
Pontypridd Technical College	7,570	9,112	12,135
Pencoed College	1,408	2,144	2,855
Coleg Powys	5,067	5,067	5,433
Coleg Glan Hafren	10,031	10,031	12,631
Barry College	9,978	9,978	12,571
Swansea College	7,914	7,914	9,636
Gorseinon College	1,720	1,727	2,300
Neath College	5,349	5,349	6,464
Afan College	1,720	1,720	2,221
Coleg Harlech	4,723	4,723	5,512
Deeside College[3]	—	11,405	15,188
St. David's RC 6th Form College[4]	—	417	555
Yale College[4]	—	715	18,916

[1] Since 1 April 1993 NEWI and WAC have been incorporated, higher education institutions

[2] Amalgamated as Coleg Menai on 1 August 1994

[3] Incorporated 1 April 1993 as a result of transfer of some FE provision from NEWI

[4] Joined FEFCW funded sector 1 April 1993

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many individual applications were made to the further education access fund in 1992–93, 1993–94 and to date in 1994–95; and which further education colleges those students were attending.

Mr. Richards: Further education colleges in Wales received a total of 2,493 applications for assistance from the access funds in academic year 1992–93. Details of the applications received by each further education college are given in the following table. Similar information for academic years 1993–94 and 1994–95 is not yet available.

Institution	*Number of students applying for assistance from the access funds in the academic year 1992—93*
North East Wales Institute	649
Llandrillo Technical College	184
Welsh College of Horticulture	28
Coleg Llysfasi College	10
Carmarthen College of Technology and Art	85
Pembrokeshire College	62
Coleg Ceredigion	41
Welsh Agricultural College	48
Gwent Tertiary College	353
Gwynedd Technical College[1]	88
Coleg Pencraig[1]	31
Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor	19
Merthyr Tydfil College	72
Aberdare College	63
Bridgend College of Technology	57
Rhondda College	14
Ystrad Mynach College	116
Pontypridd Technical College	143
Pencoed College	11
Coleg Powys	52
Coleg Glan Hafren	106
Barry College	72
Swansea College	15
Gorseinon College	18
Neath College	20
Afan College	15
Coleg Harlech	121
Total	2,493

[1] Amalgamated as Coleg Menai on 1 August 1994.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what criteria are used to decide if a student is eligible for assistance from the further education access fund.

Mr. Richards: The Further Education Funding Council pays grants to institutions within the further education sector in Wales so that they may provide financial help to students whose access to further education might be inhibited by financial considerations or who, for whatever reason including physical or other disabilities, face financial difficulties.

In order to be eligible for assistance from the access funds, further education students must satisfy the residence requirement, be following full-time—including sandwich—courses of further or adult education and be aged 19 or over. It is for each institution to decide its own criteria and procedures for considering applications and making payments of access funds to eligible students, subject to the terms and conditions specified by the council and any other guidance from the council.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he has in mind for the review of the role and function of the fundholding project management group at the end of the first year.

Mr. Redwood: The group will conduct its own review after the end of its first year of operation. I will then consider its future in the light of that review and circumstances obtaining at the time.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the number, date and place of the meetings of the general practitioner fundholder steering group since 23 March 1994; what sub-committees have

been set up and to cover which topics; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the papers and studies commissioned and actions taken to implement the recommendations of the general practitioner fundholding project management group.

Mr. Redwood: The GPFH steering group has met on three occasions at the Hensol conference centre on 10 May, 13 September and 15 November 1994. No sub-committees have been set up.

The following topics have been considered:

Steering Group Terms of Reference
Weighted Capitation
Financial Management
Survey of GP practices
Fair Purchasing

Most of this work is continuing.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the initiatives by the general practitioner fundholding project management group, taken in *(a)* promotion of general practitioner fundholding to non-fundholders, *(b)* setting up a strategic planning process, *(c)* meeting the need for financial control and an acceptable method of determining allocations, *(d)* evaluating the scheme and *(e)* evaluating the implications of the onset of unitary authorities on the relationship with fundholders.

Mr. Redwood: The GP fundholding project management group has no executive function. Any action required in respect of views or recommendations arising from its work will be a matter for my Department.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of the executive committee of the general practitioner fundholding project management group and its membership and functions.

Mr. Redwood: The GPFH steering group does not have an executive committee.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the arrangements for the Welsh conference on general practitioner fundholding mentioned in his letter of 23 March 1994 to all general practitioner fundholders.

Mr. Redwood: The conference was held on 14 June 1994. The Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), gave the keynote address and other speeches dealt with matters relating to the scheme. GP Fundholders and representatives from DHAs, FHSAs, and hospitals responded to an invitation widely distributed in the service.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the percentage figures for *(a)* brand name and *(b)* generic prescribing for the average of all general practitioner fundholders in Wales in (i) the second year before they became fundholders, (ii) the year before they became fundholders, (iii) the first year after they became fundholders and (iv) the average of each subsequent year;

(2) if he will list the percentage brand name and generic prescribing ratio for the average of all general practitioner fundholders in *(a)* the second year before they became fundholders, *(b)* the year before they became fundholders, *(c)* the first year of fundholding and *(d)* the average for all subsequent years;

(3) if he will list the average value of capital projects at the surgery premises of *(a)* general practitioner fundholders and *(b)* non–fundholding general practitioners, in each of the past three years.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the percentage figures for *(a)* brand name and *(b)* generic prescribing for (i) general practitioner fundholders and (ii) non–general practitioner fundholders in each family health service authority in Wales for each of the past three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Redwood: Information is not available in the form requested. The percentages of generic prescribing in each family health services authority in Wales is as follows:

	October 1992	*October 1993*	*October 1994*
Clwyd Fundholders	40.89	50.00	53.66
FHSA	40.23	44.28	47.23
Dyfed Fundholders	50.87	52.87	51.62

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will specify the policy objectives of the general practitioner fundholding project management group, relating to the NHS in Wales and the other developments relevant to the development of the general practitioner fundholding scheme.

Mr. Redwood: I wrote to the hon. Member on 17 January about the GP fundholding project management group's terms of reference and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to institute a full valuation of the surgery premises at *(a)* general practitioner fundholders and *(b)* non–fundholders; what estimate his Department has made of the average value of surgery premises of (i) general practitioner fundholders and (ii) non–fundholders; what estimate his Department has made of the rate of change of that average capital value of (1) general practitioner fundholders and (2) non–fundholders' surgery premises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: General practitioners are independent self employed contractors in the NHS. Under their terms of service, they themselves are required to provide adequate practice premises from which to see their patients. The capital value of, and investment in, the premises they own is a matter for them, and their interest in any premises they may rent is between them and their landlord. It would not be appropriate therefore for me to institute a full valuation of their practice premises.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list short-term loans given to each NHS trust in Wales, since its inception, stating what the interest rate was, what the term was, if security was requested and provided and for what purpose the loan was requested; and if he will detail any requests that were refused and the purpose for which they were sought.

Mr. Redwood: Information on short term loans to NHS trusts in Wales is as follows:

Trust	Loan (£000)	Interest rate per cent.	Term (days)
Nevill Hall and District	220	5.2	10
	230	5.3	7
	175	5.2	10
	175	5.3	7
	175	5.2	12
	175	5.3	7
Pembrokeshire	150	5.2	14
	100	5.3	7
	300	5.7	10
	200	5.8	11
Morriston	1,029	5.1	92
	1,162	5.2	124
	800	5.3	31
	850	5.4	41
Gwynedd Community Health	580	5.0	29
	150	6.2	111
	200	6.4	99
Bridgend and District	1,000	6.2	121
	1,000	6.3	91
South East Wales Ambulance	500	5.3	183
	500	6.2	155
North Wales Ambulance	130	5.1	60
Derwen	105	5.2	13
Rhondda Healthcare	300	5.2	14
Clwydian Community Care	900	5.3	178
	500	6.0	182
Velindre	15	5.2	14
Gwynedd Hospitals	500	5.3	10

Security is required only in the case of commercial loans. All short–term loans to NHS trusts in Wales have been provided by my Department for financial management purposes. No such applications have been refused.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what was the absenteeism rate for the Veterinary Medicines Directorate in 1991, 1992 and 1993;

(2) what was the absenteeism rate for the Agricultural Development Advisory Service in 1991, 1992 and 1993;

(3) what was the absenteeism rate for the Intervention Board in 1991, 1992 and 1993;

(4) what was the absenteeism rate for the Central Veterinary Laboratory in 1991, 1992 and 1993;

(5) what was the absenteeism rate for the Central Science Laboratory in 1991, 1992 and 1993;

(6) what was the absenteeism rate for the Pesticides Safety Directorate in 1991, 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Waldegrave: These matters are the responsibilities of the chief executives concerned. I have asked them to write to the hon. Member direct.

Letter from Dr. J. M. Rutter to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 20 December 1994:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about absenteeism rates in the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

The VMD has a total staff of 102 as at 1 December 1994. In terms of absenteeism related to sickness, the information you requested for the Directorate is as follows:

Year	Percentage
1991	3.4
1992	2.6
1993	3.0

Letter from Dr. J. M. Walsh to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 23 January 1995:

Recently, you tabled a Parliamentary Question (PQ 240) enquiring after the absenteeism rate for ADAS in 1991/1993. Subsequently, you requested additional data for 1994. The figures are as follows:

Year	Average days per person
1991	6.5
1992	6.7
1993	[1]8.5
1994	7.8 (year to 14 December 1994)

[1] Introduction of new work recording system.

Please note that these figures contain many reasons for absenteeism such as sick leave, maternity leave, special leave for other purposes.

Letter from Guy Stapleton to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 23 January 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your question about the absenteeism rate for the Intervention Board in 1991, 1992 and 1993, as the matter is one within my operational responsibility.

Sick absence rates in the Intervention Board for the financial years 199–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93, calculated as a percentage of total man years, were:

Year	Percentage
1990–91	4.4
1991–92	3.9
1992–93	6.7

The increase in 1992–93 was mainly the result of a relatively small number of the Agency's staff who were then on long-term sick leave. Most of these officers have since retired on medical grounds.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 23 January 1995:

To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what was the absenteeism rate for the Central Veterinary Laboratory in 1991, 1992 and 1993.

As you know the Minister has asked that I write to you direct with the answer to your question.

CVL was launched as an Executive Agency on 2 April 1990. Information on absences since that date is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Letter from Dr. P. I. Stanley to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 23 January 1995:

Absenteeism Rate in the Central Science Laboratory 1991–93

The Central Science Laboratory (CSL) was launched as an executive agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 1 April 1992. Questions relating to staff when they formed part of the core Department before the Agency's launch are for the Minister to consider.

Since becoming an Agency CSL has kept management information, including details of absenteeism (unauthorised absences), on a financial year basis. During the 1992–93 financial year there were no unauthorised absences and during 1993–94 there was a single incidence of eight days duration involving a junior member of the scientific staff. This was out of a total number of staff in post of 488.

On 1 April 1994 CSL was re-launched as an enlarged Agency following the merger with the Food Science Laboratories at Aberdeen and Norwich. To date in the current financial year there have been no instances of absenteeism in the enlarged Agency.

Letter from G. K. Bruce to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 23 January 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Question about absenteeism rates in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate.

The Directorate was launched as an executive agency on 1 April 1993. Information on absences since that date is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Questions relating to staff when they formed part of the core Department before the agency's launch are for the Minister to consider.

Flooding

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 29 November, *Official Report,* column *614,* what evidence he has that agricultural practices which leave land without grass or crop cover can lead to an increased rate of run-off.

Mr. Jack: Grass or, indeed, any kind of crop cover has the ability to retain water, thereby leading to a natural decrease in the rate of run-off. The precise effect of crop cover on rates of run-off will however vary according to a number of factors including slope of the land, type of soil, rate of rainfall and agricultural practices.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 29 November, *Official Report,* column *613,* what assessment he has made of the need for extensive surveys and flood modelling to assess if more run-off from the land is occurring and flood damage is becoming more frequent and widespread.

Mr. Jack: Changes in flood response in any particular catchment depend on a combination of factors notably land use, topography and climate. Ministry research carried out by the Institute of Hydrology suggests little evidence of any significant overall trend in the rate of runoff from land over time. In the light of this, the Ministry has no plans for more extensive surveys over and above those being undertaken by the National Rivers Authority to inform local planning authorities of flood risk areas.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Deva: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that other member states comply with the rules in the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Jack: Ensuring member state compliance with Community rules, including those concerning the CAP, is the responsibility of the European Commission.

The most effective sanction against non-compliance with CAP regulations is the Commission's powers to "disallow"—not reimburse—member states' expenditure which it believes was not in accordance with the rules. In December 1994, in its decision on the clearance of the 1991 CAP accounts, the Commission disallowed £1.2 billion of member states' 1991 CAP expenditure—almost 5 per cent. of the total. The Government will continue to do everything possible to ensure that the Commission makes full and proper use of these powers. For example, as a result of the United Kingdom's legal challenge to Commission disallowance decisions relating to breaches of the EC milk quota legislation by Italy, Spain and Greece, the disallowance due is increased by over 50 per cent.

We also fully support a measure soon to be implemented which, among other things, seeks to speed up the clearance of accounts process and improve the financial management of the CAP in all member states.

In addition, we are always ready to press the Commission to take action against another member state whenever evidence of breaches of the rules comes to light. Our agricultural attachés in other member states have specific instructions to be alert to such breaches. As a result of our initiatives, the Commission has recently ruled illegal state aids to French pig producers and Irish mushroom growers, requiring the aids to be repaid with interest.

Farm Hygiene Inspections

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farms were visited by Agricultural Development and Advisory Service officers for the purposes of carrying out hygiene inspections in England in each year since 1990.

Mrs. Browning: The number of farm hygiene inspections carried out by ADAS officers in England in each financial year since 1990 is as follows:

	Number
1990–91	14,457
1991–92	12,112
1992–93	12,896
1993–94	12,602
1994[1]	9,203

[1] April–December

Fishing (Spanish Vessels)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what scientific advice he has received on the impact on fish stocks of 40 Spanish vessels fishing in the Irish box.

Mr. Jack: Throughout the negotiations on the integration of Spain and Portugal into the common fisheries policy I have been advised by the fisheries scientists at the Ministry's directorate of fisheries research at Lowestoft.

Spanish fishing in the Irish box from 1 January 1996 will be constrained not only by the number of vessels they are permitted there but by their quotas for the relevant International Council for the Exploration of the Seas

zones, and by any effort control measures which may be adopted in relation to their fleet during 1995.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 12 January, *Official Report*, column *210*, what was the destination of the 6,662 cattle exported for immediate slaughter; and if all the animals were over six months of age.

Mrs. Browning: The destinations—and number of animals—are: France, 83; the Netherlands, 233; Republic of Ireland, 32; and Northern Ireland, 6,314.

European Community rules prohibit the export from the United Kingdom to other member states of cattle which are over six months of age—unless they were born outside the UK. Animals consigned from Great Britain to Northern Ireland are included in the ANIMO figures because health certification is required for such movements, and are not subject to an upper age limit.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of *(a)* lorries carrying live animals and *(b)* animals, by species, exported live through Dover to Zeebrugge on the weekend of 13 to 15 January, stating whether these animals were being exported for (i) immediate slaughter, (ii) further fattening or (iii) breeding only.

Mrs. Browning: Such information could be provided only by the ferry companies concerned.

ENVIRONMENT

Area Cost Adjustments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how much more would be distributed to *(a)* Humberside and *(b)* east midlands counties if the area cost adjustment was adjusted as proposed by the Association of County Councils; and if he will make a statement on his reasons for rejecting such an adjustment;

(2) what were his reasons for rejecting the Association of County Councils' proposals in July 1994 for reassessing the area cost adjustment on the basis of actual spending; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what is his estimate of the change in the area cost adjustment if it was based on actual rather than theoretical labour cost differentials as indicated by local authority pay scales and employee budgets; what are his reasons for using theoretical costs; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what is his estimate of the reduction in the gain to the south-east in the current year through the area cost adjustment of basing it only on London weighting;

(5) what are his reasons for rejecting the proposals made by the Association of County Councils in 1993 for adjusting the area cost adjustment on the basis of the actual payments to teachers, firemen and police; how much would have been deducted from the adjustment to the south-east if he had done; and if he will make a statement;

(6) when he expects his new review of costs as a new base for the area cost adjustment to be *(a)* completed and *(b)* considered; on what grounds it is being carried out on the basis of travel-to-work areas rather than local authority areas; and what are the actual costs and wages for local authority employees or average costs;

(7) what evidence and research he relied on to demonstrate the existence of a general labour market requiring higher wages to attract good-quality staff in the south-east; and what assessment he makes of the margin of difference this makes in actual average wages of *(a)* teachers, *(b)* firemen and *(c)* local authority manuals between London and the south-east and the east midlands.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The area cost adjustment is based mainly on evidence of differences between areas in rates of pay in occupations within which local authorities are likely to have to compete for employees. The evidence of rates of pay is taken from the new earnings survey, and is updated each year.

The Association of County Councils has criticised the scale of the area cost adjustment. In 1993, it suggested that the adjustment should, in the case of teachers, police, and firefighters, take account only of London weighting payments. In 1994, the association suggested that other specific employment-related costs might also be included, although it believed that, even if this were done, the total of the area cost adjustment would be less than it is.

We have misgivings, however, about the association's proposals in 1993 to base the area cost adjustment on London weighting payments alone because this would not reflect all the variations in employment costs faced by local authorities. We also have misgivings about the association's proposals in 1994 to identify and cost all the extra expenses related to operating in London and the south-east. This is partly because we seek to avoid reflecting in standard spending assessments the actual expenditures of authorities; and partly because we would be reluctant to introduce additional judgments into the determination of the SSA formula. We remain to be persuaded that a generally agreed list of extra costs could be identified and costed objectively, without reference to evidence of prevailing rates of pay in the local employment market of the kind which already forms the basis of the area cost adjustment.

The association's observations in 1994 were not developed into a methodology which could be applied in the calculation of the area cost adjustment. It is therefore not possible to say what the area cost adjustment would have been if the association's views had formed the basis of the calculation. Nor does the Department currently have sufficient information to calculate the level of the area cost adjustment if it were based solely on actual wage payments, local authority pay scales or London weighting. Any change in the basis of the area cost adjustment would also affect other aspects of the formula for calculating SSAs. For example, there would need to be a reappraisal of the weighting given to additional education needs.

Nevertheless, my hon. Friend has discussed with the Association of County Councils its views on the area cost adjustment. We are prepared to consider further any proposals they may make for an alternative methodology for calculating the adjustment.

We also propose to commission research this year which may enable the area cost adjustment to take account of variations in rates of pay between travel-to-work areas in all parts of England. Travel-to-work areas are being considered because they may be a better reflection of the pattern of local labour markets than are the administrative areas of local authorities. The progress of the research will

depend both on the availability of the necessary data and the success of the researchers in developing a method by which it could be used in the area cost adjustment. We will consider the findings of the research, once they are available.

Departmental Administration

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what assessment he made of the advantages and disadvantages of moving Cumbria from the northern standard region into the integrated north-west region;

(2) what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of transferring Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey and West Sussex from the south-east standard region into the south-east integrated region;

(3) what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of transferring Merseyside from the north-west standard region and creating a free standing integrated Merseyside region;

(4) what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of transferring Greater London from the south-east standard region to the Greater London integrated region;

(5) what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of transferring Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk from the East Anglian standard region and Bedfordshire, Essex and Herfordshire from the south-east standard region into the new integrated eastern region.

Sir Paul Beresford: The 10 Government offices for the regions brought together the existing regional offices of the Departments of Employment, Trade and Industry, Transport and the Environment. The proposed boundaries of the new offices harmonised the existing departmental regional boundaries and were adopted, after due consultation, when the new offices opened for business in April 1994. The boundaries are depicted in my Department's annual report, available from the House of Commons Library. There is no direct relationship between the boundaries of the Government offices for the regions and the standard regions, which are used primarily for statistical purposes.

Council Tax

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against council tax bandings are currently outstanding *(a)* nationally and *(b)* by each valuation office.

Mr. Curry: Some 959,101 proposals to alter the valuation list had been received in England by the end of December 1994, of which 229, 084 were outstanding. I am placing in the Library a table which breaks these totals down by valuation office region and office.

Railway Station, Stratford

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions and on what dates he or Ministers or former Ministers in his Department met persons representative of interests in Stratford, east London, to discuss matters relating to proposals for a new Stratford station.

Sir Paul Beresford: Matters relating to the proposal for an intermediate station on the new channel tunnel rail link at Stratford in east London have been raised with various Ministers in this Department in a variety of meetings over the last two years. For example, in that period, there have been four meetings of the East Thames Forum, in which Ministers responsible for urban regeneration have met the leaders of east London local authorities. The then Minister with responsibility for urban regeneration, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton, (Sir G. Young), visited the Stratford site in August 1993 and he and the Minister of State with special responsibility for the east Thames corridor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon, (Mr. Curry), received a presentation from the Stratford promoters in November 1993.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions and on what dates he or Ministers or former Ministers in his Department have met persons in Stratford, London to discuss matters relating to the regeneration of east London.

Sir Paul Beresford: Stratford is the focal point of a number of major regeneration initiatives in east London. These includes Stratford city challenge, a successful single regeneration budget bid and the European regional development fund funded "East London and the Lea Valley Corridor" programme. Stratford is also an important part of the Government's Thames gateway initiative. Since May 1992, the earliest date for which information is readily available, the Secretary of State and departmental Ministers have visited Stratford in connection with these regeneration initiatives as follows:

Secretary of State

Regeneration of east London conference, Old Town hall, Stratford, 19 October 1993.

Opening of new Stratford bus station, 16 November 1994.

Sir George Young

East London housing association, Victoria street, Stratford, 9 March 1993.

Marking the city challenge boundary, 2 August 1993.

Annual review, Stratford city challenge, 1 February 1994.

Mr. Robert B. Jones

Tour of Stratford city challenge, 25 November 1994.

Announcement of successful SRB bids, Old Town hall, Stratford, 6 December 1994.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions in the last six months civil servants in his Department met persons representative of interests in Stratford to discuss matters relating to proposals for a new Stratford station.

Sir Paul Beresford: In the last six months, officials from my Department have met officers from the London borough of Newham and others with an interest in the proposed intermediate station on the new channel tunnel rail link at Stratford on a number of occasions. Similar meetings have been held with those with an interest in other intermediate stations. For example, as part of the public consultation exercise on the Thames gateway planning framework, published on 7 September 1994 and more generally. Officials from the Department's Thames gateway task force have regularly attended, as observers, meetings of the Stratford Station Promoters Group.

Railway Station, Ebbsfleet

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date Ministers in his Department were briefed by Decision Makers Ltd. either formally or informally on the international station at Ebbsfleet.

Sir Paul Beresford: Ministers naturally meet a wide range of people at social occasions to which they are invited, and it is inevitable that issues of current concern are raised during conversations at such occasions. However, the Secretary of State and Ministers in this Department have had no briefing meetings with Decision Makers Ltd. on the proposed intermediate station on the channel tunnel rail link at Ebbsfleet. They were fully briefed on the station proposals during visits to the local authority areas concerned, when they met councillors, officers and representatives of the landowners, Blue Circle Properties. The Minister of State with special responsibility for Thames gateway met representatives of Dartford borough council in June 1994, to discuss the regeneration of Kent Thamesside. Representatives of Decision Makers Ltd. were present at that meeting as advisers to Dartford council.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Open Government

30. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will establish an investigation into the differential charges made to applicants under the code of practice on official information by non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: No.

40. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what action is being taken to give the public more access to Government information.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: We are continuing to implement the policy set down in the White Paper on open government.

Public Appointments

36. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will indicate the percentage of the total number of appointments to public bodies who are (i) women, (ii) of Asian origin, (iii) of Afro-Caribbean origin and (iv) of other ethnic minority origin.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: As I announced to the House on Friday, the proportion of public appointments held by women is 30 per cent.; and 2.6 per cent. of appointments are held by black and Asian people.

County Palatinate

37. **Mr. Elletson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he will next visit the County Palatinate to discuss science.

Mr. David Hunt: Shortly.

Civil Service Morale

38. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what new proposals he has to improve morale in the civil service.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The best way to improve morale is to allow staff to perform to the best of their abilities in their chosen career. The Government's civil service reforms enable staff to focus their attention on delivering high quality public services efficiently and effectively, with a minimum of central oversight.

Research Council Staffing

41. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the progress of Sir John Cadogan's review of the staffing of the research councils.

Mr. David Hunt: Sir John Cadogan is concluding his discussions with the research councils regarding their plans for 1995. Thereafter, the continuing search for improvements in efficiency and effectiveness is an essential part of the Government's commitment to ensure that the costs and complexities of administering the research councils' systems are minimised.

Citizens Charters

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what further citizens charters he is proposing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The Northern Ireland further and higher education charters will be published later this year. This will bring the total number of charters to 42.

In addition, public service organisations continue to develop their existing service standards and a number of revised charters will be published later in the year. These include the contributors charter for national insurance payers, the council tenants charter and the court service charter, which will replace the existing courts charter.

SCOTLAND

M77

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what expressions of concern he has received regarding proposed funding for the Ayr road route, M77, from the European Commission.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There have been no formal exchanges with the European Commission regarding funding for the M77 Ayr road route. However, the issue of funding of roads was discussed in the context of negotiations about the western Scotland single programming document, which was approved by the Commission on 16 December 1994. The SPD provides that support from the European regional development fund will be available for projects which construct or improve access roads to new or existing sites for industrial, business or tourism development where there is demonstrable potential for significant job-creating investments.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he has had with the European Commission about the environmental impact assessment for the Ayr road route, M77.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The United Kingdom authorities have received an informal letter of inquiry

from the Commission on that subject and we propose to respond by the end of this month.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he took to ensure that a proper environmental impact assessment was carried out before he gave consent for the Ayr road route, M77.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A full and wide-ranging public local inquiry was undertaken into the proposed road scheme in 1988. The environmental assessment of the scheme was presented by the joint promoters at the inquiry. The report of the inquiry, including a summary of the evidence and arguments, was submitted to my right hon. Friend before his decision on whether to proceed with the road proposals.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he has taken to secure European Commission funding for the Ayr road route, M77.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend does not intend to seek European Community funding for the trunk road sections of the proposed M77 Ayr road route for which he is responsible. It would be for Strathclyde regional council to decide whether to apply for funding for all or any part of the route for which it is responsible.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list which interested groups he consulted during the planning stage of the Ayr road route, M77; and what were the results of this consultation period.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: More than 50 organisations were consulted, including the National Trust for Scotland, the Countryside Commission for Scotland, regional, district and community councils, ScotRail and the National Farmers Union. The consultations showed general support for the proposals, but also identified some specific concerns. In those cases where the concerns could not be resolved by discussion, they were considered at the subsequent local public inquiry.

Scottish Renewables Obligation

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he has taken to ensure that genuine competition exists between potential contractors for the Scottish renewables obligation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: There was considerable interest in the first order under the scottish renewables obligation. A bulletin describing the arrangements for the SRO was issued by my officials in October 1993 to about 300 interested organisations and individuals. As a result, some 190 projects were submitted for consideration. Following a technical and economic scrutiny of these projects, about 140 were judged to be acceptable by the Office of Electricity Regulation. These formed the subject of the advice given to my right hon. Friend by the Director General of Electricity Supply. I understand that 30 of these 140 projects have now been offered contracts by the public electricity supply companies under the terms of the first order. There was therefore very keen competition for contracts across the whole range of technologies included.

Bridges

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he has taken as a result of the BD21 directive of 1985.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The bridge assessment and strengthening programme to upgrade all sub-standard bridges on the trunk road network started in 1988 and is expected to be completed by 1998. This is in line with the rest of the United Kingdom. The regional councils were advised to implement a similar programme for regional roads in December 1988 and the Scottish Office Industry Department has taken this into account in the capital allocations to individual regions.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from the Scottish Road Haulage Association in relation to the strengthening of bridges.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office Industry Department has had no representations from the Road Haulage Association Scottish division in relation to the strengthening of bridges.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the attendance figures for 1994 reported by the national museum and galleries in Scotland, broken down to the individual institutions but including their substations, with the percentage change from 1993.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 19 January 1995]:* The information is as follows:

	1994	*Percentage change since 1993*
National museums of Scotland	1,120,240	+4
National galleries of Scotland	883,928	+18

Figures for the national museums of Scotland relate to the Royal museum of Scotland, the museum of antiquities, the Scottish agricultural museum, the Scottish united services museum, the museum of flight, the museum of costume and the gasworks museum. The national galleries of Scotland figures relate to the national gallery of Scotland, the Scottish national portrait gallery and the Scottish national gallery of modern art.

Youth Service

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what calculations he has made of the changes in levels of funding for the youth service in Scotland since 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* In Scotland, the youth service is part of local authority provision for community education. It is not possible to identify separately expenditure on the

youth service. Total expenditure by local authorities on community education in 1989–90 was £62 million rising to £79.2 million in 1992–93.

In addition, the Scottish Office Education Department administers a scheme of grants to voluntary organisations in the community education field. Grants paid to organisations engaged in the provision of youth services totalled £0.57 million in 1989–90 rising to £0.69 million in 1993–94.

Goats

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* goat producers and *(b)* goats there are in Scotland; and what financial assistance is available to goat producers in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* The number of goats recorded in the census at June 1994 was 11,123 kept on 1,047 agricultural units.

There are some grant assistance schemes which may be of interest to those who keep goats. Goat producers, provided that they meet the eligibility criteria, would qualify for grant under the farm and conservation grant scheme. There are also the marketing and development scheme and, in relation to goat milk and meat products, the EC processing and marketing grant scheme. Some financial assistance in objective 1 and 5b areas may also be available.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all sites in Scotland where low-level radioactive waste is dumped or stored; what steps are taken to ensure that no higher level waste is also included; and what measures are taken to protect the public from any potential dangers.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* The following landfill sites in Scotland are approved by Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate for the controlled burial of low level radioactive wastes from hospitals, universities and other small users and are still receiving these wastes:

Site	*Site location*
Kilgarth	Glasgow
Summerston	Glasgow
Dalmacoulter	Monklands
Braehead	Edinburgh
Melville Wood	North East Fife
Riverside	Dundee
Ness	Aberdeen
Lower Polmaise	Stirling
East Saltoun	East Lothian
Longman	Inverness

At AEA Technology's premises at Dounreay, low-level radioactive waste produced by activities on the site is disposed of by burial on site. Before disposal, detailed monitoring of waste takes place to ensure that only low level waste is disposed of by this route.

All wastes disposed of by these users are classified as low-level waste and the disposals take place in accordance with authorisations issued by Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Means-tested Benefits

8. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of his Department's expenditure on benefit is means-tested; and what was the figure 15 years ago.

Mr. Lilley: The percentage of my Department's expenditure on income-related benefits was 15.7 per cent. in 1979–80 and 34 per cent. in 1993–94.

Social Fund

9. **Mr. Keen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social fund grants, for each of the last three years for which figures are available, were awarded above the new maximum ceiling of £875.

Mr. Roger Evans: In 1992–93, 27,800 social fund funeral payments were made for amounts more than £875. There were 41,300 such payments in 1993–94 and 31,500 have been made so far in the current financial year.

Benefits (Post Office Payments)

13. **Sir John Hannam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to enable pensioners to choose to have their benefits paid through the Post Office.

Mr. Lilley: We are committed to giving pensioners the choice of payment directly into their bank or building society by automated credit transfer or at the post office. For pensioners and others who do not want to be paid in this way, we are planning significant improvements in the delivery of benefits at post offices. The post office network will be automated, and order books and girocheques replaced with a benefit payment card.

Automation will virtually eliminate instrument of payment fraud, produce administrative savings for the Department, and provide a more responsive service to our customers, as well as providing Post Office Counters Ltd. the opportunity to automate other counter business. We are looking to the private sector to suggest how the system might best achieve these objectives, and to design, build, finance and operate the system under a contract that would provide payment based on transaction volumes. I was able to announce on 9 December *Official Report,* column *385,* the names of five companies, some of which lead consortia, which have been invited to further develop their solutions.

26. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what forms of payment pensioners will be eligible to opt for when having their benefits paid through the Post Office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Pensioners will continue to be able to choose to be paid through the post office by using either automated credit transfer into girobank or National Savings bank accounts, or order books.

In future, there will be major changes for those who do not choose ACT. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced plans to automate the payment of benefits at post offices. Order books will eventually be replaced by a benefit payment card which will allow access to information held electronically. People paid by ACT will not be affected.

Child Support

17. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to extend the scope of the child support appeal tribunals.

20. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to reform the operation of the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to extend the scope of the child support appeal tribunals.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Members to the statement made earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

22. **Sir David Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to reply to the fifth report by the Social Security Select Committee of Session 1993–94 on the operation of the Child Support Act 1991, HC420; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: The Government have considered carefully the recent report of the Social Security Select Committee and today made their response. A copy is in the Library.

23. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many reduced benefit directions have been issued by the Child Support Agency to date.

Mr. Burt: From 5 April 1993 to 31 October 1994, the Child Support Agency referred 13,830 cases to the Benefits Agency to consider the implementation of a reduced benefit direction.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish a compliance cost assessment for the Child Support Act 1991.

Mr. Arbuthnot: We have published the compliance cost assessment for the Child Support Act 1991 today. The report highlights areas where the work of the agency affects employers and represents a cost to them. It has been produced in consultation with the DSS employers' panel and the DSS employers' sub-group for child support.

Copies of the compliance cost assessment have been placed in the Library.

Disabled People

19. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of people receiving income support assistance with their mortgage interest payments are people with disabilities.

Mr. Roger Evans: Approximately 14 per cent. of claimants currently receiving income support mortgage interest payments are receiving the disability premium.

21. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a further statement on the work of his Department's Maxwell pensions unit.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Maxwell pensions unit continues to provide substantial administrative support to the Maxwell pensioners trust and to work with all concerned to encourage the resolution of Maxwell pensions disputes. The unit will stay in business while it has useful work to do, although it clearly does not represent an infinite resource.

Occupational Pension Funds

24. **Ms Estelle Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to improve the accountability of occupational pension funds.

25. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to reform the operation of occupational pension funds.

Mr. Arbuthnot: We published our proposals in the Pensions Bill which was introduced in the House of Lords on 15 December 1994.

Maternity Grant (Blyth Valley)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women claimed maternity grant in Blyth Valley in the last year for which figures are available, and what is the estimated number of women who will receive social fund payments for maternity in the year 1993-94.

Mr. Roger Evans: Around 560,000 maternity grants were made in Great Britain in 1986–87, the last year in which the grants were awarded. The corresponding figures for Blyth Valley are not available.

The available figures on social fund maternity claims and payments for the Benefits Agency district office of Northumberland are set out in the table.

Year	*Number of maternity payments claimed in Northumberland district*	*Number of maternity payments awarded in Northumberland district*
1991–92	1,072	907
1992–93	1,160	988
1993–94	1,239	1,058

The total number of social fund maternity payments awarded in Great Britain in 1993–94 was 230,220; the number for 1994–95 is estimated at 312,900. Estimates cannot be made other than on a national basis.

Income Support

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the total number of claimants receiving assistance, *(b)* the average cost per claimant and *(c)* the total cost of assistance to (i) home owners, (ii) local authority tenants and (iii) private and housing association tenants, in receipt of income support towards their housing costs in each year since 1989.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the tables.

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
(i) Home owners					
Number of income support cases with mortgage interest included in the assessment	281,000	310,000	411,000	499,000	555,000
Average weekly cost	£24.16	£34.32	£44.41	£44.02	£42.17
Implied annual cost	£353 million	£553 million	£949 million	£1,143 million	£1,217 million
(ii) Local authority tenants					
Number of income support cases in local authority housing	1,739,000	1,678,000	1,657,000	1,754,000	1,842,000
Average weekly cost	£19.93	£22.74	£26.08	£29.88	£32.23
Implied annual cost	£1,802 million	£1,984 million	£2,247 million	£2,725 million	£3,087 million
(iii) Private and housing association tenants					
Number of income support cases in private housing and housing association	552,000	589,000	673,000	836,000	1,004,000
Average weekly cost	£25.48	£31.35	£37.35	£43.20	£48.58
Implied annual cost	£731 million	£960 million	£1,307 million	£1,878 million	£2,536 million

Sources: Income support statistics annual inquiries May 1989–93; housing benefit management information statistics, annual 1 per cent. sample with income support taken at the end of May in each year given.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number of recipients of rent allowance housing benefits at 31 May 1994 in *(a)* housing association properties and *(b)* private rented properties; what was the average rent of each of these properties; and what was the average rent allowance being paid for each of them.

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the table.

	Recipients (thousands)		Average weekly eligible rent			Average Weekly rent allowance		
	Housing Association Tenants	Other Private Tenants	All Private Tenants £	Housing Association Tenants £	Other Private Tenants £	All Private Tenants £	Housing Association Tenants £	Other Private Tenants £
May 1993	412	1,068	46.98	39.88	49.86	43.61	35.75	46.80
May 1994	508	1,126	50.78	n/a	n/a	47.21	n/a	n/a

Note:
[1]Information relates to eligible rent for housing benefit as actual rents paid are not available. Detailed average rent and benefit figures are for May 1993 as May 1994 figures are not yet available.
Source:
Housing benefit management information system.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of his estimated savings on invalidity benefit in 1995–96 and 1996–97 will be achieved by *(a)* an estimated reduction in the number of successful new claimants and *(b)* existing claimants losing benefit.

Mr. Hague: In 1995–96, 13 per cent. of the estimated savings are accounted for by the exclusion of new claimants as a result of the medical test of incapacity and 41 per cent. by the exclusion of existing claimants. In 1996–97, 17 per cent. of the estimated savings are accounted for by the exclusion of new claimants as a result of the medical test and 48 per cent. by the exclusion of existing claimants.

Disability Living Allowance

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about measures being taken to review cases handled at the disability living allowance unit in Blackpool.

Mr. Hague: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mrs. Jane Kennedy, dated 20 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about measures being taken to review cases handled at the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) Unit in Blackpool.

The Benefits Agency is committed to improving customer service by working towards the introduction of a One Stop service. Following the introduction of DLA in April 1992 the Agency has looked carefully at the options available in processing DLA claims and reviews.

Currently new claims are the responsibility of Disability Benefits Centres (DBC) before the centralised unit in Blackpool takes over the case. Our research has shown that the three month period following the initial decision is the period of high activity and this also represents the prescribed time limit for applications for a review on any grounds.

A pilot exercise is currently being carried out at Newcastle DBC where the file is retained at the DBC and almost all of the activity, including reviews, that arises in the three month period following the decision on a new claim is dealt with; some work done by specialist

sections, such as Motability agreements, is retained at the DLA Unit in Blackpool.

If the pilot at Newcastle successfully demonstrates efficiency and an improved customer service, consideration will be given to extending the practice to other DBCs.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the absenteeism rate for *(a)* his Department *(b)* the Benefits Agency, *(c)* the Child Support Agency, *(d)* the Contributions Agency, *(e)* the Information Technology Services Agency, *(f)* the Resettlement Agency and *(g)* the War Pensions Agency in each year since 1991.

Mr. Hague: Information on sickness absence rates can be supplied in the form requested only for 1993, the latest year for which figures are available. The average number of working day's absence per staff year due to sickness was as follows:

Department or Agency	*Days*
Department of Social Security	12.2
Benefits Agency	12.8
Child Support Agency	9.8
Contributions Agency	11.0
Information Technology Services Agency	9.4
Resettlement Agency	14.6

The War Pensions Agency was not in existence in 1993.

In 1992, the average number of working days lost throughout the Department due to sickness was 9.3 and in 1991 the number was 11.2.

State Earnings-related Pensions Scheme

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what assumptions he has made about *(a)* the growth in the retail prices index and *(b)* the growth in earnings when changing the calculations of the earnings factors used to derive SERPS entitlement as proposed in the Pensions Bill;

(2) if the changes in the calculation of the earnings factors used to derive SERPS entitlement contained in the Pensions Bill will *(a)* reduce the sum paid out to the pensioner from what it is currently forecast to be, *(b)* contain any element of retrospection and *(c)* impact in a regressive way;

(3) what is his forecast of the cost or saving in paying out SERPS pensions brought about by the changes in the calculation of the earnings factors used to derive SERPS entitlement contained in the Pensions Bill;

(4) if he will list by earnings decile the impact of the changes in the calculation of the earnings factors used to derive SERPS entitlement contained in the Pensions Bill by comparison with the forecast outcome under the present arrangement for the years *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2010–11, *(c)* 2020–21, *(d)* 2030–31, *(e)* 2040–41 and *(f)* 2050–51;

(5) how the amount paid to SERPS beneficiaries will be affected by the changes in the calculation of the earnings factors used to derive SERPS entitlement from 6 April 2000 onwards contained in the Pensions Bill.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The changes in the calculation of earnings factors used to derive SERPS, as outlined in the Pensions Bill—annualisation of SERPS—is a technical change to the SERPS formula which will restore the original policy intention that SERPS entitlements are based on average earnings between the lower and upper earnings limit.

The change will result in a recalculation of the amount of SERPS payable in respect of past years for those people who become entitled from 6 April 2000. There will be no loss for people who reach state pension age or qualify for widows benefits before that date.

The maximum weekly reduction in individual entitlements, using the woman's current pension age, is estimated to be *(a)* £2.70, *(b)* £3.80, *(c)* £4.90, *(d)* £4.60 *(e)* £4.40 and *(f)* £4.40.

This effect is flat rate and applies to those with a complete work history of earnings above the lower earnings limit since 1978 or age 16, whichever is the later. For those with broken work records, the effects will be smaller.

Savings as a result of the change will amount to £400 million in 2010 rising to £2.3 billion by 2050. Projections assume that future upratings will continue to increase flat-rate benefits in line with prices and therefore have been calculated on 1994–95 prices. An assumed real earnings growth rate of 1.5 per cent. has been used.

Family Credit

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual spending on family credit; and what was the spending on family income supplement in 1979.

Mr. Roger Evans: The published forecast for family credit expenditure for 1994–95 is £1,276 million. This is 18 times more in real terms than the £24 million spent on family income supplement in 1978–79.

Habitual Residence Test

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual cost to the public purse of administration of the habitual residence rules.

Mr. Roger Evans: Since the habitual residence test was introduced in August 1994, we have been involved in evaluating and refining the operational procedures and we are not in a position to give the full annual cost of applying the test. These figures should become available by the end of this year.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the *(a)* average, *(b)* shortest and *(c)* longest time taken to process appeals against the adjudication officer's decision on habitual residence rules since the rules were introduced (i) in the Greater London area and (ii) in the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 24 January 1995

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Court Accommodation

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he intends to publish his Department's court accommodation plan for the next five years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor's Department's accommodation plan, covering the next three years, will be published by the end of March 1995.

Court Rooms

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many county court rooms and Crown court rooms are currently not in *(a)* full-time use and *(b)* part-time use in England and Wales, excluding London; and what percentage of the total number of court rooms these figures represent.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There are 98 county court rooms and Crown court rooms in England and Wales, excluding London, currently being used part time. This is 17 per cent. of the total number of court rooms in England and Wales, excluding London. There are 16 county court rooms and Crown court rooms in England and Wales, excluding London, currently not in use at all. This is 3 per cent. of the total number of court rooms in England and Wales.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many county court rooms and Crown court rooms in London are currently not in *(a)* full-time use and *(b)* part-time use; and what percentage of the total number of court rooms these figures represent.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There are five county court rooms and Crown court rooms in London currently being used part time. This is 3 per cent. of the total number of court rooms in London. There are no court rooms in London currently not in use at all.

Court Closures

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many county court centres, court caller offices and Crown court centres he has decided to close in *(a)* the last five years and *(b)* the next five years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Some 35 courts and offices have been closed in the last five years. One court is scheduled for closure.

Fees (Civil Business)

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list all the increases in the fees for civil business introduced by his Department in the last three years and the percentage rise in the cost of civil business that each increase represents.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In the last three years—1992, 1993 and 1994—fees have been increased in the Supreme court and the county court. In the Supreme court, fees were increased once during this period, on 11 January 1994. In the county court, fees were increased twice, on 30 November 1992 and 15 August 1994. Details are given.

Supreme court fees

New fee	*Fee number*	*Brief description*	*Pre 1992 £*	*1992 £*	*Percentage rise pre-1992 to 1992*	*1993*	*Percentage rise 1992–93*	*1994 £*	*Percentage rise 1993–94*
		Before 1992 Supreme court fees (Amendment) Order 1990 WEF 1 September 1990						*Supreme court fees ((Amendment) Order 1993 WEF 11 January 1994....Fee*	
		In Every Division of High Court							
		Commencement							
	1	On sealing writ of summons, originating summons, origination notice of motion, or originating petition	70.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	100.0	42.86
		On sealing originating summons for:							
	2(a)	approval of settlement	10.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	15.00	50.00
	2(b)	Part 2 of Solicitors Act 1994 (taxation of costs)	10.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	15.00	50.00
	2(c)	for discovery	10.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	15.00	50.00
	2(d)	examination of witness abroad	10.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	15.00	50.00
	3	On presenting a petition of course	10.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	15.00	50.00
	4	Leave to apply for judicial review	10.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	20.00	100.00
		Progress of proceedings							
	5A	On taking appointment before master etc.	10.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	20.00	100.00

Supreme court fees

New fee	*Fee number*	*Brief description*	*Pre 1992* £	*1992* £	*Percentage rise pre-1992 to 1992*	*1993*	*Percentage rise 1992–93*	*1994* £	*Percentage rise 1993–94*
		Before 1992 Supreme court fees (Amendment) Order 1990 WEF 1 September 1990						*Supreme court fees (Amendment) Order 1993 WEF 11 January 1994....Fee*	
	5B	On lodgings summons before judge or official referee	15.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	20.00	33.33
	5C	On ex parte application to judge or official referee	15.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	20.00	33.33
	5D	On lodging a motion	15.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	20.00	33.33
	5F	On setting down for trial	30.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	50.00	66.67
	5J	On obtaining allocation of cause of official referee	30.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	50.00	66.67
	5K	On filing an order for hearing of a cause	30.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	50.00	66.67
	6	On setting down a cause or motion	10.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	15.00	50.00
	7	On examination of witness before trial	5.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	10.00	100.00
	8(a)	On an inquiry etc. on adjourned summons	15.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	20.00	33.33
	9	On sealing notice of appeal	15.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	20.00	33.33
	11A	On filing notice of appeal to High Court	15.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	20.00	33.33
	11B	On filing a case stated for High Court	15.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	20.00	33.33
	11C	On filing a notice of cross appeal to High Court	10.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	15.00	50.00
	11D	On filing respondent's notice of appeal to High Court	10.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	15.00	50.00
		Enforcement of Judgments							
	12	On sealing a writ of execution	10.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	20.00	100.00
	13	Application for a garnishee order	17.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	25.00	47.06
	14	Ex parte application to examine a judgment debtor	17.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	25.00	47.06
	16(a)(i)	Ex parte application to register incoming judgment	10.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	20.00	100.00
	16(a)(ii)	Providing certified copy of judgment for use abroad	10.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	20.00	100.00
	16(b)(i)	Ex parte application to register an outgoing order	2.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	10.00	400.00
	16(b)(ii)	Providing certified copy of judgment for use abroad	2.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	10.00	400.00
		Miscellaneous							
	21(a)	On filing document under Bills of Sale Acts	5.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	10.00	100.00
	21(b)	On filing a fiat of satisfaction	5.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	10.00	100.00
	22A	Certificate of search in Bills of Sale Index	2.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	5.00	150.00
	22B	For continuation search if within one month	1.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	2.00	100.00
	23(a)	On taking an affidavit or affirmation	3.50	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	5.00	42.86
	23(b)	For each exhibit to affidavit or affirmation	1.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	2.00	100.00
	24	Per hour or part for search for bills of sale	1.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	5.00	400.00
		ADMIRALTY							
	26(a)	On lodging a warrant for arrest	60.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	100.00	66.67
	26(c)	On entering a reference for hearing by registrar	15.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	50.00	233.33
		COURT OF APPEAL							
	27(a)(i)	filing notice of appeal from county court	75.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	100.00	33.33
	27(b)	On filing notice of cross appeal	30.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	50.00	66.67

Supreme court fees

New fee	Fee number	Brief description	Pre 1992 £	1992 £	Percentage rise pre-1992 to 1992	1993	Percentage rise 1992–93	1994 £	Percentage rise 1993–94
		Before 1992 Supreme court fees (Amendment) Order 1990 WEF 1 September 1990						*Supreme court fees (Amendment) Order 1993 WEF 11 January 1994....Fee*	
		COMPANIES/INSOLVENCY							
	30(a)	Presenting petitions to wind up	40.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	50.00	25.00
	30(b)(i)	Presenting bankruptcy petition by debtor	15.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	20.00	33.33
	30(b)(ii)	Presenting bankruptcy petition by creditor	45.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	50.00	11.11
	30(d)	On hearing of a public examination	15.00	As previously	0.00	As previously	0.00	20.00	33.33

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what he estimates will be the total shortfall in fee income from civil business for *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* the next financial year; and what the figure was for the previous financial year.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The estimated shortfall in fee income from civil business for the current financial year is £71.1 million. We plan to meet our reduced income target in full next financial year. The shortfall in the financial year 1993–94 was £53.4 million.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list all the increases in the fees for civil business that he plans to introduce in the next 12 months.

Mr. John M. Taylor: We have no definite plans for increases yet, but we do propose to review the fee structure to introduce a daily hearing fee, and will need to revise the fee levels then.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list all the new fees for civil business that his Department has introduced in the last three years; the levels at which they are currently set; and the percentage rise in the cost of civil business that these new fees represent.

Mr. John. M. Taylor: During the last three years–1992, 1993 and 1994–new fees were introduced in the county court on 1 April 1993 and 15 August 1994. Details are given.

County Court fees—New fees

New fee number	Description	1992 £	1993 £	Percentage Rise 1992–93	1994 £	Percentage Rise 1993–94
	Before 1992 County Court fees (Amendment) Order 1988. No new fees in 1992		*County Court Fees (Amendment) Order 1992 (Article 4) WEF 1 April 1993.....FEE*		*County Court Fees (Amendment) Order 1994 WEF 15 August 1994.....FEE*	
	SUMMONS PRODUCTION CENTRE					
Fee 1(i)(b)	On issuing a summons at the Summons Production Centre				10p per £ or part minimum fee £10.00 maximum fee £60.00	 New New
	SETTING DOWN FOR TRIAL					
Fee 2A	(i) On a request for a date for trial				50.00	New
	(ii) On filing a time estimate				50.00	New
	(iii) On fixing a date				50.00	New
	PARKING					
4A(ii)	Warrant to enforce parking penalty charge		5.00	New	As 1993	0.00

TRANSPORT

Fennell Report

Mr. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress London Transport has made in implementing the recommendations of the Fennell report into the King's Cross underground fire.

Mr. Norris: London Transport has implemented, either as one-off or on-going actions, over 90 per cent. of the report's recommendations. I have therefore agreed that the latest progress report submitted by LT, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House, should be the last one. Work on implementing the remaining recommendations is in hand and HM railway inspectorate will continue to monitor regularly the progress being made.

Fire Safety

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to review fire safety arrangements in areas with *(a)* regional airports and *(b)* major chemical works; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The responsibility for the safety regulation of United Kingdom civil aviation, including the operational safety of airports rests with the Civil Aviation Authority. Airports operate under the terms of the Air Navigation Order 1989. Detailed guidance for aerodrome licence holders are given in CAA document CAP168—"Licensing of Aerodromes".

There are no plans to revise the current regulations but the authority is always willing to consider amendments to its instructions for regional airports in order to ensure the safety of aircraft operations is maintained.

The arrangements for areas with major chemical works is a matter for the Health and Safety Executive.

Salvage Tugs

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps were taken by his Department to ensure that the crew and officers on the vessels Brodispas Moon and Sun chartered by his Department were proficient in the English language.

Mr. Norris: The emergency towing study team from the Coastguard agency visited and assessed tugs from each of the shortlisted companies prior to the award of the contract. During those visits, discussions were conducted with the vessels' officers and crews and their proficiency in the English language was assessed. Both tugs have British liaison masters.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what actions he took to secure British crewing of the salvage tug vessels charted by his Department prior to his decision to award the contract to Croation crews; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Tenders for the contract were invited from a wide range of salvage and towing companies against a tight specification. In accordance with Government policy, no limitation was placed on flag or crew nationality as such, subject to vessels meeting international safety requirements. Only two of the 34 vessels offered by tenderers for this contract were both UK crewed and registered. The contract was awarded on the basis of performance against the specification and value for money, to a company with good salvage back-up facilities. The selected tugs are managed in the UK by a UK company and have been employed in the North sea working for major oil companies for the last three years.

Mr. Charles Kenndey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement outlining the circumstances which led to the coastguard tug, Brodospas, being stationed at Stornoway, with specific reference to its *(a)* sailing under a flag of convenience, *(b)* being registered in St. Vincent, West Indies and *(c)* carrying a Croatian crew; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 17 January 1995]:* The Brodospas Sun is one of the two tugs currently under contract to the Coastguard agency and which are stationed at Stornoway and Dover for a trial period this winter. This meets Lord Donaldson's recommendation that there should be interim emergency towing arrangements this winter: the inquiry recommended that priority should be given to the Dover strait and north-west Scotland. Tenders were invited from a wide range of salvage and towing companies against a tight specification. In accordance with Government policy, no restriction was placed on flag or crew nationality as such, though the vessels proposed were expected to meet international safety requirements such as the safety of life at sea convention. The contract was awarded on the basis of performance against specification and value for money.

Aircraft Security

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will institute an inquiry into how British Airways security allowed a representative of ICL Technical Plastics to carry on a British Airways aircraft from Glasgow to London an electro-shock weapon.

Mr. Norris: From the scant details given, we are unable to trace this incident.

Double-decker Buses

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *414*, what proposals are being considered by the European Commission which would prohibit the manufacture and use in the United Kingdom of double-decker buses; and what response has been made by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Norris: None.

Train Cancellations and Delays

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trains were cancelled; how many of those cancellations were attributable to *(a)* train breakdowns, *(b)* signal failures, *(c)* track/points failures, *(d)* leaves on the line, *(e)* staff shortage, *(f)* adverse weather conditions and *(g)* other factors; and what percentage of timetabled trains was cancelled in each of the Network SouthEast divisions in each four-week period during (i) 1992, (ii) 1993 and (iii) 1994.

Mr. Watts: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the causes of train delays and cancellations that are *(a)* recorded and *(b)* not recorded in British Rail's four-weekly track record on punctuality and reliability under the terms of the citizens charter.

Mr. Watts: All train delays and cancellations are recorded in British Rail's track record figures apart from those caused by circumstances outside British Rail's control. Examples of the types of delays and cancellations included and excluded from the track record figures are as follows:

a) Recorded delays and cancellations

Delays and cancellations resulting from:

—Derailments

—Locomotive or train failures

—Infrastructure failures

—Engineering work

—Accidents and incidents

—Staff Shortages

—Leaf Fall

—Bad Weather

b) Non-recorded delays and cancellations

Delays and cancellations resulting from:

—Acts or threats of vandalism/terrorism

—Suicides/Accidents to trespassers

—Motor vehicles striking bridges or level crossings

—Line closures at the request of police or emergency services

—Gas leaks or fires in lineside buildings not caused by rail industry employees or agents

—Fire or failure due to electrical failure or defect not caused by rail industry employees or agents

MOT Certificates (Fraud)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new measures he plans to introduce to reduce fraud in the issue of MOT certificates for *(a)* cars and *(b)* other vehicles.

Mr. Norris: I have no such immediate plans.

Vessel Registration

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* Spanish, *(b)* Dutch and *(c)* Danish-owned vessels registered as British there are in each of the major ports and by total.

Mr. Norris: The information available relates to ships of 100 gross registered tonnes and more. The figures are taken from *Lloyd's Register of Shipping* and are given in the table:

Foreign parent owned vessels registered in British ports

Port of Registry	*Vessels*
(a) Spanish	
Unknown	1
Brixham	8
Plymouth	1
Falmouth	7
Penzance	2
Milford Haven	12
Fleetwood	1
Ayr	6
Peterhead	1
Aberdeen	6
North Shields	1
Grimsby	1
Lowestoft	3
Total	50
(b) Dutch	
Southampton	2
Hull	2
London	6
Total	10
(c) Danish	
Newcastle	1
Lowestoft	1
London	1
Total	3

Source:
Lloyd's Register of Shipping.

M65-M6 Link

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the daily increase in the number of vehicles leaving the M65 at Colne following the completion of the M65-M6 link.

Mr. Watts: We expect an extra 2,000 vehicles per day eastbound on the M65 to junction 7 when the link to M6 is completed. There are no forecast of how much of this additional traffic would continue along the motorway to leave the M65 at Colne.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the cost of construction of the M65-M6 link.

Mr. Watts: Some £145 million, excluding VAT.

Heavy Goods Vehicles (Accidents)

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road traffic accidents in each of the past five years leading to the death or serious injury of *(a)* pedestrians, *(b)* cyclists, *(c)* motor cyclists and *(d)* other motorists involved a heavy goods vehicle; and what proportion this represents of all road traffic accidents affecting each category.

Mr Norris: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of accidents involving an HGV and a pedestrian, where the pedestrian was killed or seriously injured: GB 1989–93

Accidents/percentage

Vehicle type	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Pedestrians	139	128	104	107	97
Percentage of all pedestrian accidents	0.24	0.22	0.20	0.22	0.21

Number of accidents involving an HGV and a pedal cycle, where the cyclist was killed or seriously injured: GB 1989–93

Accidents/percentage

Vehicle type	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Pedal cyclists	299	229	223	218	196
Percentage of all pedal cycle accidents	1.03	0.86	0.89	0.87	0.81

Number of accidents involving an HGV and a TWMV[1] where the TWMV user was killed or seriously injured: GB 1989–93

Accidents/percentage

Vehicle type	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
TWMV	471	381	270	252	215
Percentage of all TWMV accidents	1.09	0.96	0.87	0.92	0.85

[1] Two wheeled motor vehicle—includes scooters and mopeds.

Number of accidents involving an HGV and an other motor vehicle[1], where the other vehicle user was killed or seriously injured: GB 1989–93

Accidents/percentage

Vehicle type	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Other Motor vehicle	2,609	2,381	2,077	1,940	1,816
Percentage of all OMV accidents	0.99	0.91	0.86	0.81	0.77

[1] Exludes HGVs.

Number of accidents involving an HGV and pedestrian, where the pedestrian was killed or seriously injured: GB 1989–93

Accidents/percentage

Vehicle type	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Pedestrians	139	128	104	107	97
Per cent. of all pedestrian accidents	0.24	0.22	0.20	0.22	0.21

Number of accidents involving an HGV and a pedal cycle, where the cyclist was killed or seriously injured: GB 1989–93

Accidents/percentage

Vehicle type	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Pedal cyclists	299	229	223	218	196
Percentage. of all pedal cycle accidents	1.03	0.86	0.89	0.87	0.81

Number of accidents involving an HGV and a TWMV[1], where the TWMV user was killed or seriously injured: GB 1989–93

Accidents/percentage

Vehicle type	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
TWMV	471	381	270	252	215
Percentage. of all TWMV accidents	1.09	0.96	0.87	0.92	0.85

[1] Two wheeled motor vehicle—includes scooters and mopeds.

Number of accidents involving a HGV and an other motor vehicle[1], where the other vehicle user was killed or seriously injured: GB 1989–93

Accidents/percentage

Vehicle type	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Other Motor vehicle	2609	2381	2077	1940	1816
Percentage. of all OMV accidents	0.99	0.91	0.86	0.81	0.77

[1] Excludes HGVs.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all those passenger and freight train operating companies, or other bodies, which will be responsible for providing or using motive power after full implementation of his plans for rail privatisation, showing which of them will be responsible for *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* training, *(c)* certifying competence, *(d)* route learning and passing, *(e)* inspection and *(f)* disciplining of motive power staff.

Mr. Watts: The arrangements to be made by the successor companies to the British Railways Board cannot be listed before full implementation of the privatisation plans.

The Railway (Safety Critical Work) Regulations 1994 place a duty on employers to ensure that employees carrying out "safety critical work" are competent and fit to carry out that work. The regulations also enable the Health and Safety Executive to approve specific assessments and standards to be achieved.

Roads Programme

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to carry out an assessment of the economic impact of the roads programme.

Mr. Watts: The economic impacts of schemes in the national roads programme are assessed.

The national roads programme has consistently shown good economic rates of return.

Marine Pollution

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has ratified annexe IV of the marine pollution convention; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: We have not yet ratified annexe IV of the international convention for the prevention of pollution from ships—MARPOL 73/78—but we are taking action to do so soon.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment the Government have made, following the case of Colonel Owen in Cirencester, of whether devaluation is a sufficient cause for blight to be registered against a home or business when a motorway is to be constructed; and what are the implications for such a course in relation to those constructing the Birmingham northern relief road.

Mr. Watts: The full implications of the decision by the Court of Appeal in the Lt. Col. Owen case are being reviewed. An announcement about future policy on discretionary purchase of property affected by motorway and trunk road schemes will be made as soon as possible.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Highways Agency provided figures for traffic flows under the new 2011 AADT figures in relation to the Birmingham northern relief road; for what reasons they were not available earlier; and if the Government will provide compensation for objectors who may have employed professional help or been involved in expenditure of time and energy because of the delay in provision of the figures.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Laurie Haynes to Mr. Mike O'Brien, dated 24 January 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport, when the Highways Agency provided figures for traffic flows under the new 2011 AADT figures in relation to the Birmingham Northern Relief Road; for what reasons they were not available earlier; and if the Government will provide compensation for objectors who may have employed professional help or been involved in expenditure of time and energy because of the delay in provision of the figures.

The revised traffic flows result from updating assessments which have only recently been completed. They will provide the current inquiry with up to date information, but are unlikely to give rise to significantly changed effects. In consequence, there is likely to be little effect on the substance of objections already placed before the inquiry.

Coventry Airport

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received about noise and nuisance at Coventry airport over the past 12 months.

Mr. Norris: A total of 14.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy in respect of prosecuting all those involved with each flight of calves from Coventry airport during November and December 1994 for not having the required export permit under the Air Navigation Order 1989.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* An urgent inquiry is being conducted by my Department into the series of livestock flights by Air Algerie aircraft from Coventry airport in November and December last year. The inquiry will seek to determine whether there was any breach of the Air Navigation Order 1989. The question of further action will be decided once the outcome of the inquiry has been considered.

Search and Rescue

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the costs of operating search and rescue services by helicopters using private contractors, relative to the cost of providing such services through the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force.

Mr. Norris: The three search and rescue helicopters under contract to the Coastguard agency cost approximately £7.5 million per year. Ministry of Defence helicopters which are provided primarily for military purposes are also made available for civil SAR. The Coastguard agency does not pay for civil use of Royal Air Force helicopters; it pays for the use of Royal Navy helicopters only out of working hours. The agency's estimate of using contracted helicopters to replace all the MOD SAR helicopters units is some £22.5 million. Those figures do not include the cost of SAR for incidents on land for which the Coastguard agency has no responsibilities.

Parking Enforcement, London

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which companies have been given the task of yellow line parking enforcement in each London borough following the removal of this task from the Metropolitan police traffic warden service from July 1994 under the Road Traffic Act 1991.

Mr. Norris: This is a matter for the borough councils concerned.

Railway Station, Ebbsfleet

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date Eleanor Laing, a special adviser in his Department, was briefed by representatives of Decision Makers Ltd. on Ebbsfleet either formally or informally.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* I understand from Eleanor Laing, who was a special adviser at the Department of Transport until 20 July 1994, that she was briefed formally on Ebbsfleet by Decision Makers on 29 July 1993 and 3 May 1994.

Heather Bloom (Loss Inquiry)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investigations are under way to investigate the loss of the Heather Bloom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* An investigation is being carried out by the marine accident investigation branch; the only other known official investigation concerns an inquiry under section 61 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1970 into the cause of death.

Rail Safety

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *485*, if he will list the year of introduction and the number of carriages currently in use on British Rail's Kent coastal services in each of the BR classes 415/1-5, 416/2 and 4, 416/3, 411, 413, 415/6-7 and any other mark I carriages; and when the last of each of these classes of carriages will have been replaced by new rolling stock.

Mr. Watts: The list of the carriages in use in December 1994 is as follows:

Class	*Units (coaches)*	*Date built from*
411	106 (424)	1959
414	5 (10)	1951
421	21 (84)	1964
423	66 (264)	1967
207	5 (10)	1962

The replacement of rolling stock, and the appropriate timing of an order, is a decision for BR. However, I understand that the last of the class 414 vehicles in the Kent Coast fleet will be withdrawn by 13 April 1995; the other classes of vehicles listed are considered by BR to have four years' serviceable life left, and in its view are likely to need replacing during 1999.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *485*, if he will give an undertaking that all carriages currently in use on British Rail's Kent coastal services in the BR classes 411, 413, 415, and 416 will either be strengthened immediately or replaced by new rolling stock within the time scale recommended by the Hidden report into the Clapham Junction railway accident; and how many of these mark I carriages he expects will still be in service in April 1999 given current rolling stock investment plans.

Mr. Watts: I understand that by 13 April 1995 all the mark I vehicles in classes 413, 415 and 416 will have been withdrawn and replaced by Networker class 465 and 466 trains.

Because class 411 vehicles are considered to have only four years' serviceable life left, it would not be reasonably practicable to carry out structural changes to these vehicles. I understand that they will need to be withdrawn from services during 1999.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide an assurance that in respect of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill neither Ruckholt road nor Dunedin road in Leyton will be used by construction traffic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: There will be a code of construction practice—a draft of which is being discussed with the affected local planning authorities—which will cover the use of the public highway and traffic management matters. In the meantime, I understand that Union Railways is shortly to meet the London borough of Waltham Forest to discuss the issue of road accesses in the Temple Mills area.

Ministerial Visits, Newbury

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 December to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), *Official Report*, columns *874–75*, when making his visit to Newbury, what time he arrived and what time he left.

Dr. Mawhinney: I arrived at Newbury at about 11.30 am and left at about 2.45 pm.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why he gave the hon. Member a holding answer on 10 January, but was able to answer on 12 January, *Official Report*, column *198*.

Dr. Mawhinney: Notification of this question was received while I was on an official visit to the Netherlands from 9 to 11 January inclusive.

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what his reasons were for deciding to ask the Highways Agency to reconsider the options concerning the Newbury bypass; when he first made that decision; whom he told before his announcement of the decision; and when he first told anyone else he had made this decision;

(2) when he instructed the Highways Agency to review the alternative options designed to relieve traffic congestion on the A34; and what form this instruction took.

Dr. Mawhinney: I decided to look again at the plans for the Newbury bypass against the background of continuing public concern about the scheme and because I wanted to be sure that the proposed western bypass was the right solution. By instructions to the chief executive of the Highways Agency on the day of my public announcement, I asked him to review the options for relieving congestion in Newbury and to report back. I took the decision and shared the information only within Government shortly before making my announcement.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to reply to the letter of the hon. Member for Newbury of 3 January asking him for a meeting to discuss the Newbury bypass.

Dr. Mawhinney: I have no record of receiving this letter.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which constituents of the hon. Member for Newbury he has met since his announcement in respect of the Newbury bypass to discuss his decision.

Dr. Mawhinney: Among those with whom I have discussed my decision on the A34 Newbury bypass, I believe four of them may be constituents of the hon. Member for Newbury.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which hon. Members have so far made representations to him concerning his announcement in respect of the Newbury bypass; and which he has met concerning those representations.

Dr. Mawhinney: I have received representations about my announcement on the Newbury bypass from the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) and the hon. Members for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell), for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), for Swindon (Mr. Coombs), for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), for Havant (Mr. Willetts), for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), for Reading, East (Sir G. Vaughan), for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill), for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) and for Winchester (Mr. Malone). I have met none of these concerning his representations.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to which *(a)* constituents of the hon. Member for Newbury and *(b)* other hon. Members he provided the information contained in his answer of 12 January, *Official Report*, column *198*, before he provided the hon. Member with the answer.

Dr. Mawhinney: I have not kept a record of conversations where I may have discussed details about who accompanied me on my visit to Newbury.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the absenteeism rate for the Natural Resources Institute in each year since 1991.

Mr. Baldry: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Natural Resources Institute under its chief executive, Mr. Anthony Beattie. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Anthony Beattie to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 24 January 1995:

Mr. Baldry has asked me to reply to your question about the absenteeism rates for the Natural Resources Institute in the years since 1991.

The figures for sick leave are being collated. I will write again when they are available.

Indian Sub-continent (Aid)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much overseas aid has been given to *(a)* Pakistan, *(b)* India and *(c)* Bangladesh in each year since 1979.

Mr. Baldry: The gross United Kingdom bilateral aid given to Pakistan, India and Bangladesh since 1979 is given in the tables:

United Kingdom bilateral gross public expenditure to Bangladesh, India and Pakistan 1979—1993–94 (£000s)

	Bangladesh	*India*	*Pakistan*
1979	33,632	121,623	21,797
1980	66,190	86,080	22,245
1981	33,383	168,550	24,613
1982	23,537	54,204	18,738
1983	24,728	127,600	16,612
1984	35,656	146,537	18,016
1985	41,173	106,466	16,569
1986	38,321	143,481	20,715
1987	31,634	78,464	22,475
1987–88	31,265	99,097	22,599
1988–89	48,161	84,647	28,183
1989–90	55,827	87,652	34,894
1990–91	51,602	100,746	45,467
1991–92	59,231	136,386	41,823
1992–93	65,717	115,370	38,483
1993–94	56,258	103,144	48,202

Note:
British Aid Statistics was published by financial year from 1992.
Britain also provides aid to these countries through multilateral agencies.

Pakistan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of the agreements for the provision of British aid that he signed with the Pakistani Government during his recent visit to Pakistan.

Mr. Baldry: On 9 January, in Islamabad, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary exchanged letters in respect of two new aid projects in Pakistan. These were:

(i) a contribution of £3.6 million over five years to the second phase of the Dir district development project, managed by the United Nations Drug Control Programme. The project is designed to improve basic infrastructure and to provide alternative sources of income for people in the main opium poppy growing area of the North West Frontier Province in parallel with enforcement action by the Pakistan authorities.

(ii) a contribution of £12 million over three years in support of the Government of Pakistan's social action programme, which the World bank and other donors are also supporting. The programme seeks to improve primary education, health and reproductive health through a combination of sectoral policy reform and incremental budgetary support.

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there is any threat by the Rwandan Government to the continued presence of international non-governmental organisations in Rwanda; and what representations he has been making.

Mr. Baldry: In order to avoid duplication of effort, and improve co-ordination, the Government of Rwanda have introduced a policy of NGO registration, but a number of NGOs have failed to meet the registration deadline of 9 January. The registration policy has not led to NGO expulsions. We will continue to monitor the situation.

ENVIRONMENT

Water

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the costs of compliance in meeting water standards in upland and lowland England and Wales *(a)* in total and *(b)* by water authority in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Atkins: Information is not available in the form requested. However, Ofwat has published information which shows that the compliance programme for drinking water resulted in expenditure in England and Wales of £620.5 million in 1991–92, £733.3 million in 1992–93, and £737.1 million in 1993–94.

Refrigerants

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures have been implemented with regard to the conservation and reclamation of refrigerants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The EC Environment Council adopted in December a new EC regulation on ozone-depleting substances. This requires refrigerants contained in commercial and industrial refrigeration equipment and air conditioning equipment to be recovered if practicable for recycling, reclamation or destruction during service and maintenance of the equipment as well as before equipment dismantling or disposal. It also requires that all precautionary measures practicable are taken to prevent the leakage of ozone-depleting refrigerant from this equipment. This regulation is directly applicable in UK law.

In 1994 the refrigerant users group was set up, with Government support, by a number of refrigerant users and suppliers. The RUG was the first refrigerant bank in Europe. Its main aim is to ensure that the increasingly scarce supply of chlorofluorocarbon refrigerants is conserved through recovery and efficient reuse within the UK.

Capping Limits

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list for each local authority for which he is responsible *(a)* the change in the capping limit in cash terms between 1993–94 and 1994–95, *(b)* this change in cash terms after the notional cost of pay increases at the current rate of inflation have been taken into account and *(c)* this change in cash terms after notional increases in pay and price increases at the current rate of inflation have been taken into account;

(2) what is the cash change and percentage change in the capping limit of each local authority for which he is responsible for 1994–95 compared to 1993–94; and if he will also express the change as a figure per head of population.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have arranged for a table showing the following for each local authority in England to be placed in the Library of the House:

(i) the cash change between the 1993–94 cap limit and the 1994–95 cap limit.

(ii) the cash change between the 1993–94 cap limit (in 1994–95 prices) and the 1994–95 cap limit.

(iii) the percentage change between the 1993–94 cap limit and the 1994–95 cap limit.

(iv) the change per head of population between the 1993–94 cap limit and the 1994–95 cap limit.

Information on cap limits after notional costs of pay increases at the current rate of inflation have been taken into account is not available.

Pollution

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the level of carbon dioxide emissions for each year since 1980; and what efforts his Department has implemented to reduce these levels.

Mr. Atkins: Annual United Kingdom emissions of carbon dioxide since 1980 are as follows:

Estimated annual United Kingdom emissions for carbon dioxide, expressed in terms of weight of carbon (million tonnes of carbon)

Year	Amount
1980	164
1981	157
1982	154
1983	152
1984	148
1985	154
1986	158
1987	159
1988	159
1989	156
1990	158
1991	159
1992	155
1993	[1]152

[1] latest provisional estimate.

In fulfilment of our commitment under the climate change convention, the UK climate change programme, published in January 1994, sets out in full the measures aimed at returning emissions of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his most recent figures for annual CO_2 emissions for the United Kingdom; and what assessment he has made of their consistency with the target set in "Climate Change: The UK Programme".

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to my oral answer of Wednesday 18 January 1995, *Official Report*, column 706, to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) earlier today.

London Boroughs Grants Committee

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money the London Boroughs Grants Committee has *(a)* received from the London borough of Barnet and *(b)* given to organisations based in Barnet each year since its inception.

Sir Paul Beresford: The London Boroughs Grants Committee distributes grants to voluntary organisations in Greater London which either have a London-wide remit or cover a significant number of London boroughs. There is no direct relationship between contributions from the amounts awarded to voluntary organisations in particular boroughs. The London boroughs grants unit has supplied the following information:

The London borough of Barnet's contribution to the committee's annual expenditure

Year	Contribution £
1986–87	1,190,700
1987–88	1,179,250
1988–89	1,240,515
1989–90	1,246,000
1990–91	1,300,500
1991–92	1,265,300
1992–93	1,307,000
1993–94	1,255,700
1994–95	1,255,700

Amounts awarded to voluntary organisations based in the London borough of Barnet

Year	Amount £
1986–87	n/a
1987–88	62,905
1988–89	98,712
1989–90	113,688
1990–91	92,228
1991–92	114,298
1992–93	103,340
1993–94	153,871
1994–95	165,327

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much the London Boroughs Grants Committee has *(a)* received from each London borough and *(b)* paid to organisations based in each London borough during the last three years.

Sir Paul Beresford: There is no direct relationship between contributions from, and amounts awarded to, voluntary organisations in particular boroughs. The London boroughs grants unit has supplied the following information:

(a) Borough contributions received

£ thousands

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Barking and Dagenham	622.1	613.5	607.8
Barnet	1,307.3	1,255.7	1,255.7
Bexley	928.9	920.3	911.7
Brent	1,078.0	1,040.7	1,026.35
Bromley	1,267.2	1,235.6	1,218.45
Camden	782.7	748.3	751.15
City of London	17.2	17.2	17.2
Croydon	1,347.5	1,336.0	1,330.25
Ealing	1,238.5	1,181.2	1,178.3
Enfield	1,115.2	1,100.9	1,089.45
Greenwich	911.7	894.5	891.6
Hackney	808.5	774.1	788.4
Hammersmith and Fulham	630.7	639.3	647.95
Haringey	814.2	871.5	877.3
Harrow	811.3	854.3	851.45
Havering	977.6	974.8	960.4
Hillingdon	994.8	992.0	986.2
Hounslow	831.4	874.4	857.2
Islington	731.1	713.9	725.35
Kensington and Chelsea	553.3	596.3	610.65
Kingston	587.7	576.3	573.4
Lambeth	980.5	1,052.1	1,075.1
Lewisham	954.7	994.8	994.8
Merton	696.7	719.6	716.75
Newham	880.1	914.6	928.9
Redbridge	992.0	969.0	963.3
Richmond	705.3	688.1	685.2
Southwark	951.8	937.5	943.2
Sutton	708.1	716.7	713.85
Tower Hamlets	705.3	696.7	699.55
Waltham Forest	900.2	911.7	905.95

(a) Borough contributions received

£ thousands

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Wandsworth	1,080.8	1,089.4	1,103.75
Westminster	756.9	768.3	782.7
Greater London Totals	28,669.3	28,669.3	28,669.3

(b) Amounts paid to or approved for voluntary organisations by borough base.

£ thousands

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Barking and Dagenham	44.7	44.6	47.5
Barnet	103.3	153.9	163.3
Bexley	63.8	65.7	63.7
Brent	442.3	341.9	355.3
Bromley	68.2	71.5	76.4
Camden	5,035.3	4,409.3	4,210.4
City of London	156.1	91.3	81.5
Croydon	158.9	198.6	199.9
Ealing	258.1	412.5	436.6
Enfield	132.4	146.6	144.4
Greenwich	488.3	479.7	407.0
Hackney	1,491.2	1,479.5	1,519.7
Hammersmith and Fulham	811.5	979.3	993.4
Haringey	880.3	655.8	699.0
Harrow	23.6	1.2	—
Havering	47.7	50.5	56.4
Hillingdon	172.1	177.1	161.5
Hounslow	246.4	255.7	268.0
Islington	3,391.9	4,703.2	4,728.8
Kensington and Chelsea	1,399.5	1,302.0	1,296.0
Kingston	69.8	95.3	109.8
Lambeth	2,248.9	2,257.6	2,260.3
Lewisham	465.8	461.9	487.7
Merton	251.7	265.3	259.2
Newham	368.2	386.7	413.4
Redbridge	86.3	60.1	67.1
Richmond	79.0	76.8	95.0
Southwark	2,314.8	2,558.1	2,425.2
Sutton	104.8	75.2	72.7
Tower Hamlets	1,961.7	1,934.7	1,832.9
Waltham Forest	73.1	181.4	148.9
Wandsworth	322.4	327.3	367.2
Westminster	3,128.4	2,939.4	3,055.7
Outside London	61.4	70.2	70.4
Totals	26,952.5	27,709.9	27,574.3

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation requiring the provision of *(a)* adequate heating systems and *(b)* insulation in domestic buildings.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Part L of the Building Regulations 1991 in England and Wales requires reasonable provision, including insulation and heating controls, to be made for the conservation of fuel and power in new buildings and extensions to existing ones. Revised regulations which come into force on 1 July this year strengthen the provisions of part L and in addition require all new and converted dwellings to be provided with an energy rating based on the standard assessment procedure. The Boiler Efficiency Regulations 1993 require that, when they are placed on the market, gas and oil-fired boilers achieve specified levels of efficiency. These regulations came into force on 1 January last year.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current combined heat and power capacity in the United Kingdom; and what is his target for 2000.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Secretary of State for the Environment has set a target of 5,000 MW installed combined heat and power capacity by the year 2000. It is estimated that approximately 3,000 MW CHP is now in operation in the United Kingdom on around 1,100 sites.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made toward reaching his target for increased efficiency of domestic appliances by 2000; and what assessment he has made as to the consistency of such progress with reaching that target.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Government have not set specific targets to improve the energy efficiency of domestic appliances but are committed to achieve overall carbon dioxide targets by a variety of approaches including improving appliances. Joint voluntary initiatives with industry, the Energy Saving Trust and my Department's energy efficiency office have resulted in good progress in some sectors and I believe they can be emulated elsewhere. The Government are presently engaged in studies to assess the impact of energy labelling and other policies in each sector.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many grants have been made under the home energy efficiency scheme and of what average value in each year since its formation by local authority area.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information is not available in the form requested. The total numbers of grants under the home energy efficiency scheme in Great Britain and their average values, for each financial year since the scheme began, are as follows:

		£
1990–91 (from January 1)	7,582	154
1991–92	167,849	137
1992–93	204,130	150
1993–94	270,148	153
1994–95 (until December 31)	330,751	168

Before 9 December 1993, a contribution from the householder, to a maximum of £16, was required in each case. Since then 100 per cent. grants have been available.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he carried out into the effectiveness of the advertising campaigns he has run in order to encourage greater energy efficiency in the home.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Two advertising campaigns have been run by my Department to promote energy efficiency in the home. The first of these campaigns, "Helping the Earth Begins at Home", now completed, was monitored through a series of interview surveys to track changes in public knowledge, attitudes and energy saving behaviour, over the course of the campaign. The second campaign, "Wasting Energy Costs the Earth", is currently under way and is subject to a similar programme of monitoring research.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in tightening building regulations since the publishing of "Climate Change: The UK Programme"; what assessment

he has made as to achieving the energy-saving target set out in the document; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Revised building regulations for the conservation of fuel and power were laid before Parliament last year. They come into force on 1 July. It is estimated that the improved provisions will save about 250,000 tonnes of carbon per year by the turn of the century, with significantly greater savings in the longer term.

Uranium

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the source of the uranium recently found in Northamptonshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The scrap metal containing uranium found on land at Poplar farm, Caldecott, Northamptonshire, is of unknown origin. Investigations are continuing to trace the source of the material.

Greenpeace

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence he has that the misuse of equipment, as referred to in Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's reply to Greenpeace's complaint regarding a perceived breach of paragraph 2 of the Drigg authorisation, was the sole cause of the high-surface activity levels recorded by the Greenpeace investigators.

Mr. Atkins: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution sought the advice of the National Radiological Protection Board regarding the environmental monitoring carried out by Greenpeace and depicted in its video of the Drigg site. The NRPB advised that an item which fully complies with the requirements of the Drigg disposal authorisation could give rise to the results determined by Greenpeace. This is because the instrument used by Greenpeace was not appropriate for use in the mixed radiation fields associated with the low-level wastes disposed of at Drigg. It is possible that there was no surface contamination present at all on the items monitored, and that the spurious surface contamination really was due to radiation emissions from radioactive material contained within the disposed items.

HMIP thoroughly investigated Greenpeace's complaint and concluded that there had been no breach of the Drigg site authorisation. A reply to this effect was sent by HMIP to Greenpeace on 16 December 1994.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what attempt has been made to locate and monitor the package reported to him by Greenpeace as containing intermediate-level waste in its complaint regarding arrangements for the disposal of low-level waste at Drigg.

Mr. Atkins: Greenpeace entered Drigg illegally, in July 1994, but did not bring its complaint to the attention of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution until October 1994. In the intervening period, the item in question has been completely covered by material disposed of in the trench. Direct monitoring of the item would have been possible if Greenpeace had bothered to notify HMIP immediately of its concerns. An item, which from the Greenpeace video and report could have been mistaken for a glovebox that might have been thought to contain intermediate-level waste, has been identified from photographs provided by British Nuclear Fuels plc of the tipping face at about the same time that Greenpeace entered Drigg. The disposal records and history of the item indicate that the disposal was carried out in full compliance with the requirements of the Drigg authorisation.

Sprinkler Systems

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to make the introduction of a sprinkler system a mandatory requirement in single-storey buildings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The provision of sprinklers in new buildings is a matter for building regulations. Whether such sprinklers should be required in large single storey buildings is under consideration at present and I hope to be able to make a statement within a few months.

Fire Engineers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to require the compulsory registration of qualified fire engineers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have no plans at present to require the compulsory registration of qualified fire engineers but will keep the situation under review.

Civil Airports

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers are available to local authorities to control noise and nuisance at civil airports.

Mr. Atkins: Local authorities' powers to control noise at civil airports are those available under planning legislation, through which conditions may be attached, if appropriate, to planning permission. In addition, at all but the smallest airports, operators are required to consult nearby local authorities about matters concerning management and administration which may have a bearing on noise and nuisance.

Leasehold

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what consideration he has given to the funding of the leasehold enfranchisement advisory scheme beyond its initial two years; and if he will make a statement on the expected longer-term demand for the scheme and the necessary resources to ensure that it is able to respond appropriately;

(2) what proposals he has for further publicity to increase leaseholders' awareness of their rights under the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993;

(3) what assessment he has made of the interim report of the leasehold enfranchisement advisory service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have carefully studied the interim report of the leasehold enfranchisement advisory service and taken note of its conclusions about the way the new rights for leasehold enfranchisement and lease extension introduced by the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 have been exercised.

I have been impressed with the start that the service has made and consequently I am able to announce that the

Department has decided to make available, from its special grants programme, a grant of £78,711 to LEAS for 1995–96. This is an increase of 8 per cent. on the initial grant given to the service in 1994–95. The primary reason for the increase is to allow the service to increase its programme of publicity designed to make leaseholders and freeholders more aware of the new rights to enfranchisement and lease extension. At the same time, the Department will continue to make its booklets on enfranchisement freely available on demand. So far, over 145,000 copies have been issued.

The intention has been to provide funds from the SGP to the service over a three-year period. This means that, subject to a review of the service's performance, planned for later this year, further funding will be made available to the service in 1996–97.

Energy Saving Trust

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current level of funding for the Energy Saving Trust which is raised from gas customers; and what this level is expected to be in each of the next three years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The finances of the Energy Saving Trust are properly a matter for the trust, which is an independent company. However, I understand that in the financial year 1994–95 the gas industry will pay the trust a total of £2.5 million, raised from gas customers by the so-called "E-factor" levy. Figures for future years are not available, as the Director General of Gas Supply has yet to reach a decision on proposals to finance, from the E-factor, trust schemes which were submitted to her by British Gas in July 1994.

Noise Pollution

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to be able to bring forward proposals to address the problems of noise pollution and noise nuisance.

Mr. Atkins: Local authorities have a range of powers to prevent or abate noise nuisance from premises and from vehicles, machinery and equipment in the street. An inter-departmental working party was set up in October last year to review the current controls over neighbour noise and to investigate options for swifter remedies. The working party expects to complete its review shortly and I intend to consult fully on its conclusions and recommendations.

West Yorkshire Fire Service

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had in respect of the West Yorkshire fire service's budget deficit for 1995–96.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have received two written representations from the West Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority about the proposed local government finance settlement 1995–96. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration met a delegation from the authority on 10 January 1995. We will be considering these representations, together with those we have received from other authorities, in finalising the settlement for 1995–96.

Consultants

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the consultants, *(b)* the tasks for which they were employed and *(c)* the payments made to them from the budget of his Department in (i) 1992–93 and (ii) 1993–94.

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is not held centrally by my Department and is obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

Erin Void, Derbyshire

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he can report on the application by Derbyshire county council to his minerals division for funding under the Moynihan agreement in relation to the reclamation of the Erin void at Poolsbrook, Staveley, Derbyshire; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Moynihan agreement relates to deep mines in England started before 1 July 1948 which closed within four years commencing 1 April 1990. Under the agreement, British Coal undertook responsibility for the restoration of those closed colliery sites to a soft end use. An application for funding by my Department would not be appropriate nor has such an application been received.

However, Derbyshire county council has made representations to my Department about a dispute with British Coal as to whether the Erin void falls within the terms of the agreement. My understanding is that the Erin void is a former opencast coal site which is already subject to conditions requiring its infilling and restoration to a condition suitable for agriculture. As such, it would not appear to fall within the agreement.

Green Belts

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government will publish revised planning policy guidance on green belts in England.

Mr. Gummer: We have today published a revision of planning policy guidance note 2 on "Green Belts". This reaffirms our commitment to green belt policy, and makes limited changes to strengthen it to meet the challenges of the next century.

Following research which we published in 1993, we issued a draft revision of PPG2 for public consultation last year. We are grateful to the almost 700 organisations and individuals who responded. We have carefully considered their views in finalising the document, and made adjustments to take account of views expressed. The thrust of the revised PPG2 is similar to the consultation draft, which was broadly welcomed.

Compared with the present published PPG2, the revision incorporates six main amendments, within a framework of continuity.

(1) It reaffirms the Government's commitment to green belt policy, stresses the fundamental aim of preventing urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open, and points out that green belts can assist in moving towards more sustainable patterns of urban development.

(2) It sets out positive objectives for the use of land in green belts, so as to secure greater benefits for the environment without compromising the overall restrictive approach.

(3) It further encourages proper consideration of the long-term direction of development, through the development plan system, to ensure long-term protection of green belts.

(4) It removes the former concession for new building in the green belt by institutions, so that they are subject to the same controls as other developers.

(5) It enables local planning authorities to make realistic provision in their development plans for the future of existing major developed sites in the green belt, such as pre-war factories and power stations, in such a way as to secure environmental benefits.

(6) It introduces a new policy on the re-use of buildings, which includes specific safeguards for the green belt.

These modifications will reinforce the position of green belts as a cornerstone of the town and country planning system in England as we enter the 21st century.

A summary of responses to the consultation exercise has been deposited in the Libraries of the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Department of the Environment. Copies of all the responses have been placed in the DOE library.

Buying Agency

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what performance targets he has set the Buying Agency for 1995.

Sir Paul Beresford: To support the objectives set out in the agency's corporate plan 1995–1997, and business plan 1995, we have set financial, productivity, customer satisfaction, environmental, and internal quality targets.

The financial targets are:

— to increase sales by 10 per cent. or to £157 million whichever is the higher,

— to achieve an overall surplus after interest of 1.5 per cent. on total sale.

The productivity targets are:

— to increase sales/staff ratio from £1.27 million per employee projected for 1994 to £1.42 million in 1995,

— to reduce the cost of £ of sales from 2.9p projected in 1994 to 2.6p in 1995.

The customer satisfaction targets are:

— to ensure 90 per cent. of direct orders are delivered by the due date,

— to resolve 90 per cent. of complaints within one month, the balance within three months.

The environmental target is:

— to ensure that all new or revised catalogue entries contain information relating to the environmental impact of the product and, where appropriate, its production and disposal.

These targets require the agency to build on improvements in sales, efficiency, and customer service, made in 1994.

In addition, the agency is proposing new pay and grading arrangements and management delayering, and other measures in line with the White Paper "The Civil Service—Continuity and Change".

Pennine Bridleway

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce his decision on the proposed Pennine bridleway.

Mr. Atkins: Following further consultations with the local authorities through whose areas the route passes, the Secretary of State has today signified that he has decided to approve the Countryside Commission's report in respect of the Pennine bridleway, with the modifications to the route as submitted by the commission.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Television

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps are open to areas where television reception is *(a)* poor and *(b)* non-existent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The first step is for such communities to notify the engineering department of the BBC or Independent Television Commission so that these bodies are aware of the situation. They jointly build about 25 new television relay transmitters each year. It is also open to communities to install their own television relay system at their own expense under the self-help television system.

Buckingham Palace

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the cost of repairing the damage to the gates of Buckingham palace; what insurance covers the gates; and who will incur the bill for repair.

Mr. Dorrell: Investigations are taking place to assess the extent of the damage to the gates of Buckingham palace. Until these are completed, it is not possible to estimate the cost of the repairs. In line with general Government policy, the gates of Buckingham palace were not insured. It is hoped that the car driver's insurance company will meet the cost of the repairs. If not, the repairs will be funded from the royal household's current grant in aid provision.

National Jazz Centre

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representation his Department has received concerning the creation of a national jazz centre.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department has received no such representations.

Double Funding

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects to report on the allegations of double-funding of money from the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority S4C, and the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts via Pengwyn Pinc cyf to the Welsh Rock and Folk Music Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I have received a report from the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts on the circumstances of an award to the Welsh Rock and Folk Music Council under the business sponsorship incentive scheme. My consideration of that report will be informed by the findings of an internal inquiry which is currently being undertaken by S4C.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Dining Room

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee when the stools for waiters and waitresses by their stations were first introduced into the Members' Dining Room; how many complaints there have been about their use; what considerations underlay their removal before Christmas; and what proposals there are to return them.

Mr. Colin Shepherd *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* This is a matter for the Director of Catering Services. I have asked her to write to the hon. Member.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Card Systems

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will consider setting up a committee to consider the developing technology of card systems and the potential demand for such systems from Government Departments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Cabinet Committee GEN34, which is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, already exists to consider the developing technology of card systems and the potential demand for such systems from Government Departments.

Recruitment

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what opportunities exist in the civil service for the recruitment of individuals with outside experience.

Mr. David Hunt: Many, varied and at all levels.

Worldwide Web Server

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy to present to the House during the current Session of Parliament a report on the progress and future plans for development of the government worldwide web server "open.gov.UK".

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I have asked CCTA, the Government Centre for Information Systems, to prepare a report on the progress and future plans for development of the government worldwide web server "open.gov.UK", in three months' time, and quarterly thereafter. This report will be placed in the Library of the House, and it will, of course, be available over the Internet via the CCTA Government information service.

The CCTA Government information service was launched in November 1994 as a pilot service to make Government information available over the Internet, and to provide a means for Departments to develop expertise in this sector. It has proved a tremendous success. Over 14 Departments and agencies have already made information available, and most others have plans to do so. On average, there are over 35,000 requests for information each week. This month we have added two additional pilot services, "G-NET" and "GMAIL", and further improvements are planned for the coming months.

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants are currently *(a)* registered disabled and *(b)* disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document "Focus on Ability".

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: On 1 July 1994, the number of registered disabled people in the non-industrial civil

service was 8,142, representing 1.67 per cent. of the total. Figures for the number and proportion of all disabled people employed in the civil service are not available, although surveys conducted by some individual Departments suggest that there may be at least as many non-registered disabled people in the civil service as there are registered.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 24 January.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 24 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Hugh Colver

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister during which years Mr. Hugh Colver was employed by Her Majesty's Government in *(a)* the Ministry of Defence, *(b)* other Departments and *(c)* No. 10 Downing street.

The Prime Minister: Mr. Hugh Colver was employed as an information officer in the Ministry of Defence from December 1975 to July 1981 and again from September 1985 to June 1987 as deputy chief of public relations and from then until July 1992 as chief information officer. He was a press officer at: No. 10 from July 1981 to July 1982; at the Department of Education from July 1982 to January 1984; and at the Metropolitan police from January 1984 to September 1985. He is no longer employed by a Government Department.

Card Systems

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister if he will consider setting up a committee to consider the developing technology of card systems, and the potential demand for such systems from Government Departments; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science today.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Prime Minister which Ministers and former Ministers have given evidence to the Scott inquiry.

The Prime Minister: Ministers and former Ministers who the Government are aware have given evidence to Sir Richard Scott's inquiry are:

Ministers who have given written and oral evidence:
In addition to myself,
The Right hon. Kenneth Clarke QC
The Right hon. Michael Heseltine RD
The Right hon. Douglas Hurd CH
The Right hon. Peter Lilley
The Right hon. Sir Nicholas Lyell QC
The Right hon. Sir Patrick Mayhew QC
The Right hon. Malcolm Rifkind QC
The Right hon. the hon. William Waldegrave
Former Ministers who have given written and oral evidence:
The Right hon. Kenneth Baker CH
The Right hon. Sir Adam Butler
The Right hon. Paul Channon
The Right hon. Alan Clark
The Right hon. Tristan Garel-Jones
The Right hon. The Lord Howe QC
The Right hon. Sir Richard Luce
The Right hon. David Mellor QC
The Right hon. Timothy Renton
The Right hon. The Baroness Thatcher OM FRS
The Right hon. Lord Trefgarne
Ministers who have given written evidence only:
The Right hon. Jonathan Aitken
The Right hon. Douglas Hogg QC
Former Ministers who have given written evidence only:
The Lord Glenarthur
The Right hon. the hon. Sir Archie Hamilton
Neil Hamilton
The Right hon. the hon. Sir Timothy Sainsbury

Science Promotion

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he has taken since 1993 to promote science and its applications.

The Prime Minister: In May 1993, we published the White Paper "Realising our Potential"—Cm 2550—which sets out the Government's policy for science, engineering and technology. It announced a number of new initiatives such as technology foresight and the restructuring of the research councils to carry forward the Governments strategy. That strategy is to improve the nation's competitiveness and quality of life by maintaining the excellence of science, engineering and technology in the United Kingdom.

In a speech to the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee in February 1994, I underlined the importance of the White Paper and my commitment to the policy it sets out.

The White Paper recognised the important benefits of international collaboration. In September I visited South Africa and met President Mandela. I exchanged letters of intent with him, committing the United Kingdom and South Africa to continuing discussions with a view to concluding in due course a bilateral science, engineering and technology agreement.

In September I also met members of the Council for Science and Technology which the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster chairs on my behalf. We discussed the vital contribution of science, engineering and technology to the nation's prosperity and quality of life. I emphasised our determination to create a culture of partnership, where excellence in science and the development of new applications go hand in hand.

Women Workers

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Prime Minister what practical measures he has introduced to help *(a)* employers in the private sector and *(b)* employers in the public sector to increase the quality and quantity of

women's participation in the work force, since the launch of Opportunity 2000 in 1991.

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

Opportunity 2000 is an employer-led campaign which the Government have supported since its launch in 1991.

The Employment Department helps private and public sector employers increase the quality and quantity of women's employment by promoting a competitive, efficient and flexible labour market. Details of the ED's initiatives introduced since the launch of Opportunity 2000 are contained in the ED's annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library, and include, the out-of-school child care grant, new horizons for women, and fair play for women.

TREASURY

Corporate Assets (Individual Investments)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make an estimate of the proportion of corporate assets which represent investments financed by individual investment through unit trusts life, endowment insurance and pension contributions.

Mr. Nelson: It is not possible to attribute particular corporate assets to particular sources of funds. However, it can be estimated that about 45 per cent. of company securities are financed by personal sector investments in unit and life assurance and pension funds.

This estimate is based on information which can be found in tables 5.2D and 9.1E, G, H, I and J of the January edition of "Financial Statistics".

International Monetary Fund

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current policy towards Russia within the IMF.

Mr Nelson: Discussions are continuing on an IMF standby agreement linked to a strong programme of economic reform. I look forward to a successful outcome.

Government Spending

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the *(a)* actual and *(b)* budgeted Cabinet Office and other spending, as classified in the 1995–96 Red Book, in each year from 1979 to 1994, at 1993 prices; what were the reasons for any material increase in real expenditures in this area; and what was the estimated annual actual expenditure on *(a)* direct funding to the Cabinet Office, *(b)* direct funding to the House of Commons and *(c)* direct funding of the House of Lords for each year from 1979 to 1994 at 1993 prices.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

It is not possible to provide budget figures on the same basis as the actuals which are shown in the 1995–96 Red Book. Expenditure by the Cabinet Office and other spending as classified in the 1995–96 Red Book were as follows:

	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Cabinet Office—OPSS						
"Red Book"	892	977	1,044	1,108	1,241	1,320
at 1993 prices	1,097	1,113	1,119	1,142	1,241	1,294
Real increases	1	16	6	23	99	53
Cabinet Office—other, etc.						
"Red Book"	274	313	363	1,123	1,233	1,200
at 1993 prices	337	357	389	1,157	1,233	1,176
Real increases	1	20	32	768	76	-57
Direct funding at 1993 prices						
House of Commons	96	98	105	156	163	175
House of Lords	18	19	20	33	33	41

Notes:

(a) This information is not available prior to 1989–90 in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

(b) "other spending" covers expenditure by the Privy Council Office, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, the Houses of Parliament and the National Audit Office.

(c) The increases in OPSS spending over the period reflect the priority accorded by the Government to the science programme of basic and strategic research, and includes from 1992–93 to 1994–95 the transfer of funding from the higher education funding councils to the research councils in respect of certain research projects.

(d) Most of the increase in Cabinet Office—other, etc. relates to the setting up in 1994–95 of the security and intelligence services vote, for which comparable historic figures are available only back to 1992–93. Other increases relate principally to capital works and IT projects both in the Cabinet Office and both Houses of Parliament.

Mortgage Tax Relief

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total cost of mortgage tax relief in Scotland in each year since 1982–83; what is the estimated cost for 1994–95 and 1995–96; and what would have been the costs in 1994–95 and 1995–96 if relief had been available at 25 per cent. for both years.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Estimates for the years in question are given in the table.

Cost of mortgage interest relief in Scotland

	£ million
1982–83	140
1983–84	190
1984–85	260
1985–86	350
1986–87	300
1987–88	310
1988–89	370
1989–90	470

Cost of mortgage interest relief in Scotland

	£ million
1990–91	530
1991–92	420
1992–93	340
1993–94	280
1994–95[1]	[2]300
1995–96[1]	[3]240

[1] Assumes, by convention, no changes from current interest rates.
[2] Relief at 20 per cent.
[3] Relief at 15 per cent.

The estimates for 1994–95 and 1995–96 are approximate and are based on the regional distribution of mortgages shown by the 1993 family expenditure survey applied to the United Kingdom total estimates for these years.

The corresponding costs in 1994–95 and 1995–96 for relief at 25 per cent. are estimated to be £380 million and £410 million respectively.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcom Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the total departmental expenditures and planned expenditure on trade and industry by his Department and its predecessors for each year from 1979 to 1998 in 1993 prices; showing also expenditures on research and development and expenditure data for industrial support.

Mr. Heseltine: Total expenditure figures in cash terms for the DTI and its predecessors from 1979–80 are available as follows:

"The Government's Expenditure Plans", published in January of each year by Her Majesty's Treasury for the period to 1990–91:

Department of Trade and Industry and Department of Energy Departmental Reports, published in February/March of each year, for the period from 1991–92 to 1992–93:

Department of Trade and Industry Departmental Reports published from 1993–94 onwards which reflect the merger in 1992 with the former Department of Energy.

Figures for 1993–94 and forward year plans to 1997–98 will be included in the next edition of the Department of Trade and Industry's departmental report, due to be published in late February or early March this year.

These publications also include details of spending on industrial support. Details of spending on research and development, also in cash terms, are provided in the "Annual Review of Government-funded R and D" published each year from 1983 to 1992 and subsequently replaced by the annual "Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology". Plans for 1997–98 are not yet available, but will be included in the 1995 edition, due to be published in early summer 1995.

The cash terms figures may be adjusted to reflect 1993–94 prices by means of the GDP deflators which are shown in table 6A.1 on page 131 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995–96". Copies of documents referred to above which have already been published are available in the Library of the House. The remainder will be placed in the Library upon publication.

Iraq (Sanctions)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which countries were listed as likely diversionary routes for the avoidance of sanctions against Iraq in the letter from his Department to various British exporting companies dated September 1990; and why those countries were selected for mention.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The letter sent to a large number of British companies in September 1990 concerning UN sanctions against Iraq did not include a list of countries.

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by the Department or agency.

Mr. Heseltine: The information in respect of civil servants in my Department and its agencies for the calendar year 1994 is as follows:

	Description and cost
Title	Oxford Strategic Leadership Programme
Objectives	To help senior managers to develop their strategic leadership skills. Allowing them to apply these skills in the workplace.
Organisation	Templeton college, Oxford
Total cost	£10,575
Number of attendees	2
Responsibilities of attendees	Senior Managers in the Government Office for the South East
Evaluation	Verbal feedback and written course appraisal from trainees on specific forms. Follow-up forms sent to trainees and line managers eight weeks after the course to assess how effective it had been.

No DTI staff have attended any other training or tuition courses in that period where the cost for the individual exceeded £5,000.

Biological and Chemical Weapons

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newport, West, (Mr. Flynn) *Official Report*, 20 December 1994, column *1045*, on the import of biological and chemical warfare weapons materials and their precursors, what are the reasons for the unavailability of the information requested.

Mr. Needham: The United Kingdom classification of commodities for overseas trade is based on the harmonised commodity description and coding system, an internationally agreed system of classification which incorporates the headings of the combined nomenclature of the European Communities. This classification does not specifically identify the materials in question. As a consequence, the official trade statistics of the United Kingdom cannot distinguish between the materials in question and related commodities. An analysis of import licences issued by this Department would not provide the required information because it is unlikely that an individual import licence would be required for many of the commodities concerned.

Nuclear Materials Trafficking

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the answer of 20 December to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central, (Mr. Cousins) *Official Report*, columns *1043–44*, what additional funds Her Majesty's Government have offered the International Atomic Energy Agency to meet its intensified activities to combat nuclear materials trafficking.

Mr. Charles Wardle: As I stated in my answer to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *1043–44*, the board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency will resume its discussions on the director general's report on illicit trafficking at its meeting in March. Any detailed consideration of funding issues would be premature in advance of this meeting, which will establish the nature of IAEA involvement.

Departmental Employees

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and, of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information requested is set out in the following table:

Headcount of women in the Department of Trade and Industry by grade level at 1 April 1991–1994

Grade level	*1991*[1]	*1992*[1]	*1993*	*1994*
G3	4	5	6	7
G7	117	129	162	176
EO	1,061	1,067	1,113	1,054
AO	1,964	1,944	2,020	1,886
AA	1,815	1,756	1,636	1,395
Total number of women employed in Department	5,617	5,592	5,700	5,309

[1] The Department of Energy joined DTI in 1992. The figures for 1991 and 1992 therefore exclude former Department of Energy staff.

Grenade Launcher Exports

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total value of grenade launcher exports in each of the last five years.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The published information is not sufficiently detailed to identify the value of exports of specific weapons. The information available for harmonised system commodity code 9301 0000—"military weapons (other than revolvers, pistols, swords, cutlasses, bayonets, lances, etc.)"—is published in Central Statistical Office business monitors MM20 and MQ20, "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Export Credits Guarantee Advisory Committee

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all of the members of the Export Credits Guarantee Advisory Committee, with their corporate or other affiliation for each year since 1985.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is as follows:

		Appointment Commenced	*Ended*
R.J. Dent Esq.	Baring Brothers	1 August 1980	1985
J.N. Scott Esq.	The General Electric Co.	1 August 1980	1986
Sir Jeffrey Benson	National Westminster Bank	1 September 1981	1987
W.J.A. Dacombe Esq.	Rea Brothers plc	1 August 1982	1986
M.D. McWilliam Esq.	Standard Chartered Bank	1 August 1982	1987
W. Hogbin Esq. CBE	Taylor Woodrow International Ltd	1 August 1983	1988
W.G. Barrett Esq.	Midland Bank	1 August 1983	1986
R.H. George Esq. CB	Celluware Group	1 June 1984	1991
E.L. Brooks Esq	Rothmans International plc	1 November 1984	1991
P.W. Bulfield Esq	J. Henry Schroder Wagg and Co.	1 October 1985	1988
T.W.B. Sallitt Esq. CBE	Hawker Siddeley Group	1 April 1986	1990
Sir Peter Leslie	Barclays Bank plc	1 September 1986	1992
A.G. Gormly Esq. CBE	Trafalgar House plc	1 February 1988	1994
Hon. D. Douglas-Home CBE	Morgan Grenfell and Co.	1 March 1988	1993
S.M.F. Harris Esq.	Guardian Royal Exchange	1 March 1988	1991
Prof. K. Scholes	Sheffield Business School	1 April 1988	1991
D.G. Eustace Esq.	British Aerospace plc	1 August 1988	1992
F.M.P. Riding Esq.	Lloyds Bank plc	1 August 1988	1991
R.T. Fox Esq. CBE	Kleinwort Benson Group	1 July 1991	—
Sir Derek Thomas KCMG	N M Rothschild and Son Ltd.	1 October 1991	—
C. Smallwood Esq.	TSB Group plc	1 October 1991	1994
Sir Robert Davidson	Balfour Beatty Ltd.	1 October 1991	—
Viscount Weir	The Weir Group plc	1 November 1991	—

		Appointment Commenced	Ended
J.W. Melbourn Esq.	National Westminster Bank	1 November 1991	—
G.W. Lynch Esq.	Hiscox Syndicates Ltd.	1 July 1993	—
B.P. Dewe Mathews Esq.	J. Henry Schroder Wagg and Co.	1 July 1993	—
T.M. Evans Esq. CBE	Foster Wheeler Ltd.	1 August 1993	—
Sir Frank Lampl	Bovis Construction Group	1 August 1993	—
D.B. Newlands Esq	The General Electric Co.	1 August 1993	—

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what remuneration the members of the Export Credits Guarantee Advisory Committee receive.

Mr. Needham: Members of the Export Guarantees Advisory Council receive no remuneration for their services.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what selection criteria there are governing appointments to the Exports Credits Guarantee Advisory Committee.

Mr. Needham: Members of the Export Guarantees Advisory Council are appointed by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and are drawn from senior levels of the banking, commercial and industrial sectors. Members are chosen for their expertise in their particular field and their experience of export credit business.

Land Mines

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the occasions when the Export Credits Guarantee Department has advanced credits to cover the export of land mines over the last five years.

Mr. Needham: None.

Gas Market (Competition)

Sir John Hannam: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has for consultation on the choice of areas for the extension of competition in the gas market which he has proposed would be introduced from 1996 to 1998.

Mr. Eggar: I have today published a consultation document jointly with the Director General of Gas Supply, Clare Spottiswoode, on the choice of the initial areas for the phased extension of competition into the gas market between 1996 and 1998.

Subject to enactment of the proposed Bill by Parliament, we propose a first phase starting in April 1996 which would introduce competitive gas supply to a geographic area of Great Britain containing up to 500,000 premises which consume less than 2,500 therms of gas a year. A second phase starting from a date in 1997 would extend competition to an area or areas containing a total of 2 million such premises. Finally, from a date in 1998, it is intended that the entire gas market in Great Britain, some 18 million premises, should be open to competitive supply.

We intend to announce the prospective areas chosen as soon as possible, so that, subject to parliamentary consideration of the Bill, all may plan accordingly. Once we have considered the responses to the document, my aim is to make an announcement early in March.

The initial phases are important steps in the proposed move to full competition at the national level in 1998. They will provide an opportunity to ensure the satisfactory operation of the new management and computer systems necessary to ensure the accurate measurement, balancing and allocation of gas. Systems will also be needed to ensure the orderly handover of responsibility where a consumer decides to change supplier. The phased introduction of competition will allow those responsible for these systems time to ensure their fully satisfactory operation.

It will be convenient if the area chosen is geographically well delineated and coincides with existing administrative boundaries and clearly demarcated part of the gas pipeline network. We should like the area chosen to contain examples of the full cross section of types of premises and customer and include both urban and rural environments. The area chosen should provide a good test of the arrangements for measuring gas and so on, and handling changes of customer.

Subject to these other factors, we consider it would also be reasonable, in choosing the initial area to benefit from competition, to take into account the pattern of regional transportation charge differentials which were introduced in October 1994. The independent suppliers have said that they expect to offer average savings of some 10 per cent. on current BG prices. Within that pattern, they may—or may not—choose to pass on the differential transportation charges, which amount to around plus/minus 2 per cent. of final prices. I have noted in this context the recommendation of the Trade and Industry Select Committee that

"areas likely to be disadvantaged by cost reflective charges should be included amongst those selected".

In the consultation document, we are seeking views on the choice of the initial area in 1996. We are also seeking views as to whether the area for the second phase in 1997 should be:

(i) a single geographic area (enlarging the area for the first phase); or

(ii) split between two or more distinct areas (of which the first phase area would be one or part of one).

There may be some technical arguments in favour of the first alternative. On the other hand, the second alternative would enable more than one area to gain experience of competition.

In order to gain as much information as possible from the initial phases of competition, the Director General of Gas Supply may invite consumers and appropriate representative groups and persons to supply information to help her monitor the development of competition. It will therefore be helpful if representative organisations in the area concerned are prepared to assist in this process. Parliament will have an opportunity to debate the issues

related to the initial phases of competition during the passage of the forthcoming Gas Bill.

The consultation document has been sent to all local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales as well as to all Members of Parliament, consumer groups and the gas industry. Copies have also been placed in the Printed Paper Office in the House of Lords. The deadline for responses is 24 February.

Further copies of the document can be obtained from the Library of the Office of Gas Supply, 16 Palace street, London SW1E 5JD, telephone 0171 932 1602/3/4.

British Coal

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the land and property in the Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley constituency which currently remains in the ownership of British Coal Property.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 19 January 1995]:* The land and property owned by British Coal are matters for the corporation and I will draw the hon. Member's interest to the attention of the chairman.

Export Credits

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what value of export credits for capital goods and projects were advanced (i) in total and (ii) in respect of defence exports for each year since 1980 and for *(a)* Pakistan, *(b)* India, *(c)* Nigeria, *(d)* Indonesia, *(e)* Jordan, *(f)* Kenya, *(g)* Sri Lanka, *(h)* the Philippines, *(i)* Saudi Arabia, *(j)* Malaysia, *(k)* Turkey, *(i)* Qatar, *(m)* Thailand, *(n)* Kuwait, *(o)* the United Arab Emirates, *(p)* Bharain, *(q)* Oman, *(r)* Brunei and *(s)* Egypt.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* The values requested are set out in the following tables:

ECGD experience on defence business—(£ million) for specific markets requested

	1980–81	1981–82	1982–83	1983–84	1984–85	1985–86	1986–87	1987–88	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Bahrain	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brunei	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Egypt	0	0	0	12	0	11	111	70	2	0	0	0	0	0
India	0	7	0	219	0	19	1	17	0	25	0	0	0	0
Indonesia	0	54	24	0	109	83	51	6	3	0	3	2	442	6
Jordan	0	30	0	0	15	0	202	91	99	0	0	0	14	0
Kenya	0	0	0	0	108	0	0	0	43	0	0	0	0	0
Kuwait	0	0	0	73	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	580
Malaysia	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	187	272	377	19
Nigeria	0	39	278	3	47	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Oman	305	62	61	0	4	17	37	0	0	0	350	0	44	344
Pakistan	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
Philippines	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Qatar	0	80	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	0	129	218
Saudi Arabia	0	0	24	0	0	6	0	0	450	0	0	0	225	750
Sri Lanka	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Thailand	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Turkey	0	0	0	75	8	70	0	0	0	31	24	0	1	0
UAE	0	0	96	0	0	1	0	0	0	188	0	0	356	0

ECGD total capital goods and project business experience—(£ million) for specific markets requested

	1980–81	1981–82	1982–83	1983–84	1984–85	1985–86	1986–87	1987–88	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Bahrain	17	64	4	20	7	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	35	32
Brunei	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Egypt	25	58	77	41	157	35	202	118	5	111	21	59	12	0
India	52	42	627	224	75	36	86	83	5	80	70	13	102	209
Indonesia	9	150	566	301	249	140	73	48	67	52	150	124	450	100
Jordan	188	42	1	26	18	0	240	103	152	41	0	0	14	0
Kenya	5	4	48	14	126	3	50	23	45	1	128	0	0	0
Kuwait	0	18	12	73	18	1	2	0	1	0	0	8	0	614
Malaysia	0	43	32	0	19	0	226	0	0	0	256	697	377	19
Nigeria	272	246	1,041	471	121	0	23	0	34	0	0	0	0	0
Oman	305	66	415	306	41	77	66	0	0	0	350	0	45	413
Pakistan	16	0	25	0	8	1	1	0	6	0	0	41	37	12
Philippines	37	52	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	37	29	0	19	0
Qatar	0	85	4	3	1	0	1	5	0	5	5	0	129	218
Saudi Arabia	0	19	58	12	27	52	0	15	450	0	0	17	225	751
Sri Lanka	0	12	39	32	54	0	80	2	5	0	0	11	63	0
Thailand	4	34	5	7	4	23	10	0	13	8	0	0	25	6
Turkey	16	4	0	75	8	165	38	49	125	55	51	175	130	112
UAE	0	0	96	0	0	1	0	33	0	188	0	0	356	0

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the average political risk premium for Export Credits Guarantee Department cover for exports to Saudi Arabia for each six-month period since January 1991.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* For reasons of commercial confidentiality, the ECGD does not make public premium rates for individual countries.

Railway Station, Stratford

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions in the last six months civil servants in his Department met persons representative of interests in Stratford, London, to discuss matters relating to proposals for a new Stratford station.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* There have been no meetings between civil servants in this Department and persons representative of interests in Stratford in the last six months, although officials here have been kept well apprised of Stratford's interests in the proposals for a new station.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions and on what date he, Ministers or former Ministers in his Department met persons in Stratford, London, to discuss matters relating to the implications of a new railway station at Stratford.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* On 13 January 1994, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Sir T. Sainsbury) when Minister for Trade, met the Stratford promoters group; and on 28 April 1994 I visited Stratford and was briefed by local representatives on the implications of a new railway station.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if the Sunday Fairs Act 1448 (27 Hen VI c 5) is in force; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if the Statute of Northampton 1328 (2 Edward III c 15) is in force; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if the Statute (1331) 5 Edward III (5 Edward III c 5) is in force; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if the Sale of Horses Act 1555 (2 and 3 Phil and Mar c 7) and the Sale of Horses Act 1588 (31 Eliz I c 12) are still in force; and if he will make a statement;

(5) if the Fairs Act 1871 (34 and 35 Vict c 78) and the Fairs Act 1873 (36 and 37 Vict c 37) are still in force; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have been asked to reply.

With the exception of the Fairs Act of 1871 and 1873, all of the statutes mentioned have been repealed. The Fairs Acts of 1871 and 1873 empower my right hon. and learned Friend to make an order either abolishing certain types of fair or changing the day or days on which such fairs are held.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioner Incomes

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the proportion of pensioners receiving income from an occupational pension identified as *(a)* all pensioners, *(b)* single male pensioners aged under 75 years, *(c)* single female pensioners aged under 75 years, *(d)* single pensioners aged under 75 years, *(e)* pensioner couples aged under 75 years, *(f)* single male pensioners aged 75 years and over, *(g)* single female pensioners aged 75 years and over, *(h)* single pensioners aged 75 years and over and *(i)* pensioner couples where at least one partner is aged 75 years and over; and if he will provide figures for the mean and the median amount received for the latest year in which figures are available.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is in the table.

The proportion of pensioners with income from occupational pensions with the mean and median amounts for those in receipt

	Percentage with occupational pension	*Mean amount (£ per week)*	*Median amount (£ per week)*
All pensioners	60	71.70	37.80
Single male pensioners under 75	55	67.90	31.20
Single female pensioners under 75	60	52.90	31.60
Single pensioners under 75	59	53.90	31.50
Pensioner couples under 75	73	97.10	54.80
Single male pensioners aged 75 and over	51	56.50	23.50
Single female pensioners aged 75 and over	47	50.10	24.30
Single pensioners aged 75 and over	48	51.70	24.10
Pensioner couples aged 75 and over	68	78.20	41.50

Notes:

1. Percentages are rounded to the nearest 1 per cent., amounts rounded to the nearest 10p.
2. Estimates are drawn from the 1992 family expenditure survey and the GAD 1991 occupational pension schemes survey, at July 1992 prices.
3. Single pensioners are defined as those over state pension age, couples are those where the husband is over state pension age.
4. Couples aged under 75 are defined by the age of the husband.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number and proportion of *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples who have total gross weekly incomes of £0 to £50, £51 to £100, £101 to £150, £151 to £200, £201 to £250, £251 to £300, £301 to £350, £351 to £400, £401 to £450, £451 to £500 and £500 and above.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The available information is in the table. Owing to difficulties with sample sizes, it has been necessary to amalgamate some income bands in order to provide reliable estimates.

Weekly gross income distribution—pensioner units 1992 pensioner couples

	Up to £150	*Up to £200*	*Up to £250*	*Up to £350*	*Over £350*
Numbers (000s)	900	600	300	400	400
Percentage	36	22	12	16	14

Single pensioners

	Up to £100	*Up to £150*	*Up to £250*	*Over £250*
Numbers (000s)	2,700	900	500	400
Percentage	60	21	11	8

Notes:

1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred thousand. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole per cent. and may not sum to 100.
2. Estimates are drawn from the 1992 family expenditure survey.
3. Pensioner units are defined as single people over state pension age and couples in which the husband is over state pension age.

Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applicants for benefit under the chronic bronchitis and emphysema regulations were turned down because the X-ray did not show category 1 pneumoconiosis; and of these in how many a post mortem examination revealed evidence of pneumoconiosis.

Mr. Hague: By 30 November 1994, 14,600 out of 44,594 claims for benefit had been disallowed because an X-ray did not show at least category 1 pneumoconiosis. The information requested in respect of post mortem examinations is not available.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applicants for benefit under the chronic bronchitis and emphysema regulations had to obtain fresh X-rays because of over-exposure of previous X-rays.

Mr. Hague: Any necessary X-rays are obtained by the Benefits Agency. Information on the number of any new X-rays required because of over-exposure of previous X-rays is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applicants for benefit under the chronic bronchitis and emphysema regulations received new X-rays before examination.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Family Incomes

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the average net incomes before and after housing costs, after tax and benefits of *(a)* a lone mother of two children working 20 hours per week paying an average council rent and *(b)* a married man with two children and a dependent non-working wife working 40 hours per week paying an average council rent; and if he will give details of the calculation of each benefit to which they may be entitled on the basis of hourly pay rates of (i) £3.50, (ii) £4 and (iii) £5.

Mr. Burt: The information requested can be found in the Government Statistical Service publications "Tax Benefit Model Tables, April 1994" published on 21 July 1994, and "Additional Tax Benefit Model Tables, October 1994", published on 20 October 1994. Copies of both publications are in the Library.

Benefits

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide figures for his Department's expenditure on income support, attendance allowance and disability living allowance for claimants with preserved rights between 31 March 1993 and 31 March 1994.

Mr. Roger Evans: Estimated quarterly expenditure on claimants who were receiving either income supply only or income support and attendance allowance/disability living allowance is as follows:

	£ million
May 1993	736
August 1993	696
November 1993	653
February 1994	612

Separate data are not collected on attendance allowance or disability living allowance for people in residential care and nursing homes who are not also in receipt of income support.

Source:

Income support quarterly inquiries.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people had preserved rights to the higher level of income support between 31 March 1993 and 31 March 1994.

Mr. Roger Evans: Information on income support for people in residential care and nursing homes is contained in the quarterly statistical inquiry based on sample data. The number with preserved rights are:

	Number
May 1993	284,000
August 1993	267,000
November 1993	249,000
February 1994	233,000

Source:

Income support quarterly inquiries.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent by his Department on income support and attendance allowance or disability living allowance for new claimants in independent care homes since 31 March 1993.

Mr. Roger Evans: Information is not available in the form requested. Estimated total expenditure on claimants who were receiving either income support only or income support and attendance allowance/disability living allowance for the 12 months from May 1993 is £73 million.

Separate data are not collected on attendance allowance or disability living allowance for people in residential care and nursing homes who are not also in receipt of income support.

Source:

Income support quarterly inquiries

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people claiming residential allowance were placed in (a) residential care homes and *(b)* nursing homes during each month from April 1993 to March 1994.

Mr. Roger Evans: Information is not available in the form requested. The total numbers in receipt of residential allowance based on sample data are:

	Number
May 1993	2,000
August 1993	17,000
November 1993	30,000
February 1994	44,000

Source:
Income support quarterly inquiries.

Information is not available split between residential care and nursing homes.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of residential allowance were in independent residences or nursing homes on 31 March 1993.

Mr. Roger Evans: Residential allowance was introduced on 1 April 1993. Most people who were in residential care and nursing homes on 31 March 1993 have preserved rights to the higher levels of income support and would not be entitled to residential allowance. Information is not available for those who subsequently claimed residential allowance because they do not have preserved rights to the higher levels of income support.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for disability living allowance were *(a)* received and *(b)* approved between (i) March to October 1993, (ii) November 1993 to March 1994 and (iii) April 1994 to October 1994; and how many in each case were from people whose principal disability was (1) physical and (2) mental illness.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the format requested. The information available is in the tables.

Table 1: Disability living allowance claims and awards

	March–October 1993	*November 1993–March 1994*	*April–October 1994*
Claims received	298,000	174,000	294,000
Awards made	155,000	84,000	136,000

Source:
100 per cent. count.

Table 2: First awards of disability living allowance by type of disability

	March–November 1993	*December 1993–February 1994*	*March–November 1994*
Physical	162,000	48,000	171,000
Mental	32,000	9,000	32,000

Sources:
5 per cent sample.
Analytical services division.
Notes:
1. The information in tables 1 and 2 is from different sources and is collated by different periods.
2. Table 1—a claim may be received in one period but decided in another.
3. Table 2—figures are first awards arising from initial claims, reviews or appeals. The breakdown of type of disability is made by reference to the main disabling condition recorded by the adjudication officer initially deciding the claim.

Incapacity benefit

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what amount of benefit is payable to a recipient with no children at school and a wife under 60 years under the new incapacity benefit scheme.

Mr. Hague: The basic rate of incapacity benefit will be payable where there is no entitlement to a child dependency increase, or the person cannot be treated as entitled, and the spouse is under age 60.

For the first 28 weeks of sickness the basic rate is £44.40, from week 29 to week 52 it is £52.50, and from week 53 it is £58.85.

People with a terminal illness, or who are receiving the highest rate of the care component of disability living allowance, will be able to get the long-term rate of £58.85 from week 29.

An age addition may be payable at one or two rates depending on the age of the person when his incapacity for work began. If his incapacity began before age 35, the age addition is £12.40. Where the incapacity began when aged 35 to 44, the age addition is £6.20. No age addition is payable if the person is aged 45 or over when the incapacity began.

Note:
The rates given are subject to parliamentary approval.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to uprate annually all benefits that claimants of the incapacity benefit may be entitled to; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: Section 150 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 requires the Secretary of State to review annually the rates of incapacity benefit.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the difference in the payments made to claimants under the invalidity benefit and the new incapacity benefits scheme for a person aged 30, 40 or 50 years where there is *(a)* and adult dependant under 60 years and *(b)* a dependant over 60 years.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table. Some further assumptions have been made to support the examples, as explained in the notes.

	Age 30 £	Age 40 £	Age 50 £
Invalidity benefit	106.50	101.90	98.00
Long-term incapacity benefit			
Spouse under 60	71.25	65.05	58.85
Spouse 60 +	106.50	100.30	94.10

Notes:

1. In the case of invalidity benefit, the spouse's age is not a relevant factor.
2. Assumes spouse does not have earnings/occupational pension in excess of relevant earnings limit and does not receive a benefit in own right.
3. Assumes no earnings-related additional pension payable with invalidity benefit.
4. In the case of incapacity benefit, an increase is payable for a spouse aged 60 and for an adult dependant if the claimant is entitled or treated as entitled to a child dependancy increase, regardless of adult dependant's age.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by the Department or agency.

Mr. Goodlad: The information in respect of both the diplomatic and aid wings of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is given in a list of six pages that is being deposited in the House Library. My agencies bought no training with a total cost in excess of £5,000.

French Foreign Policy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the French Government in regard to the proliferation consequences of the sale of nuclear technology by France to the People's Republic of China.

Mr. David Davis: We are not aware of any sales of nuclear technology by France to China which could contribute to the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Council of Europe

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will support the formal adoption of recommendation 1235 (1994) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe relating to psychiatry and human rights by the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom and the other member states of the Council of Europe are studying recommendation 1235 of the Parliamentary Assembly. We will decide in due course whether we are able to support its adoption by the Committee of Ministers.

Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of the Russian Federation over the potential proliferation consequences of the decision of the Russian Government to rebuild the damaged nuclear power plant at Bushehr in Iran.

Mr. David Davis: We have expressed our concern to the Russians that their decision to rebuild the damaged nuclear power station at Bushehr could have proliferation consequences.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what stipulations were set by the non-nuclear weapon state members of the European Union upon France, as President-in-office of the EU, in representing EU political opinion at the final preparatory committee meeting of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty review and extension conference in New York on 23 to 27 January.

Mr. David Davis: France, as current President of the EU, has been co-ordinating an EU statement on NPT extension for use at the NPT extension conference's fourth preparatory committee on 23 to 27 January. As with other intergovernmental exchanges of this kind, comments on EU draft statements are circulated in confidence. The final text will have to be acceptable to all EU member states.

Harjit Singh

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further representations he has made to the Indian Government regarding the case of Harjit Singh.

Mr. Baldry: We have raised the case of Harjit Singh with the Indian Government on several occasions. We understand that a case of habeas corpus brought by Harjit Singh's father is still before the courts, although the proceedings are moving very slowly.

Departmental Employees

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and, of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Goodlad: The information requested by the hon. Member is as follows:

	1991	1992	1993	1994
Total Women	3,048 (98 P/T)	3,061 (115 P/T)	3,081 (154 P/T)	3,029 (152 P/T)
Grade 3 level	Figures not available	5	4	5
Grade 7 level	Figures not available	113 (2 P/T)	127 (7 P/T)	135 (11 P/T)
Executive Officer level	Figures not available	791 (14 P/T)	772 (30 P/T)	794 (37 P/T)
Administrative Officer level	Figures not available	1,302 (28 P/T)	1,293 (53 P/T)	1,245 (53 P/T)
Administrative Assistant level	Figures not available	218	207 (20 P/T)	172 (6 P/T)

Notes:
1. These figures cover all FCO grades including the DS and the ODA.
2. (P/T = Part-Time).

Trident

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding his Department's assessment of the perception of overseas Governments of the recent deployment by Britain of the Trident nuclear system.

Mr. David Davis: Our NATO allies fully accept the United Kingdom's deployment of Trident as part of our and NATO's strategy of war prevention. It is not for us to comment on the perceptions of others.

Pakistan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Pakistan's anti-narcotics legislation, with particular reference to the law providing for the death sentence and forfeiture of property for those involved in drug trafficking.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 20 January, *Official Report*, column *746*.

Peace Talks, Nairobi

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made representations to the Government of Sudan that it should recognise and co-operate with the UN observer of the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development peace talks in Nairobi.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is for the IGADD states to decide whether they want the appointment of a UN observer to the peace process. Discussions between them and the Sudanese Government are continuing.

Croatia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Croatia in respect of Krajina and the future deployment of UNPROFOR in the region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I discussed the Croatian Government's position on the extension of UNPROFOR's mandate with Mr. Sanader, the Croatian deputy Foreign Minister, on 11 January. I made clear our deep concern and regret over this development, which puts at risk the prospect of finding a peaceful solution to the problems in the United Nations protected areas in Croatia. Along with our EU partners, we have called upon the Croatian Government to reconsider their decision.

Drug Liaison Officers

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the contribution drug liaison officers on attachment to British diplomatic posts overseas make to his Department's efforts to develop international co-operation against the illicit drug trade.

Mr. Baldry: British drug liaison officers, who are attached to diplomatic posts in a number of countries, play an important role in developing international co-operation in the fight against the global menace of the illicit drug trade. They are fully integrated into the work of the posts concerned, and carry out their duties in close co-operation with local law enforcement agencies.

In their work, these officers fully observe Home Office guidelines. These state that no police officer or public informant should counsel, incite or procure the commission of a crime and make it clear that an informant should be instructed that he must not act as agent provocateur.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Councils in November and December 1994.

Mr. David Davis: I attended the Foreign Affairs Councils in November and December.

The Council of 28 to 29 November covered the following subjects:

On the White Paper on growth, competitiveness and employment, Mr. Delors introduced the main themes for the Essen European Council. He said that there would be two discussions, one focusing

on White Paper themes generally, and the second on employment questions.

Ministers agreed to release a first tranche of 15 mecu of the 35 mecu of EU macro-financial assistance to Albania. The release of the second tranche, 20 mecu, will depend on a favourable Commission report on progress in economic and political reform in Albania and a subsequent Council decision.

Foreign Ministers held discussions with Mr. Perez and Mr. Arafat and issued a statement which reaffirmed their determination to continue their support for the middle east peace process, both politically and economically.

Ministers reviewed preparations for the CSCE summit in Budapest—5 to 6 December.

The Commission introduced a support package of some 200 to 300 mecu for Northern Ireland.

The Council agreed to put forward for consideration at Essen the interim report of the Consultative Commission on Racism and Xenophoria.

Ministers discussed preparations for the interim conference on the EU's stability pact initiative to be held in the margins of the CSCE summit in Budapest.

A partnership and co-operation agreement between the EU and Moldova was signed on 28 November.

The Council approved a negotiating mandate for Europe agreements with Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

Ministers discussed the presidency's draft pre-accession strategy for the associated countries of central and eastern Europe. The text was agreed, apart from a passage on cumulation of rules of origin.

The Council discussed the Commission's communication on a strategy for strengthening the EU's political and economic links with the Mediterranean countries, in preparation for a further discussion at the Essen European Council.

Ministers reviewed prospects for the Association Council with Turkey on 19 December. The presidency underlined the importance of concluding negotiations on customs union at the Council.

The presidency reported on progress in the negotiations with Israel, Morocco and Tunisia. The agreement with Israel was close to conclusions, but the agreements with Morocco and Tunisia were delayed by unresolved questions on access for agricultural products to EU markets.

The Council approved a draft report, to be issued by the Essen European Council, on measures to tackle illicit trade in nuclear materials.

Ministers discussed a Commission proposal to provide balance of payments assistance to Ukraine.

The Council discussed the EU position for the ministerial conference on the mid-term review of the Lomé convention, to be held in Brussels on 30 November and 1 December. Agreement was reached on a package of measures to be put to the ACP countries on the programming of aid.

The Council discussed progress in implementing the Uruguay round agreements. It reaffirmed the determination of the Community and the member states to ratify the agreements before 1 January 1995.

Discussion of the Commission proposal for the Council to approve the OECD agreement on shipbuilding subsidies was postponed until 19 December.

On Rwanda, the Council called for the UN to give high priority to actions to stabilise the region. Ministers supported a regional refugee conference, and endorsed an immediate rehabilitation programme to the value of 67 mecu, agreed by the development council.

In a brief discussion of trade and the environment, the Commission confirmed it was preparing a Green Paper on the subject, and expected this to issue next year.

On relations with the European Parliament the Council noted progress on comitology and temporary committees of inquiry. There was a brief discussion over lunch about some member states' difficulties with the draft implementing provisions for the right to vote and stand in municipal elections of other member states—Article 8B1.

At the Council of 19 to 20 December 1994, the following subjects were discussed:

The presidency listed items for action during the remainder of its tenure. M. Juppe highlighted five French presidency priorities.

On relations with the European Parliament, the Council agreed texts on comitology, temporary committees of inquiry and consolidation of existing Community legislation. Denmark voted against the decision on TCIs. These texts were then adopted by the Commission and the EP at an inter–institutional conference on 20 December.

The Council unanimously adopted a directive which implements the right of EU citizens to vote and stand in municipal elections in member states of which they are not nationals.

An association Council with Turkey was held in the margins. It was agreed that a further association council should be held early in the French presidency.

The EEA Council on 20 December reaffirmed its wish to strengthen the political dialogue on foreign policy with a view to developing closer relations in spheres of mutual interest. The Norwegians are now preparing proposals for a framework for political dialogue under the EEA which they will present to the French presidency.

There was a discussion on ways in which the peace process in the former Yugoslavia could be taken forward.

The Council agreed to discuss Russia during the French presidency on the basis of an options paper.

The Council agreed a new Community generalised system of preferences, to come into force on 1 January 1995. There were two votes. On the creation of a new scheme for industrial products the United Kingdom abstained, and set out its reasons in six statements for the minutes. The scheme passed by qualified majority. Renewal of the scheme for agricultural products was agreed unanimously; this scheme will be reviewed during 1995.

Agreement in principle was reached on the EU/Israel agreement. The agreement is now expected to be signed at the January FAC. There was no progress on the EU/Morocco and EU/Tunisia negotiations. Morocco has rejected the Commission's offer on access for tomatoes and courgettes. The question of Tunisian olive oil quotas remains unresolved.

The Council agreed to endorse the results of the Uruguay round, comprising the Marrakesh final act, the agreement establishing the World Trade Organisation, the ministerial declarations and decisions attached to it, the understanding on commitments in financial services, plurilateral agreements on bovine meat, dairy products, civil aircraft and Government procurement, and the bilateral EC agreements with Australia on coal and with Uruguay on bovine meat. The Council also agreed an accompanying package of EC implementing legislation. All the above texts were formally adopted by the Council of Ministers on 22 December. All the necessary processes have thus been completed to allow the Community to ratify the agreement establishing the World Trade Organisation: the instruments of ratification of the Community and the member states are expected to be deposited in Geneva on 30 December.

The Council received a progress report from the presidency on the three EU/United States working groups established at the July 1994 EU/United States summit. The groups' work covers central and eastern Europe, drugs and international crime, and the mechanisms for EU/United States political co–operation.

The Council confirmed its negotiating directives, originally adopted in December 1991, for the Commission to negotiate a co–operation agreement between Euratom and the United States. The new agreement is to replace the existing United States/Euratom agreements of 1958 and 1960, the second of which expires on 31 December 1995.

The Council approved the OECD agreement on shipbuilding subsidies and authorised the Commission to sign the agreement. Signature took place in Paris on 21 December. The Council adopted a Commission proposal that the Commission and Council should make a joint declaration at the signing ceremony to the effect that

they would monitor the implementation and respect of the agreement by all parties.

The Council agreed the adjustments necessary to the EFTAn accession treaty following the non-accession of Norway.

The chairman of the Consultative Commission on Racism and Xenophobia gave an oral report a progress. This was a follow-up to the interim report of the Consultative Commission, which was presented to the Essen European Council. The consultative commission will submit its final report to the Cannes European Council, in June.

The Council approved concluding decisions allowing the entry into force of the Europe (association) agreements with the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria and the free trade agreements with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Ministers approved in parallel implementing regulations governing the operation of the four Europe agreements.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Shipbuilding

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the size of the shipbuilding industry in Northern Ireland in 1979; and what it is now.

Mr. Ancram: In 1979, Harland and Wolff had a recorded turnover of £67.3 million. The company was privatised in 1989 and turnover in 1993 was £103 million.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the total number of persons serving in the RUC in the ranks of *(a)* constable, *(b)* sergeant, *(c)* inspector, *(d)* chief inspector, *(e)* superintendent and *(f)* chief superintendent as at 31 December 1994.

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is as follows:

Rank	*Number*
Constable	6,264
Sergeant	1,410
Inspector	490
Chief Inspector	163
Superintendent	122
Chief Superintendent	35

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of members of each rank of the RUC broken down by *(a)* perceived religious affiliation and *(b)* gender.

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is as given in the table:

	Community background			*Gender*	
	CB1[1]	*CB2*[2]	*CB3*[3]	*Male*	*Female*
Constable	5,597	454	213	5,512	752
Sergeant	1,269	115	26	1,336	74
Inspector	429	45	16	468	22
Chief Inspector	139	23	1	158	5
Superintendent	102	18	2	121	1
Chief Superintendent	30	5	0	35	0

Notes:
[1] Perceived Protestant community.
[2] Perceived Roman Catholic community.
[3] Other.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the normal consultative arrangements which exist between the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the Police Authority for Northern Ireland and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: The Chief Constable and other senior officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary attend frequent and regular meetings both with the Secretary of State and with the chairman and members of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland. My officials are in frequent contact with both the RUC and the authority, and there is a wide variety of groups comprising the Northern Ireland Office and the Police Authority for Northern Ireland and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, dealing with matters of common concern.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what aspects of the situation relating to promotions to the rank of assistant chief constable in the Royal Ulster Constabulary are currently under consideration; when this process commenced; what are the difficulties; when the issue is likely to be resolved; and if he will list all the stages in the promotion process for the rank of assistant chief constable in the Royal Ulster Constabulary, including selection for the senior command course, when the Chief Constable makes a specific input to that process.

Sir John Wheeler: Appointments to the rank of ACC are made under the provision of section 7(1) of the Police Act (Northern Ireland) 1970. The process is currently the subject of proceedings by way of judicial review; it is not appropriate to comment further pending the outcome of those proceedings.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what comments Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary's 1994 report makes on the need for corporate policy decision making within the senior command of the Royal Ulster Constabulary; and what has been the Chief Constable's response to this.

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Gentleman to paragraph 6 of appendix A on page 40 of the report of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary on the Royal Ulster Constabulary 1994, a copy of which is in the Library.

The Chief Constable, who is responsible for the direction and control of the RUC, has carefully considered HMI's concerns but believes, given the size and complexity of the RUC, that the systems in place are fully sufficient for corporate decision making. These systems include twice weekly meetings with those assistant chief constables with operational roles and, pending the appointment of a Deputy Chief Constable (Support Services), fortnightly meetings with the assistant chief constables with support service responsibilities; a monthly meeting attended by all chief officers; and a force policy executive, comprising the Chief Constable and his two deputies, which takes all major policy decisions.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the salary of the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary; how long the present Chief Constable has been in post; whether his family residence is in Northern Ireland; to what amount of housing allowance he is entitled; on how many nights during 1994 he was present in Northern Ireland; and if he will list those periods of longer than four nights' duration

when the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary was out of Northern Ireland during 1994.

Sir John Wheeler: The salary of the Chief Constable is £85,350 per annum and he has been in post since 1 June 1989.

The Chief Constable resides in Northern Ireland with his wife at RUC headquarters and has done so since 1 June 1989. He does not receive housing allowance but to provide some respite from the domestically undesirable nature of his accommodation, above force headquarters, he receives a non-pensionable allowance of £4,355.04 per annum.

The Chief Constable was in Northern Ireland on 242 nights in 1994. The Chief Constable was outside Northern Ireland on eight occasions for periods of more than four nights; four of those occasions were on official business. When outside Northern Ireland, whether on leave or business, he is always contactable and has been so contacted when appropriate.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total cost to the policing budget of travel, and all associated expenses by the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary during 1994.

Sir John Wheeler: The cost of the Chief Constable's travel in the course of his duties in Northern Ireland cannot be disaggregated. Travel outside Northern Ireland on police duties cost £20,505.33 during 1994; associated expenses totalled £1,931.28.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary was informed by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland of its intention to conduct a public survey on the future of policing in Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: The chairman of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland wrote to consult the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary about the arrangements that the authority intended to make for obtaining the views of people about matters concerning policing, on 18 November 1994. At that stage the date on which the authority was to announce its initiative had not been decided. The secretary of the authority informed RUC headquarters of the proposed date of the announcement on 30 December 1994.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what account he has taken of the article published on 1 January written by the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary on the establishment of a commission for policing in Northern Ireland; and if it is the Government's intention to implement this suggestion; and to what extent the suggestion was derived from general consultation with his senior command colleagues or the staff associations.

Sir John Wheeler: I have noted with interest the Chief Constable's article on policing published in *The Sunday Times* on 1 January 1995 in response to an open letter from the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) published on 11 December 1994, which contained a suggestion that a Northern Ireland commission on policing be established. I understand that the Chief Constable had consulted a number of senior colleagues and that such a commission is the method preferred by the Police Federation of Northern Ireland which represents some 97 per cent. of the RUC. My right hon. and learned Friend does not, at this stage, intend to establish a commission and I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) on 15 December, *Official Report*, columns *739–40*.

Agricultural Colleges

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many full-time students attended *(a)* Greenmount college, *(b)* Enniskillen agricultural college and *(c)* Loughry college in each of the past five years; if there were sufficient places for the number of applicants each year; and if he will make a statement on the futures of these three agricultural colleges.

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* The number of full-time students enrolled at the three colleges run by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland for 1990–91 to 1994–95 was as follows:

	Enniskillen Collegeof Agriculture	*Greenmount College of Agriculture and Horticulture*		*Loughry College of Agriculture and Food Technology*	
		Agriculture	*Horticulture*	*Agriculture*	*Food Technology*
1990–91	47	218	26	46	165
1991–92	40	217	30	45	206
1992–93	47	221	28	39	228
1993–94	32	242	27	61	223
1994–95	51	276	39	39	240

Each year there were sufficient places available for all qualified applicants for full-time courses.

In line with the Government's objective of improving the level of education and training of the national work force, the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland is committed to meeting the education and training needs of the Province's agri-food industry.

Following a strategic review of the Department's activities, consideration is being given to a rationalisation of its education and training service. Under the proposal, the Department would retain three colleges but courses in agriculture would be delivered through Greenmount and Enniskillen colleges, leaving Loughry college to concentrate its resources and facilities on furthering its aim of being a centre of excellence and a focus for food industry development within Northern Ireland.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Data Protection Act 1984

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the number of complaints

alleging breaches of the Data Protection Act 1984 received in each of the latest available three years for *(a)* each county in Wales, *(b)* for Wales as a whole and *(c)* for the United Kingdom; how many prosecutions were brought; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Data Protection Registrar is responsible for administering the Data Protection Act 1984. I understand that statistical information about complaints is not kept on a geographical or county basis. The latest available information relating to complaints and prosecutions—including details, in the case of the latter, of the court concerned—can be found in the 10th report of the Data Protection Registrar, laid before Parliament on 5 July 1994.

Probation Service

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he makes for rurality in determining the formula for funding the probation service in England and Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The formula takes into account the differing staff costs of providing probation services in different parts of the country. A recent review of the formula by the Home Office, the Central Probation Council and the Association of Chief Officers of Probation concluded that an additional allowance based directly on rurality would not be justified.

Riot Shields

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether United Kingdom policing authorities or his Department are testing or have tested electro-shock riot shields or weapons in the last 12 months.

Mr. Maclean: No such tests have been conducted by my Department. I have no details of any such tests that may been conducted by police authorities in respect of equipment used to protect officers against ferocious dogs.

Mr. Gerry Hall

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether Mr. Gerry Hall has ever applied to his Department for a section 5 permit for the building of militarily sensitive equipment, including electro-shock equipment.

Mr. Maclean: No.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the announcement will be made on the distribution of section 11 funding to local authorities, with special reference to Bradford.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 17 January, *Official Report*, column *382*.

Hypnotists

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been of hypnotists in connection with their trade in each of the last five years.

Mr. Maclean: Information held centrally shows one prosecution from 1989 to 1993. This occurred in 1991 and resulted in a conviction.

The 1994 data will not be available until the autumn.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the activities of hypnotists in each of the last two years for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In 1993, we received three letters about stage hypnotism from hon. Members or members of the public. In 1994, we received 39 such letters, and five parliamentary questions about the subject were asked. In addition, the Adjournment debate on stage hypnotism on 12 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *745–52*, was initiated by the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) and my hon. Friends the Members for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) participated.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to *(a)* regulate the activities of hypnotists and *(b)* require the registration of hypnotists.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In an Adjournment debate on stage hypnotism on 12 December 1994, I announced that there was to be a review of the workings of the Hypnotism Act 1952 which regulates public performances of stage hypnotism. The review is now in hand.

Woodcock Inquiry

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the estimates, both in capital and running cost terms, for the implementation of Sir John Woodcock's recommendations.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated cost of implementing in full the proposals contained in the report of Sir John Woodcock's inquiry in respect of England and Wales as forecast for each financial year for which figures are available; and if he will break down the costs by recommendation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Detailed costs of implementing the recommendations contained in Sir John Woodcock's report on Whitemoor are currently being assessed by the Prison Service.

Wheel Clamping

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when proposals will be forthcoming following his Department's consultation paper "Wheel Clamping on Private Land".

Mr. Maclean: We are considering what action it might be appropriate to take. We will make an announcement when our proposals are ready.

Private Clegg

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the imprisonment of Private Clegg in Her Majesty's Prison, Wakefield.

Mr. Howard: Private Clegg is at present imprisoned at HMP Wakefield, on temporary transfer from Northern Ireland, following the dismissal by the House of Lords last Thursday of his appeal against conviction for murder.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has made clear, decisions on Private Clegg's release are a matter for him.

In giving judgment, the House of Lords expressed concern about certain aspects of the law of murder. I can confirm that, together with colleagues, I am reviewing the law in the light of the concern expressed by the House of Lords.

Card Systems

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider setting up a committee to consider the developing technology of card systems, and the potential demand for such systems from Government Departments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science.

Life Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women currently serving a life prison sentence in a prison in England or Wales have been informed they will never be released from prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 16 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *333*. The 15 prisoners mentioned in that answer comprise 14 men and one woman.

Private Detectives

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of private detectives by Government Departments on public agencies; if he will issue guidelines about their use; what representations he has received on the civil liberty implications of such use; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not held centrally. We have not received any representations on the civil liberty implications of the use by Government of private detectives nor have we any plans to introduce guidelines in this area. But we are looking again at policies on the whole of the private security industry and we await with interest the outcome of the Home Affairs Select Committee's current inquiry into the industry.

National Lottery

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to require the organisers of the national lottery to conduct a survey of public opinion before determining the disbursement of funds to charities.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Disbursement of lottery proceeds for charitable expenditure is the responsibility of the National Lottery Charities Board. It is a principle of the lottery that the operator, Camelot, has no role to play in the disbursement of proceeds. I shall be issuing the board with directions as to the matters which it must take into account in making grants, but within that framework it will be responsible for deciding its own policies, practices and procedures. The current draft directions include the need to make grants to small, local organisations and those without immediate popular appeal as well as to large, national high-profile bodies. It is for the board to determine what factors to take into account before determining its policies. I understand that the board will be undertaking detailed consultation with the charitable and voluntary sectors before reaching decisions on these matters.

Police (Traffic)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in respect of his decision not to include enforcement of road traffic regulations in the list of core functions for police authorities.

Mr. Maclean: There is no list of core functions for police authorities. My right hon. and learned Friend announced last October the key objectives for policing for 1995–96. Following consultation with ministerial colleagues and others he decided that it would not be right to include a traffic objective, but this does not mean that road traffic regulations will not be enforced. In promulgating the key objectives, my right hon. and learned Friend made plain the importance the Government attach to road safety, and the reduction of road traffic accident casualties.

It is open to police authorities to include traffic objectives as they consider fit in the local objectives which they will be expected to set each year.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were dedicated to traffic enforcement for each of the last five years for which figures are available by police authority.

Mr. Maclean: Information for the years 1989 to 1993 is set out in the table. Figures for 1994 are not yet available. The collection of data for the Metropolitan police began only in 1994.

Officers dedicated to traffic enforcement by police authority (1989–1993)

Police Authority	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Avon and Somerset	253	259	268	266	208
Bedfordshire	94	99	101	80	73
Cambridgeshire	125	120	125	126	107
Cheshire	235	203	201	206	206
City of London	37	33	37	34	33
Cleveland	96	97	93	94	87
Cumbria	132	131	133	132	128
Derbyshire	157	154	153	146	155
Devon and Cornwall	241	241	239	238	227
Dorset	108	112	111	95	97
Durham	130	135	134	113	115
Dyfed-Powys	104	106	101	94	105
Essex	259	262	274	272	293
Gloucestershire	82	84	83	83	82
Greater Manchester	455	474	467	462	425
Gwent	105	103	100	95	90
Hampshire	263	263	261	343	269
Hertfordshire	159	156	155	157	159
Humberside	164	161	161	161	160
Kent	156	172	208	234	230
Lancashire	305	292	287	282	276
Leicestershire	78	76	84	122	111
Lincolnshire	85	86	103	99	94
Merseyside	329	367	359	338	349
Norfolk	118	127	114	116	119
North Wales	134	134	137	136	125
North Yorkshire	156	161	147	139	132

Officers dedicated to traffic enforcement by police authority (1989–1993)

Police Authority	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Northamptonshire	89	100	98	102	99
Northumbria	251	253	253	244	249
Nottinghamshire	182	189	187	163	160
South Wales	266	256	248	247	231
South Yorkshire	206	208	213	219	202
Staffordshire	233	234	240	233	226
Suffolk	94	97	87	85	83
Surrey	225	202	203	213	209
Sussex	245	239	238	247	243
Thames Valley	326	341	354	344	345
Warwickshire	104	127	126	126	126
West Mercia	119	142	132	127	120
West Midlands	449	446	462	441	428
West Yorkshire	384	392	391	384	357
Wiltshire	101	96	103	104	115

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each police authority the budget allocated for road traffic enforcement *(a)* as a total and *(b)* as a percentage of overall expenditure for each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not held centrally

Police National Computer

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from senior police officers about the proposed privatisation of the running of the police national computer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: One formal representation was made by the then president of the Association of Chief Police Officers to my predecessor, which supported the principle of market testing the hendon data centre but expressed concern about the timing of the exercise. Representatives of the association have been consulted on the same matter more recently, and have expressed similar views. I will shortly be announcing our conclusions with respect to the future management of the Hendon data centre.

Police Stations

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the 1995–96 police grant allocation on the number of police stations, and their hours of opening in the North Wales police force area.

Mr. Maclean: The draft report "The Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 1995–96" sets out the principles on which proposed allocations of resources have been made for 1995–96. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library.

It is for the police authority and the chief constable to decide what their priorities are and on what they spend their allocation of police grant.

Police (Abnormal Operations)

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which constabularies' applications for special payments for a one-off abnormal operation have been successful during the past five years; and what percentage of their annual budget the cost of that operation represented.

Mr. Maclean: One application for a special payment of grant has been successful during the past five years, from Northumbria police authority. The estimated additional expenditure incurred represented 6.4 per cent. of budget.

Police, Shoreham Harbour

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total cost of the police operation at Shoreham harbour; and what percentage of the annual budget for Sussex constabulary this operation will represent.

Mr. Maclean: I understand that the total estimated cost of the police operation at Shoreham harbour at 19 January was £2.2 million. This represents about 1.7 per cent. of the force budget for 1994–95.

Weapons Scanners

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the use of scanners to detect offensive weapons in places of public entertainment.

Mr. MacLean: This operation is not collected centrally.

North Wales Police

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the 1995–96 police grant allocation on recruitment of police, special constables and graduate recruits for North Wales police.

Mr. Maclean: The responsibility for the recruitment of police officers, special constables and graduate recruits to the police lies solely with the chief officer of the police force concerned. No assessment of the impact of the 1995–96 grant allocation on recruitment for North Wales police has been undertaken centrally.

Martin Fenton

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to release on licence Martin Fenton, currently serving a life sentence for murder.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Mr. Fenton's case has been reviewed twice by the parole board—most recently in October 1992—but the board has not yet recommended that Mr. Fenton is safe to release. My right hon. and learned Friend has no power to release a mandatory life sentence prisoner without a positive parole board recommendation.

The next review of Mr Fenton's case by the parole board will begin in July 1995.

Frederick West

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is *(a)* the total cost of the Frederick West operation to the Gloucestershire constabulary to date and *(b)* the estimated cost of the

entire inquiry; and what percentage of the annual budget these sums represent.

Mr. Maclean: As at 19 January, the estimated total cost to date was £1.4 million. This represents 2.6 per cent. of the force budget for 1994–95. The additional cost to the force is some £670,000 or 1.2 per cent. of budget.

The chief constable is not able at present to make a firm estimate of the total costs expected to be incurred.

Prisoners (Release on Licence)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women who were released on licence were recalled to prison during 1994.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Provisional data for 1994 show that there were 291 men and four women recalled from parole licences under section 39 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 and under earlier legislation and 20 men and no women recalled from life licences. The latest available data for those recalled under sections 38, 65 and 40 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 and for 1993 when there were 33 men and no women recalled for breach under sections 38 and 65 and 22 men and no women recalled for reoffending under section 40.

Vehicle Crime

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what were *(a)* the costs of vehicle crime in England and Wales for 1993 and *(b)* his Department's expenditure on related research that year; and what is the planned expenditure for 1994 and 1995.

Mr. Maclean: Our estimate of the total cost of vehicle crime during 1993 was £2.7 billion. This figure includes estimated property loss, and insurance costs, damage, security expenditure, inconvenience costs and criminal justice/police costs.

Home Office expenditure on vehicle-related research totalled approximately £70,000 in 1993 and £72,000 in 1994. Planned expenditure for 1995 is approximately £90,000.

Identity Cards

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his latest policy on identity cards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My right hon. and learned Friend announced last October that the Government plan to publish a Green Paper on identity cards in the spring of this year.

The Green Paper will set out options for a national identity card scheme. We will consider the possibility of introducing an identity card scheme in the light of the responses received to this consultation document.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the private companies that have been consulted by his Department over the possible introduction of identity cards.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Home Office has not entered into formal consultations with any private companies about the possible introduction of identity cards. The forthcoming Green Paper on identity cards will provide an opportunity for private companies to make their views known.

Electric Shock Equipment

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) which British police forces have electric shock anti-riot equipment; in what quantities; and for what purpose;

(2) who authorised the supply of electric shock riot shields to police forces in England and Wales for test purposes; how many were purchased then; and to which forces they were supplied.

Mr. Maclean: Chief officers of police are responsible for deciding what equipment to obtain for their forces, either for testing or introduction. In the case of the Metropolitan police, the Commissioner requires my right hon. and learned Friend's agreement to defensive equipment. I understand that no force has obtained any form of electric shock equipment for use against people, or for testing for this purpose, although a number of forces have small numbers of electric shock shields and prods for use against ferocious dogs. Details of the numbers or distribution of such equipment are not available centrally.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many section 5 certificates have been granted in the last two years which relate specifically to electric shock weapons and to which companies.

Mr. Maclean: Electric shock weapons are prohibited by section 5(1)(b) of the Firearms Act 1968 and cannot be possessed without the authority of the Secretary of State. No company has been granted authority specifically to possess electric shock weapons in the last two years.

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by the Department or agency.

Mr. Howard: No part of my Department, including its agencies, has purchased any training, tuition or course, over the past 12 months, costing more than £5,000 for a single member of staff. The immigration and nationality department purchased five courses for 73 middle and senior operational managers at a total cost of £33,000. These were provided by a mix of in-house training staff and external consultants. Evaluation is by discussion between course members and their line managers. My Department has also made considerable investment in information technology training. A total of 19 courses for 127 members of staff on information technology and computer hardware costing more than £5,000 each have been purchased by the immigration and nationality department, the police national computer data centre and the Home Office's research and planning unit. Total costs were, respectively, £26,000, £36,250 and £74,000. The overall costs are a consequence of the number of information technology staff requiring training in implementing and using new systems and software.

WALES

Defective Buildings, Flint

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action (1) he has taken following the copy letter dated 6 April 1994 from Clwyd county council chief fire officer to the National House Building Council regarding properties at Palace close, Flint and Balmoral close, Flint; and what is his opinion of the conformity to building regulations;

(2) what request he has received to use his default powers under the Building Act 1984 with regard to Royal Gardens, Flint; what action he has taken; and if he will request a formal opinion of the nature and extent of the defects reported to him.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has received a request from Mr. C. Gavin of 15 Palace close to use his default powers under section 116 of the Building Act 1984. However, the Secretary of State uses these powers only in cases where there appears to be a manifest failure by a local authority to carry out a specific function under the Act.

My right hon. Friend has no statutory basis on which he can express an opinion on conformity with the building regulations in this case. It was for NHBC Building Control Services Ltd. to consider what action might be necessary following the chief fire officer's letter to it.

Blood

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future chain of command of the blood transfusion services in north Wales; what consultations he has hade with the Secretary of State for Health, the National Blood Authority, in England, and the National Blood Transfusion Service, in Wales, on this issue; and what representations he has received concerning his policies.

Mr. Redwood: Management of the blood transfusion service in north Wales is the responsibility of the National Blood Authority and representations about the future of this service are for the Secretary of State for Health. My officials were kept informed of progress on the review of services in England and these discussions are continuing. I will shortly be consulting on the future management of the Welsh blood service.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority and the management of National Blood Transfusion Services—Wales regarding the screening of donors and recipients for hepatitis C.

Mr. Redwood: The Welsh Health Common Services Authority and National Blood Transfusion Services — Wales are being kept fully informed about the "look-back" exercise for hepatitis C.

Internet

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the percentage of Welsh businesses connected to the Internet system.

Mr. Redwood: It has been estimated that in the United Kingdom as a whole some 30 per cent. of businesses are connected to the Internet. I am not aware of any reliable estimate of the comparable figure for Wales.

Ambulance Personnel (Early Retirement)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce the same early retirement settlement for ambulance personnel in Wales as is proposed for England.

Mr. Richards: In view of the level of provision made in 1993–94, there are no plans to introduce a further early retirement scheme for ambulance personnel in Wales in the current financial year.

Tourist Rail Links (VAT)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment his Department has made of the effect on tourist facilities in Wales of the imposition of value added tax on tourist rail links; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The application of VAT is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer who announced on 29 November that services relating to entertainment or recreational activities and car parking at airports, which include passenger transport, will become wholly standard-rated. The measure will affect a limited range of businesses in Wales.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from the Wales tourist board on the imposition of value added tax on tourist rail links and its likely effects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The chief executive of the board has written to me about this matter.

Strategic Development Scheme Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total strategic development scheme expenditure to be allowed in Wales in 1995–96; what proportion of this will be spent in Gwynedd, and of this figure, how much in the voluntary sector; and if he will make a statement on any difficulties arising with regard to securing sufficient suitable projects for Gwynedd.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The strategic development scheme's total budget for 1995–96 is £57 million, of which £5,900,000—10.4 per cent.—has been allocated to local authorities in Gwynedd. Some £464,645 will be spent on voluntary sector projects in Gwynedd. Before submitting bids, authorities are asked to consult widely within their local communities, with development agencies, the voluntary sector and other appropriate interested bodies. The selection and priority of the bids are a matter for those local authorities.

Home Renovation Grants

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* Alyn and Deeside are waiting for home renovation grants; and what steps he is taking to provide funds for the delivery of these grants.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The figures requested are not held centrally. Since the grant system was introduced in 1990, more than £1.04 billion has been made available for renovation in Wales, with Alyn and Deeside receiving

some £14.9 million. For 1995–96, we have increased the money available for renovation to £198.5 million.

Animal Diseases

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of equine infectious anaemia there have been in each year since 1985.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No cases of equine infectious anaemia have occurred in Wales since 1985.

Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning the requirement for adapting council houses for those suffering disability.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is for local councils to determine the priority they attach to adaptations for individuals with disabilities. A council may carry out adaptations or tenants may apply for disabled facilities grants.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish details of the number of dwellings provided by housing assoiciations for each district council and for Wales as a whole, for each of the last three years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of dwellings provided by housing associations in each district and in Wales as a whole is published annually in table 5.2 of Welsh housing statistics. Additionally, the numbers of dwellings provided during 1992–93 under the acquisition initiative were published in appendix 3 of Welsh housing statistics No. 13 1993. Copies of the publication are in the Library of the House.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the starting date applicable to the Tai Cymru policy framework for assisted ownership; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The relevant regulation—statutory instrument No. 2895 of 1994—came into force on 8 December 1994. I expect the first sales of properties to take place during the financial year 1995–96.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish details of the amount invested in housing provision in Wales from *(a)* grants from Tai Cymru, *(b)* transfers from local authorities and *(c)* private investment from banks and building societies, in each of the last three years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information sought will be covered in the "Government's Expenditure Plans 1995–96 to 1997–98: Departmental Report by the Welsh Office and the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales" which is due to be published on 9 March 1995.

Health Authorities (Financial Allocations)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to inform health authorities of their financial allocation for 1995–96.

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend will be announcing the financial allocations for 1995–96 to health authorities shortly.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the specific different circumstances in Wales which led him not to publish the consultation paper inviting views on the desirability of introducing a licencing system for homes in multiple occupation in England and Wales on which the Department of the Environment is consulting in England.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Department of the Environment document covers England only. My right hon. Friend has written to the hon. Gentleman, other Welsh Members of Parliament, local authorities and interested organisations seeking their views on this issue.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the identifiable costs of administration within his office for grant-maintained schools; and what estimate he has made of costs which cannot be readily separated from general educational expenditure.

Mr. Richards: I will write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Health Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will consult the chairmen of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority and the Health Promotion Authority for Wales concerning potential savings from rationalising accommodation and other management running costs expenditure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Such matters are kept under constant review.

National Curriculum Assessment

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the results from the 1994 national curriculum assessment in Wales.

Mr. Richards: A summary of the results submitted is shown in the following table. The results represent 8.2 per cent. of pupils eligible for assessment at the end of key stage 1 and 11.4 per cent. of pupils eligible for assessment at the end of key stage 3. This low level of response means that no statistically valid conclusions can be drawn from the data as regards the whole of Wales.

Table 1: The percentage of pupils achieving level 2 and above at the end of Key Stage 1 (7-year-olds). A typical 7-year-old is expected to be at level 2.

	Tests *Per cent.*	*Teacher Assessments* *Per cent.*
English	[1]—	76
Speaking and Listening	[1]—	82
Reading	78	77
Writing	66	69
Spelling	69	70
Handwriting	81	81
Mathematics	[1]—	77
Using and applying mathematics	[1]—	76
Number	79	81
Algebra	[1]—	77
Shape and space	[1]—	73
Handling data	[1]—	75

Table 1: The percentage of pupils achieving level 2 and above at the end of Key Stage 1 (7-year-olds). A typical 7-year-old is expected to be at level 2.

	Tests Per cent.	Teacher Assessments Per cent.
Science	[1]—	84
Scientific investigation	[1]—	80
Life and living process	[1]—	86
Materials and their properties	[1]—	84
Physical processes	[1]—	81
Welsh: Insufficient data submitted		

[1] Not subject to National Curriculum tests.

Table 2: The percentage of pupils achieving level or above at the end of key stage 3—14-year-olds. A typical 14-year-old is expected to achieve level 5/6

	Tests Per cent.	Teacher assessments Per cent.
English	48	52
Mathematics	53	59
Science	59	66
Welsh: No data submitted	—	—

SCOTLAND

Scottish Homes Board

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the remuneration and emoluments and expenses paid to each member of the Scottish Homes board in each year since it was established.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have asked the chairman of Scottish Homes, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member with the relevant information.

General Practitioners

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will publish his consultation document on an accountability framework for fundholding general practitioners; and who will be included on the list of those to be consulted on this framework.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The proposed consultation document on an accountability framework for GP fundholders is due to be issued for consultation within the NHS in Scotland in the near future. Bodies which will be consulted will include GP fundholders, the Scottish general medical services committee of the British Medical Association, Royal College of General Practitioners, health boards, NHS trusts and local health councils.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many general practitioner fundholders in Scotland *(a)* are to participate and *(b)* have expressed an interest in participating in pilot studies under the primary care purchasing initiative for the purchase of all health care services; where these fundholders are located; and when the pilot studies will begin.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The following information relates to the proposed pilot studies to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of GP fundholding practices which purchase all health care services on behalf of their patients in collaboration with their health board.

To date approximately 30 GP fundholding practices in the following health board areas have expressed interest in participating.

Ayrshire and Arran
Forth Valley
Grampian
Greater Glasgow
Highland
Lanarkshire
Lothian
Tayside

Some further expressions of interest from fundholding practices are expected.

It is intended to mount up to six pilot studies in a range of areas but no final decisions have been reached about those practices which will participate. The pilot projects are expected to commence during 1995–96.

Asthma Medication Costs

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the expenditure on general practitioner prescribed anti-asthma medication and preparations in each health board in Scotland in terms of *(a)* net ingredient cost and *(b)* net ingredient cost per capita for the last two years for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information by health board and Scotland for the financial years 1992–93 and 1993–94 is set out in the table. The costs shown are based on the value of the ingredients before the deduction of any discount and relate only to inhaled and oral adrenoceptor stimulants, inhaled steroids, inhaled antimuscarinic bronchodilators and theophylline preparations.

	Cost of medication £ million		*Cost per patient on GP lists (£)*	
Health Board	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Argyll and Clyde	2.751	3.202	6.11	7.17
Ayrshire and Arran	3.019	3.465	7.72	8.85
Borders	0.771	0.879	7.22	8.20
Dumfries and Galloway	0.963	1.076	6.30	7.02
Fife	2.105	2.373	6.00	6.76
Forth Valley	1.723	2.001	5.95	6.90
Grampian	3.098	3.541	5.88	6.64
Greater Glasgow	6.135	7.187	6.02	7.12
Highland	1.067	1.247	5.02	5.87
Lanarkshire	3.775	4.442	6.46	7.61
Lothian	4.620	5.230	5.78	6.51
Orkney	0.097	0.109	4.84	5.45
Shetland	0.077	0.100	3.38	3.35
Tayside	2.943	3.430	7.20	8.36
Western Isles	0.117	0.142	3.89	4.73
Unallocated prescriptions	0.058	0.054	—	—
All Scotland	33.319	38.478	6.21	7.17

Elderly People

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from Highland regional council about attacks on vulnerable

elderly people in their homes; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No such representations have been received from Highland regional council.

Arts Courses

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many school leavers, in the last year for which figures are available, entered courses run by colleges of *(a)* music, *(b)* art, *(c)* drama, *(d)* dance and *(e)* other arts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Low Moss Prison

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans there are to use the area of the resettlement unit at Bishopbriggs to extend facilities at Low Moss prison; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The suitability of this area for prison service facilities is one of a number of possible options currently being examined. No decisions have been taken; and any proposals for the use of this area would require to be the subject of an application for outline planning consent.

Objective 1 Funding

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the eligibility for financial assistance under highlands and islands objective 1 status allow for applications for maintenance of rail services regionally; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Under the highlands and islands objective 1 programme, assistance from the European regional development fund can be provided towards rail infrastructure projects. EC funds cannot be used to provide a revenue subsidy.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail the incidence of, and extent to which, highlands and islands objective 1 European funding has resulted in corresponding reductions in his Department's financial allocations and expenditure within the area; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: European Community spending, including that in the highlands and islands under objective 1, is dealt with in the public expenditure survey as an integral part of the expenditure programmes for which I have responsibility. EC rules on additionality preclude the use of objective 1 funds to substitute for other forms of public expenditure.

Electro-Shock Weapons

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date his Department gave ICL Technical Plastics a licence to produce electro-shock weapons in the United Kingdom.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Electric shock weapons are considered to be prohibited under the provisions of the Firearms Acts. Their manufacture, possession and sale, therefore, require the specific authority of my right hon. Friend. No such authority has been granted to ICL Technical Plastics.

Ferry Transport

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of *(a)* cars, (b) commercial vehicles and *(c)* passengers and the volume and value of freight originating from or destined to Scotland which was transported to or from mainland Europe by ferry via English ferry ports in the most recent five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

This information is available only at disproportionate cost.

Hip Replacements

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his letter of 31 October to the hon. Member of Linlithgow, what progress his officials have made in monitoring the use of Kyocera titanium fibres in relation to hip replacements.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 January 1995]:* As explained by my noble Friend the Minister of State in his letter to the hon. Gentleman of 31 October, although Kyocera included the possible use of titanium fibres in hip replacement implants in its patent application it is not yet developing the material into a marketable product for use in hip replacement applications. The Medical Devices Agency is taking the lead in monitoring developments in this area and will keep the other United Kingdom Health Departments informed.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations took place to ascertain the most suitable specification for the new communications system in the Scottish ambulance service control room in Aberdeen; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* The Scottish ambulance service consulted within the service to establish its communications requirements and agreed the specification in consultation with the Scottish Office directorate of telecommunications which provided appropriate technical advice.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give an analysis of the response to the consultation on trust status for the Scottish ambulance service; what consideration he has given to this analysis; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* An analysis of the responses is as follows:

Body/individual	*'Number consulted*	*Supporting the application*	*No clear view expressed*	*Not supporting the application*
Health boards	15	4	3	1
NHS Trust and DMUs	51	14	7	0
Local health councils	19	6	7	2
Regional and District councils	65	3	15	15
MPs and Euro MPs	80	0	1	16
Trades Unions/Trade councils	12	0	0	3
Emergency services	16	0	3	0
Universities	12	1	1	0

Body/individual	[1]Number consulted	Supporting the application	No clear view expressed	Not supporting the application
Health related organisations	20	4	11	5
Community councils	1,000	5	19	38
Political parties/ organisations	0	0	0	4
GPs, pharmacists, members of the public	2,000	2	4	7
Total	3,290	39	71	91

Note:
[1] Number of the Application Documents issued for consultation.

Copies of all comments received in response to the public consultation have been retained by the Common Services Agency and are available for inspection. A copy is available for inspection in the Library of the Scottish Office, St. Andrew's house, Edinburgh.

Following an extensive consultation exercise including 34 public meetings held throughout Scotland, 201 responses were received. Only 91 of these specifically indicated opposition to the application. Consideration was given to all the comments made and to the report and recommendations made by the Common Services Agency. The application was considered against the published criteria of benefits for patients, management competence, involvement of clinicians and other health care professionals in management and financial viability. My right hon. Friend announced on 25 November that he had given his approval to the application after appraisal against the criteria.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the letter of the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 2 August 1994, what evidence he has had from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority about the use of ovarian tissue in research; and what action he proposes to take.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* No such evidence has been received. I understand that the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority has not received any application for the use of ovarian tissue for research purposes in the period since I wrote to the hon. Member on 2 August 1994.

Lorries

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he is making of the impact of 40-tonne lorries on secondary roads and bridges in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* Regional and islands councils, as local roads authorities, are responsible for assessing the impact of 40-tonne lorries on secondary roads and bridges in Scotland. Bridges which form part of the trunk road network are being assessed, and strengthened where appropriate, by the Scottish Office.

Bridges

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of increased help for new unitary local authorities for the strengthening of bridges.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* Bridge assessment and strengthening is one of the Government's special objectives in determining local authority capital allocations for roads and transport in Scotland. Full consideration is given, within the resources available, to the proposals contained in local authorities' transport policies and programmes documents and financial plans for bridge assessment and strengthening. There will continue to be arrangements to ensure that adequate financial resources are available to cover necessary work when the new unitary local authorities assume their responsibilities.

Unitary Authorities

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is his policy in respect of the future management and disposition of common good funds by the new unitary authorities in Scotland after April 1996;

(2) if he will require new unitary authorities to restrict decisions on the disposition and management of common good funds to the new councillors representing the area for which the common good fund was established;

(3) if he will ensure that the new unitary authorities are unable to apply common good resources to any subject which can be financed by normal local authority funds.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* Subject to complying with the current statutory requirements, local authorities have complete discretion as to the management and disposition of common good funds. Authorities must have regard to the interests of the inhabitants of their area and, with common good property, must have regard to the interests of the inhabitants of the area to which the common good related prior to 16 May 1975. The existing arrangements will continue to apply after April 1996.

Management and disposition of common good funds may be addressed in the decentralisation schemes which will be drawn up by the new councils. Community councils will be formally consulted on the draft schemes, which will also be subject to public consultation.

Retail Development

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish the new national planning policy guideline on retail development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* I expect to issue a draft national planning policy guideline on retailing for public consultation very shortly.

Churches

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in what circumstances churches are classed as business users for water rates; and, if he has any plan to reclassify charitable bodies, including churches.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* All occupiers of premises connected to the public water supply may be liable to pay water charges. Churches are liable to pay either the non-domestic water rate, at the reduced levy applicable to such premises, or metered water charges.

We have no plans to change this prior to restructuring of Scotland's water and sewerage services. At that point,

it will be for the new water and sewerage authorities to determine future methods of charging for their services.

Aberdeen Royal Hospitals

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list operations cancelled by Aberdeen Royal Hospitals in each month since June 1994.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* This information is not collected centrally. The chairman of the Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS trust has been asked to provide the information to the hon. Member.

EDUCATION

City of Westminster Bill

12. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has received relating to the City of Westminster Bill [*Lords*]; and what was her response.

Mr. Robin Squire: There has been correspondence with Westminster city council about the need for clause 9 of the Bill which would relieve the local education authority of its duty under section 12 of the Education Act 1980 to build a new school at Moxon Street. No other correspondence about this aspect of the Bill has been received.

Annual Capital Guidelines

13. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has received from local education authorities regarding the 1995–96 annual capital guideline figures since their announcement.

Mr. Robin Squire: To date, some 14 LEAs have written to officials, identified concerns on the telephone, or made a request to bring a delegation to see me.

Schools (Capital Spending)

16. **Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much central Government support for capital spending in schools has changed in real terms between 1986–87 and 1993–94.

Mr. Robin Squire: Between 1986–87 and 1993–94, there was a 57 per cent. real terms increase in central Government capital support for schools. That covers spending on local authority and voluntary schools and, since 1989, grant-maintained schools.

Standard Spending Assessment

17. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on the education standard spending assessment of Hereford and Worcester county council.

Mr. Robin Squire: The increase in Hereford and Worcester's education standard spending assessment for 1995–96 is higher than the national average. Allowing for the reform of inter-authority recoupment, the authority's provisional education SSA will be 2.3 per cent. higher than in 1994–95.

Office for Standards in Education

18. **Mr. Haselhurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made with regard to the progress of Ofsted.

Mr. Forth: Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, the head of Ofsted, is responsible for the new school inspection arrangements. The Secretary of State shares with him the objective of ensuring that all publicly funded schools are independently inspected on a four-year cycle. The new arrangements have got off to a good start. By the end of this academic year, roughly half of all secondary schools, and a significant minority of primary schools, will have been independently inspected and a copy of the report sent to every parent.

Nursery Schools

19. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on the progress of the working party established to consider the provision of nursery and pre-school education.

24. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what progress she is making in achieving a nursery place for all children over three years of age.

Mr. Forth: The task force, established by my right hon. Friend, is consulting widely and is considering a range of options to achieve the Prime Minister's commitment to provide a pre-school place for all four-year-olds whose parents wish them to take it up. As the expansion is achieved, we want to ensure that it will add to the choice parents have among a range of provision—public, private and voluntary. My right hon. Friend will be making an announcement about progress in due course.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much Government funding was given during 1994 for the provision of nursery school education within the Greater London area.

Mr. Forth: For the purpose of determining standard spending assessments, the education component of standard spending, net of specific grants, is divided into five sub-blocks—under-fives, primary, secondary, 16-plus, and other education. There is no SSA for nursery school education as the under-fives sub-block notionally includes spending on rising fives in primary schools as well as pupils in nursery schools and classes. The total of the under-fives SSA sub-block for London local education authorities in 1994–95 is £189.87 million.

Schools, Shropshire

20. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made of the adequacy of current class sizes and academic achievement in local education authority schools in Shropshire.

Mr. Forth: Average class sizes in Shropshire are lower than average class sizes nationally. In 1994, 46.2 per cent. of 15-year-olds in Shropshire maintained schools obtained five or more GCSE grades A*-C, compared with 38.2 per cent. for LEA-maintained schools nationally.

Research Links

21. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement about the

development of research links between universities and industry.

Mr. Boswell: There are many examples of universities and industry working together for their mutual benefit. We have asked the Higher Education Funding Council for England to take into account in its funding for research the policies set out in the White Paper "Realising our Potential: A Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology". This includes developing the method for rewarding universities and colleges which collaborate in generic research with industry.

Three-tier Schools System

22. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many education authorities have a three-tier system in their schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: In January 1994, 32 local education authorities were operating a three-year system in all or in part of their area.

Higher Education

23. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education when she last had a meeting with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals regarding the impact of Government policy on higher education.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend last met the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals on 2 December 1994, and discussed a range of matters, including matters relevant to the impact of Government policy on higher education.

Disabled Students

25. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many disabled pupils in Britain who were in mainstream primary schools have been denied mainstream secondary places in 1994.

Mr. Forth: This information is not available centrally. The special educational needs code stresses the need for careful planning for transfer between phases: if parents remain dissatisfied with a local education authority's decision about their child's special educational needs they can appeal as appropriate to the SEN tribunal or an independent appeal committee established by the relevant admissions authority.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools in Britain in 1994 have had adaptations to allow full access for disabled students.

Mr. Forth: This information is not held centrally. From May this year, we will be conducting a survey of the accessibility of all schools. This survey will be completed biennially and comparing these results with those produced in future years' surveys will provide an indication of the amount of adaptation undertaken during that period.

School Budgets, Derbyshire

26. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on school budgets in Derbyshire for 1995–96.

Mr. Robin Squire: It will be up to Derbyshire county council to decide what to spend on the various services for which it is responsible, including schools. Derbyshire's education standard spending assessment will increase by 0.7 per cent. in 1995–96.

Ministerial Visits

27. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will visit the Makerfield constituency to discuss the funding of local education authority schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Student Poverty

28. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to address the issue of student poverty.

Mr. Boswell: There is no evidence of widespread student poverty. For those eligible for mandatory awards and student loans, the total support available has risen slightly in real terms since 1990 when loans were first introduced. It will increase by 2.5 per cent for the 1995–96 academic year. Other students can apply to local education authorities for discretionary awards. The access funds can provide additional assistance to full-time students in particular need.

Assisted Places Scheme

29. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of pupils on the assisted places scheme receive a free place.

Mr. Forth: Over 40 per cent. of assisted place holders received a free place in the academic year 1993–94.

Class Sizes

30. **Ms Church:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what research her Department has undertaken into the relationship between class size and educational standards.

Mr. Forth: The Department has not undertaken such research itself, but monitors work generally in this field.

Special Needs

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what additional funding and resources she proposes for children with special needs in the next financial year.

Mr. Forth: Education standard spending assessments will rise on average by 1.2 per cent. in 1995–96 and the special educational needs code of practice will encourage schools to make most effective use of their budgets for special educational needs pupils. In addition, grants for education support and training from the Department for Education to local education authorities in support of special educational needs will increase by some 15 per cent.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to make provision, in the entire education service from nursery to higher education, for children identified as being affected by attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Mr. Forth: The responsibility for making provision for school children with special educational needs, including,

those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, rests with schools and local education authorities. The code of practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs, issued by the Secretary of State under the Education Act 1993, gives guidance to schools and LEAs on their responsibilities towards all pupils with special educational needs of all kinds. District health authorities and NHS trusts must inform the parents and the appropriate LEA when they form the opinion that a child under the age of five may have special educational needs.

The Further Education Funding Council and LEAs are statutorily required to take account of the needs of students in further education with all kinds of learning difficulties. In higher education, the Secretary of State's initial letter of guidance to the Higher Education Funding Council for England asked it to consider how it could best meet the needs of students with learning difficulties. Universities are able to make the provision they consider appropriate for students with learning difficulties.

Teachers' Morale

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she had made of the proposed system of league tables on the morale of the teaching profession.

Mr. Forth: School and college performance tables are now well established, not least because they help ensure that the achievements of individual schools and colleges are fully recognised. The views of the representatives of the teaching profession are sought each year on the format and content of the tables.

Religious Education

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on the future of religious education and the daily act of worship in schools.

Mr. Forth: The Government have no plans to change the law requiring religious education and daily collective worship to be provided for all registered pupils at maintained schools. These activities make an important contribution to pupils' moral and spiritual development.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will investigate the circumstances surrounding the extension of the employment contract of the chief executive of the Student Loans Company; who took the decision, if she approved the extension; and what considerations led to the contract being extended.

Mr. Boswell: The decision to offer Mr. Harrison an extension of his contract as chief executive was taken in November 1993 by the board of the Student Loans Company, with the agreement of my right hon. Friend's predecessor and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Departmental Employees

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many employees for which her Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and, of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Boswell: The number of women employed by the Department at the specified grades over the past four years is as follows:

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Grade 3	0	0	0	0
Grade 7	31	44	39	45
EO	208	218	269	280
AO	403	410	446	416
AA	265	287	224	208
Overall	1,096	1,150	1,186	1,233

Private Finance Initiative

Sir Nicholas Scott: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans her Department has for encouraging the use of the private finance initiative in education.

Mr. Boswell: In December last, we issued the booklet "Education Means Business" which sets out opportunities for private investment in education. This was sent to all higher and further education institutions, grant-maintained schools and all other secondary schools, maintained special schools, local education authorities, diocesan bodies and teachers' organisations together with banks, solicitors and accountancy firms and other businesses that have expressed an interest in PFI and education. Copies were placed in the Library of the House.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Further Education Funding Council and the Funding Agency for Schools maintained registers of businesses and education providers who are interested in pursuing privately financed projects and put interested parties in touch with each other.

The Department—working together with the higher education funding councils and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals—is organising a conference for universities and the private sector to encouraged further private investment in higher education. It is to be held on 23 March at the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre. We are considering whether it would be beneficial to organise similar conferences for the further education and schools sectors.

The Department's PFI unit is arranging a number of visits to schools and LEAs with the objective of promoting PFI.

As announced at the time of the last Budget, we are making changes from 1 April 1995 to the allocation of capital and recurrent grants to both higher and further education funding councils. This will enable them to give higher and further education institutions more flexibility to decide how to finance capital projects and, in particular, more scope to use private sector finance. In addition, further education institutions will have the same ability as the higher education institutions to use Exchequer-funded assets as security for loans.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will set out for each of the next steps agencies in her Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what

purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have acquired which were not required when their operations were within her Department; how many of them publish periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have spoecifially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. Forth: The Department has only one next steps agency, the Teachers Pensions Agency. The operational and managerial matters of the Teachers Pensions Agency are the responsibility of its chief executive, Mrs. Denyse Metcalfe. I have asked her to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Denyse Metcalf to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 23 January 1995:

As Chief Executive of the Teachers' Pensions Agency, I have been asked to let you have information about the Agency as requested in your Question to the Secretary of State for Education about the operation of the Department's Next Steps Agencies.

The TPA was launched as an Agency in April 1992 and has continued to occupy premises in Darlington on a site shared with the Department. It has no separate headquarters building. As well as sharing a site with the Department the Agency also obtains most of its support services from the Department under a Service Level Agreement, although it has its own Personnel and Training Section of 5 staff of whom 2 were additional posts in support of delegated freedoms stemming from the Agency's Framework Document.

The TPA produces an information sheet which it sends to the employers (approximately 3,500) of the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme members each term. The cost of this publication is £6,000 annually.

The Agency has one 'pool' car which is owned by the Agency and used by the Chief Executive and other staff for seminars and visits to employers. The annual cost of the car in 93/94 was £1,900.

The Agency has a logo which was produced as a result of an 'in house' competition for which a token amount of £150 was paid to the member of staff who produced it. The Agency has not corporate clothing and the use of a logo on stationery does not result in any increased costs.

National Curriculum

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list for *(a)* English, *(b)* mathematics and *(c)* history the publications, guidance and teaching material which has been sent to schools concerning the national curriculum since 1988; and if she will give the cost for each subject.

Mr. Forth: The table shows the information requested in the case of the statutory documents setting out study requirements for the current national curriculum in English, mathematics and history.

For the revised national curriculum which comes into effect in August 1995, however, the statutory documents for the 11 subjects and the two supporting compilations were produced as a single project. It is not possible therefore to disaggregate the production and distribution costs of the individual subjects, but the production cost and the estimated distribution cost of the entire revised national curriculum are shown, along with the names of the relevant documents. Distribution is currently under way.

The table also lists publications since 1988 relating to non-statutory curriculum guidance and the assessment of pupils in English, mathematics and history, although in some cases the documents cover all three core subjects—English, mathematics and science. I will write to the hon. Member with cost details as soon as possible.

1. Statutory documents containing attainment targets and programmes of study for the current National Curriculum

	Production costs £	*Distribution costs* £
English in the National Curriculum	840,000	242,000
English in the National Curriculum (1991)	[1]757,000	[1]198,000
Mathematics in the National Curriculum	231,000	74,000
Mathematics in the National Curriculum (1991)	736,000	153,000
History in the National Curriculum		

[1] These figures are estimates.

2. Statutory documents containing Attainment Targets and Programmes of study for the revised National Curriculum coming into effect in August 1995

English in the National Curriculum
Mathematics in the National Curriculum
History in the National Curriculum
The National Curriculum
Key Stages 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum
Production cost—entire National Curriculum—£1,167,000
Estimated distribution costs—entire National Curriculum—£255,000

3. Non-statutory curriculum guidance, and publications related to assessment of pupils

a. Curriculum guidance

English
1989 Non-Statutory Guidance (Key Stage 1)
1990 Non-Statutory Guidance (Key Stages 1-4)
1990 Aspects of English

Mathematics
1989 Non-Statutory Guidance
1991 Non-Statutory Guidance
1990 Using and Applying Mathematics (Book A)
1990 Using and Applying Mathematics (Book B)
1991 Mathematics Programmes of Study: INSET for Key Stages 3 and 4
1993 Mathematics Programmes of Study: INSET for Key Stages 1 and 2

History
1991 Non-Statutory Guidance
1992 History at Key Stage 2: an introduction to the non-European study units.
1993 Teaching History at Key Stage 3
1993 Teaching History at Key Stage 1
1993 Teaching History at Key Stage 2

b. Assessment of pupils

The core subjects—English, mathematics and science combined

Key Stage 1
1991 Children's Work Assessed
1992 School Assessment Folder
1992 Core Subjects Reference Notes
1992 Core Tasks
1993 School Assessment Folder
1993 Children's Work Assessed
1993 Core Tasks
1994 School Assessment Folder
1994 Core Tasks
1995 Assessment Arrangements

Key Stage 2
1994 School Assessment Folder
1994 Children's Work Assessed
1995 Assessment Arrangements

1995 Special Arrangements

Key Stage 3

1991 Teacher Assessment at KS3
1991 Teacher Assessment in Practice
1992 School Assessment Folder
1993 School Assessment Folder
1993 Materials to Support the End of Key Stage Tests
1993 Guidance on Special Arrangements
1993 Test Timetable
1993 Test Guidance Notes
1994 End of Key Stage Assessment Arrangements
1994 Test Timetable
1994 Guidance on Special Arrangements
1994 Test Guidance Notes
1994 Reporting and Recording Leaflet
1995 School Assessment Folder (booklet 1)
1995 School Assessment Folder (Booklet 2)
1995 Test Timetable
1995 Special Arrangements Timetable

English

Key Stage 1

1991 En 1 Speaking and Listening
1992 Children's Work Assessed
1992 Reading and Spelling Tasks
1993 Reading and Spelling Tasks
1994 Reading and Spelling Tasks
1995 Tasks

Key Stage 2

1993 Pilot Tests
1994 Pilot Tests
1995 Tasks

Key Stage 3

1992 Pupils' Work Assessed
1993 Assessing En 1
Information on the 1993 Tests
1993 English Anthology
1993 Sample Test Questions
1994 Level 1–3 Tasks
1994 Test Guidance Notes
1995 Levels 1–3 Tasks

Mathematics

Key Stage 1

1992 Optional Tasks (mathematics and science combined)
1994 Optional Mathematics Pack
1995 Mathematics Tasks

Key Stage 2

1993 Pilot Tests
1994 Pilot Tests
1995 Tasks

Key Stage 3

1991 Teacher Assessment at KS3
1992 Pupils' Work Assessed
1992 Materials to support the Assessment of MA 1
1993 Sample Test Questions
1993 Assessing Ma 1
1993 Pupils' Work Assessed
1994 Level 1&2 Tasks
1995 Level 1&2 Tasks

History

Key Stage 1

1993 Children's Work Assessed (history and geography combined)

Key Stage 3

1992 Teacher Assessment at KS3
1993 Pupils' Work Assessed

University Students

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what action she is taking to help university students living below the poverty line and not in receipt of social security benefit.

Mr. Boswell: The student income and expenditure survey for 1992–93 conducted on behalf of the Department revealed no evidence of widespread student poverty, for those students prepared to take the concessionary student loans on offer. The total support available through the main rates of grant and loan will increase by 2.5 per cent. for the 1995–96 academic year. Income support and housing benefit continue to be available to students in certain vulnerable groups. The access funds, which will be increased by about £1 million to around £28 million for 1995–96, can provide additional assistance to full-time students in particular need.

Public Bodies (Grants)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the grants given to non-governmental organisations by her Department in each year since 1990.

Mr. Boswell: The grants given to the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Department are listed in the table. Those made to the research councils and to the Sports Council, formerly sponsored by the then Department of Education and Science and now by the Office of Public service and Science and the Department of National Heritage respectively, are published in the appropriation accounts, copies of which are in the Library.

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
		£ million		*outturn*	*estimate*
Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges[1]	3.021	3.498	3.848	4.051	4.184
Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research	0.535	0.652	0.949	0.857	0.832
National Council for Educational Technology	4.660	4.961	5.658	5.506	5.391
Further Education Unit[2]	3.871	3.129	3.545	—	—
National Youth Bureau[3]	0.571	—	—	—	—
National Youth Agency[4]	—	1.840	1.495	1.344	1.394
Education Assets Board	0.552	0.500	0.858	0.784	1.401
School Examinations and Assessment Council[5]	7.730	10.532	12.383	4.139	—
National Curriculum Council[5]	7.340	7.698	8.135	3.091	—
School Curriculum and Assessment Authority[6]	—	—	—	21.998	34.000
Teaching as a Career Unit	1.487	1.402	1.407	1.064	1.194
Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council[7]	1,104.255	993.158	1,034.601	—	—

	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
		£ million		outturn	estimate
Universities Funding Council[7]	1,836.708	1,782.142	1,806.426	—	—
Higher Education Funding Council for England[8]	—	—	0.500	2,810.626	3,436.076
Further Education Funding Council[8]	—	—	24.417	2,706.066	2,847.058
Funding Agency for Schools[9]	—	—	—	0.674	237.026
Teacher Training Agency[10]	—	—	—	—	1.932
Special Educational Needs Tribunal[11]	—	—	—	—	0.220

[1] Merged with British Council December 1993. Henceforth sponsored by Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
[2] Subsumed in Further Education Funding Council grant from 1993–94.
[3] Wound up in 1991 and replaced by the National Youth Agency.
[4] Established April 1991 incorporating National Youth Bureau and Council for Education and Training in Community Work.
[5] Wound up in 1993.
[6] Established October 1993 incorporating School Examinations and Assessment Council and National Curriculum Council.
[7] Wound up March 1993.
[8] Established April 1993. Preparatory costs in 1992–93.
[9] Established April 1994. Preparatory costs in 1993–94. 1994–95 estimate net of annual maintenance grants, which are recouped in full from local education authorities, and loan repayments.
[10] Established September 1994. Preparatory costs only.
[11] Established September 1994. Programme costs only.

HEALTH

Cancer

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she has taken to assist cancer sufferers to live at home with the appropriate and necessary level of support.

Mr. Sackville: Health authorities are required to contract for specialist palliative care services to meet the assessed health needs of their populations. We have increased the amount of funding made available to health authorities for specialist palliative care from £8 million in 1990–91 to nearly £48 million this financial year. This financial commitment has helped to ensure that palliative care is increasingly available in all settings, including in the patient's own home. The development of the right services to enable people to live in their own homes wherever this is possible and sensible is a key objective of the new community care arrangements. The expert advisory group on cancer also recommended that treatment should be provided as close to the patient's home as is compatible with high-quality, safe and effective treatment.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health trusts have set energy saving targets comparable to those set by health authorities given in "Climate Change: The UK Programme".

Mr. Sackville: Some 387 national health service trusts have established energy targets for the period to March 1996 and beyond.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made by each health authority in the United Kingdom towards the energy saving target given in "Climate Change: The UK Programme".

Mr. Sackville: The national health service energy savings programme commenced in April 1991 with a target set to reduce national energy consumption by 15 per cent. over the five years to 1995–96. The broad total savings achieved in England to date amount to 7.9 per cent.

It is not possible to give totals for each health authority or national health service trust.

Additional energy savings have been projected from April 1994 to March 1996 amounting to 8.3 per cent.

Special Transitional Grant

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each local authority in England the special transitional grant for 1994–95; and if she will indicate for each local authority the funding that would have been received by that authority if the distribution formula had been the same as that used for 1993–94, and indicate the difference between the two.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 9 March 1994, *Official Report*, column *308*.

Long-term Care

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what national criteria she has stipulated against which she will judge whether the definitions of access to long-term health care which the district health authorities will be negotiating with their local authorities next year are reasonable and equitable;

(2) what financial recompense she will require to be made to local authorities required to provide a substantial part of long-term care which is elsewhere available under the NHS.

Mr. Bowis: We shall shortly be issuing guidance to health authorities on their responsibilities for continuing health care. Under this guidance, all health authorities will be required to review their current arrangements and to ensure they are securing an adequate level of continuing health care to meet the needs of their population.

NHS Uniformity

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring mechanism she has requested the National Health Service Executive put in place to ensure that there is consistency of definitions between authorities.

Mr. Sackville: The National Health Service Executive in consultation with the NHS, has commissioned national standards for the data items, including definitions, which

all NHS authorities have agreed to collect regularly, both for local NHS management and returns to the centre. The regulation of these standards is governed by the joint Department of Health–National Health Service Committee for Regulating Information Requirements.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanism is in place to ensure equity between different areas of the country as regards the availability of different forms of treatment on the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: Our policy objective is to secure, through resource allocation, over time, equal opportunity of access to health care for people at equal risk. A weighted capitation formula is used as the basis for allocating hospital and community health services revenue to regional health authorities. The formula weights their population for age, need, and for geographical variation in the cost of providing services. It is for health authorities to determine, taking full account of national priorities, set out in the annual priorities and planning guidance, how best to use the resources available to them to meet local needs.

Stress-related Diseases

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of deaths among *(a)* men and *(b)* women in each of the last five years were a consequence of stress-related diseases.

Mr. Bowis: Information on death certificates about causes of death is given in terms of diagnosis. Stress may be a contributory factor in deaths from a number of diseases, but is not a separate diagnostic category. It is therefore not possible to say what proportion of deaths from any disease are stress related.

Children's Homes

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the study being prepared by the social services inspectorate into unregistrable children's homes will be *(a)* completed and *(b)* published.

Mr. Bowis: I expect the report to be submitted within the next few months. A decision on publication will be made thereafter.

Children (Placement)

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children are currently placed with non-relatives under the arrangements for the Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991; and in what percentage of these placements a taxable fee is being paid directly to the non-relative or to an agency.

Mr. Bowis: Information collected centrally relates only to children looked after by local authorities. At 31 March 1993 approximately 43,000 children looked after by local authorities were placed in foster care with non-relatives or in residential accommodation, and would have been subject to these regulations. Of these, 27,000 were in foster care. The total includes about 2,000 children with agreements for a series of short-term placements, who will not all have been so placed on that date.

Where placements are with a foster family, the percentage of foster carers that receive a taxable fee—reward payments—is very small.

In all cases where placements are with an agency, the fee, less expenses accepted by the Inland Revenue, would be regarded as taxable income.

Conception

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what surveys she has conducted to establish which scientists argue that conception in human reproduction occurs days later than fertilisation; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The accepted scientific view is that pregnancy does not occur until the fertilised ovum implants in the womb, which is usually around six days after fertilisation.

Laparoscopic Operations

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received regarding the recently issued guidelines, by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, on the subject of laparoscopic operations; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: No representations have been received about these guidelines, which were contained in a report of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists working party on training in gynaecological endoscopic surgery, the publication of which we welcome.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will require the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists to introduce an accreditation procedure for surgeons wishing to perform laparoscopic operations.

Mr. Sackville: We welcome the recent decision by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists to introduce compulsory training in endoscopic surgery, including issuing certificates of competence to those who have had satisfactory reports.

Ambulance Response Times, Bolton

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what are the target ambulance response times for Bolton;

(2) on how many occasions, numerically and as a percentage over the last two years, target ambulance response times for Bolton have not been met.

Mr. Bowis: Health authorities are responsible for setting and monitoring performance standards for the emergency and urgent ambulance services in the district(s) they cover, which must as a minimum accord with national standards. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Wigan and Bolton district health authority, for details of the services in Bolton.

Mrs Elizabeth Bailey

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to receive the report of the inquiry into the part played in the death of Mrs. Elizabeth Bailey of Bolton by *(a)* hospital bed availability and *(b)* ambulance response time.

Mr. Bowis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is aware of the sad circumstances of Mrs. Bailey's death. My right hon. Friend does not expect to receive further reports. It is for the local health authorities to consider any lessons to be learned for the operation of the health services in Bolton.

Specialty Statistics

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give for each financial year since 1989–90 the numbers of *(a)* hospital spells and *(b)* finished consultant episodes in NHS hospitals in England recorded in the NHS Executive's fast-track monitoring returns for (i) acute specialties, (ii) geriatrics, (iii) mental illness, (iv) mental handicap, (v) maternity, (vi) well babies and (vii) all specialties.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* The numbers of finished consultant episodes for ordinary and day case admissions in national health service hospitals in England are published in "Ordinary and day case admissions for England: Financial Year 1993–94, copies of which are available in the Library. These are the definitive figures which supersede the provisional forecasts from the National Health Service Executive's fast-track monitoring returns. Information on hospital spells is not collected within the fast-track system.

Family Health Services

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give for each year since 1974–75 total spending on family health services for each NHS region and for the special health authorities *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* adjusted using the GDP deflator and *(c)* adjusted using the NHS pay and prices index.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* A regional breakdown of all family health services expenditure from 1992–93 will be placed in the Library. Regional figures for earlier years are not readily available on a comparable basis but national totals of FHS expenditure from 1974–75 will also be placed in the Library. Figures have been adjusted to 1993–94 prices using the GDP deflator. The only available FHS inflation index is based on costs in the non-cash-limited part of the FHS and is not applicable to these figures which incorporate both cash-limited and non-cash-limited FHS expenditure. Special health authorities do not incur expenditure on family health services.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give for each financial year since 1989–90 the numbers of day case admissions to NHS hospitals in England recorded in *(a)* the hospital episode system and *(b)* the NHS Executive's fast-track monitoring returns for (i) acute specialties, (ii) geriatrics, (iii) mental illness, (iv) mental handicap, (v) maternity, (vi) well babies and (vii) all specialties.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* The number of day case admissions for each speciality group from the hospital episode statistics system for each financial year 1988–89 to 1992–93 is given in the annual publication "Hospital Episode Statistics, England", copies of which are available in the Library.

The National Health Service Executive's fast-track monitoring returns are used to produce provisional forecasts which are not routinely published. The final definitive figures of day case admission in NHS hospitals are published in "Ordinary and Day Case Admissions for England: Financial Year 1993–94", and copies are available in the Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Factory Inspectors

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the annual cost of employing a factory inspector.

Mr. Oppenheim: The average annual cost at 1994–95 prices to the Health and Safety Executive of employing a factory inspector 1B, the main grade deployed on inspection work, is £45,387.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in how many cases relatives of *(a)* existing factory inspectors and *(b)* administrative staff have been recruited in (i) area offices, (ii) HQ Bootle or (iii) London in the administrative executive and clerical grades; if he will issue instructions to prevent this practice; and if he will take appropriate disciplinary action.

Mr. Oppenheim: No statistics are kept of relatives employed in Health and Safety Executive offices.

The recruitment of all staff in the HSE meets the civil service Order in Council rules dealing with fair and open recruitment. The existing rules about recruitment of relatives are sufficiently clear and stringent and no disciplinary action is needed.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many factory inspectors are due to be recruited in 1995; and when the recruitment will take place.

Mr. Oppenheim: A current recruitment competition aims to recruit approximately 60 factory inspectors.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many premises were inspected by the factory inspectorate *(a)* in 1992–93 and *(b)* 1993–94.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information about the number of premises inspected is not readily available since some premises received more than one visit. The number of planned inspection visits carried out by the field operations division's factory, agriculture and quarries inspectors is shown in the following table:

Year	*Number of inspections*
1992–93	157,426
1993–94	152,014

Visits were also paid for a range of other purposes, such as to follow up complaints and to investigate accidents.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the names and full costs of all consultants currently used by the Health and Safety Executive and those used in 1993–94.

Mr. Oppenheim: Available information for 1993–94 is given in the following table. A similar list for the current year is not yet available.

Names and costs of consultants—1993–94

Consultant	*Cost (£)*
P. A. Consulting Group	22,424.72
MaST Western Ltd.	1,796.20
Dr. Fitzgerald	141.00
Elintech	64,918.75
Easesystems Ltd.	13,236.94
R. M. Consultants	2,806.75
Dr. P. Knight	194.95
W. L. Pugh Mining Engineer	1,044.00
Strata Control Technology Pty Ltd.	13,612.89
Mr. Essery	10,000.00
Mr. Sibson	10,000.00
Mr. Hiles	15,928.00
Miss Caws QC	2,931.25
Mr. Burgess	238.60
Disc Europe	60,000.00
Compel plc	1,890.00
Retix UK Ltd.	700.00
Amtec Consulting	870.00
Level 7 Ltd.	16,218.65
Admiral Software Ltd.	1,000.20
Uden Computer Consultants	33,929.37
Mica Computing Services	772.40
Sensory Systems	125.00
Yale Consulting	38,315.00
E2E Systems	8,510.64
SiSL	34,042.55
Hoskyns Group	13,846.74
Cognos Ltd.	29,594.31
Triad Special Systems	490.95
Comtex (UK) Ltd.	4,815.00
Kinesis Computing Ltd.	149,398.12
Professor Sir William Wade QC	5,581.25
Patrick Thomas	455.49
Keisley Harris	7,167.50
Capita	42,881.00
Denham-Nash Ltd.	18,926.80
W. S. Atkins	42,955.66
Ernst and Young	15,000.00
Allan H. Webb	5,922.01
Hunterskill	31,114.05
Turner Williams	28,107.34
ROSPA	19,470.58
University of Nottingham	4,200.00
John Enderby	502.26
Shreeveport	2,440.00
KPMG	27,672.14
Ian Sharland Ltd.	7,680.00
Institute of Occupational Medicine Ltd.	125.00
BMRB International	3,466.00
TQM International Ltd.	34,771.46
Pointing Consulting Services Ltd.	15,537.47
Business Planning and Research International	13,899.74
Taylor Nelson AGB plc	18,623.75
Dr. P. Buley	4,857.69
Mr. A. B. Martin	16,817.62
Mr. A. J. Linehan	6,511.36
Dr. J. Patrick	1,552.17
Mr. J. Hannaford	3,074.82
Dr. D. Hicks	2,044.61
Sir Alan Cottrell	10,000.00
Professor E. Smith	13,747.50
Mr. G. L. Potts	21,072.00
Dr. R. E. Long	11,944.97
Mr. D. Stallard	4,999.62
Total	996,914.84

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the Health and Safety Executive will open the files held in area offices on individual firms' inspection history to members of the public on demand without payment of any fees.

Mr. Oppenheim: Under the code of practice on access to government information and the Environmental Information Regulations 1992, the Health and Safety Executive will make available, on request information about inspections it has carried out at particular premises, subject to the exempted categories of information in the code and the regulations.

Where the HSE uses significant resources to make information available, it will make reasonable charges for such information as it is entitled to do under both the code and the regulations.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many premises liable to inspection by the Health and Safety Executive have not had a full basic inspection by the Health and Safety Executive in the last *(a)* five, *(b)* seven, *(c)* nine, *(d)* 11 and *(e)* more years; and what will be the inspection backlog for 1994–95.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information about the elapsed years since full basic inspections were carried out by the Health and Safety Executive to premises for which the HSE has inspection responsibilities, can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Although elapsed years is one consideration in determining inspection priorities, more account is taken of the degree of hazard and risk posed to employees and the public. Inspection programmes are selected each year to match the resources available, and there is no inspection backlog.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the target number of basic field inspections for 1995–96 in the field operations division of the Health and Safety Executive; and how many premises in total the Health and Safety Executive is now responsible for inspecting.

Mr. Oppenheim: The 1995-96 plan of work for the field operations division of the Health and Safety Executive is still in preparation and the target number of inspections is not yet known. HSE inspectors are responsible for enforcing health and safety legislation in over 650,000 establishments.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how the Health and Safety Executive is alleviating the problem of work-related stress among its staff.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive's safety policy is clear in establishing divisional management responsibilities for dealing with issues such as stress at work. Guidance to divisional line managers is currently provided in the Employment Department group personnel handbook. This guidance augments the high level of awareness within the HSE's divisions of the risks associated with work-induced stress. While recognising the difficulties posed by non-work stresses, it sets out a practical approach to identifying and combating workplace stress. The HSE's 1995 staff attitudes survey will provide monitoring of its effectiveness in managing this issue.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what changes in the complement of principal inspectors of factories is being planned for the Health and Safety Executive area offices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: The complement of principal inspectors—factory, agriculture and quarries—in area offices is being reduced for 1995–96 by approximately 34, as part of the process of restructuring some parts of

the Health ad Safety Executive in order to allow the executive to recruit more inspectors for front-line activities. The HSE has agreed to the recruitment of some 60 of the latter during 1995–96.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the ratio of managers to managed grades in the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive has many staff whose work involves a mixture of supervisory and personal work. The ratio of those staff whose work is entirely or mainly managerial to other staff at 1 January 1995 was 1:18.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what personnel policies the Health and Safety Executive has to deal with husbands and wives working in the same office of the Health and Safety Executive; and what consideration he has given to making a formal statement banning such arrangements.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Employment Department group policy on partners working with each other is set out in the ED group personnel handbook. This broadly ensures that partners should not have line management responsibilities, should not have a disciplinary role and should not act directly over the other in financial matters.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff were made redundant following market testing in the Health and Safety Executive in 1993–94.

Mr. Oppenheim: None.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to reduce the Health and Safety Executive front-line services; and what is the consequence for 1995–96 and 1996–97 of the recent public expenditure round for the Health and Safety Executive front-line services in area offices.

Mr. Oppenheim: Following the reduction in its financial provision, I have asked the Health and Safety Commission to safeguard the front-line work of the executive, including inspection, guidance, advice and enforcement, by building on the executive's record of continuing efficiency improvements.

The commission will be announcing details of its planned deployment of resources in its plan of work for 1995–96, due to be published in the early summer.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of the employees of the Health and Safety Executive have had their child care costs met by the executive; what is the grade of staff involved; and on what basis this assistance is made available.

Mr. Oppenheim: No Health and Safety Executive staff have their child care costs full met by the executive. Currently, a total of 25 people have a place at one of HSE's two workplace nurseries on Merseyside at a subsidy of £45 per week—pro rata for part-time use—which is around 50 per cent. of the full weekly cost.

The grades involved are two grade 7s, two senior information officers, one inspector, two higher executive officers, one scientific officer, five executive officers, 11 administrative officers and one administrative assistant. Additionally, there are currently 14 holiday play schemes at various locations throughout the country which assist parents with child care during school holidays. The numbers of staff assisted, their grades and the degree to which they are financially assisted varies from scheme to scheme but, in the main, the HSE's contribution is in the form of some basis set-up and running costs depending on the scheme.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the Health and Safety Executive has been seeking volunteers for early retirement from factory inspectors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive has been seeking volunteers for early retirement from a wide range of senior staff within the HSE, including at principal inspector level and above. This exercise, which is resulting in the early retirement of 85 staff in March 1995, was caused by the need to restructure some parts of the HSE in order to allow the HSE to recruit more inspectors for front-line inspection.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what resources were available to the field consultant group of the Health and Safety Executive, *(a)* in 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: The following staffing resources were available to the field consultant groups of the Health and Safety Executive in 1993–94 and 1994–95.

	As at 31 March 1994	*As at 1 November 1994*
Specialist inspector grades	99.50	96.75
Scientific grades	28.50	29.50
Total	128.00	126.25

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many factory inspectors in the area offices of the Health and Safety Executive are suffering from work-related stress; and whether the Health and Safety Executive has a contingency budget for legal claims against the executive for any of its staff suffering work-related stress.

Mr. Oppenheim: It is not possible to say how many factory inspectors are under stress currently, or whether that is causing them suffering. It is also very difficult to separate work-related stress from non-work-related stress or to measure it accurately because stress-related illness can manifest itself in a variety of ways. There is no Health and Safety Executive budget for claims of this kind.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what will be the cost of the regional tier of field management in the field operations division of the Health and Safety Executive in 1995-96.

Mr. Oppenheim: The regional tier of field management in the field operations division of the Health and Safety Executive in 1995-96 is expected to be unchanged from that in the current year. The 1995–96 payroll cost of the regional directors, their support managers and secretarial services is £496,000.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many relatives of existing employed staff have been recruited at Health and Safety Executive headquarters, Bootle; and whether such recruitments are within civil service personnel rules.

Mr. Oppenheim: No statistics are kept on the recruitment of relatives within Health and Safety Executive headquarters, Bootle. All recruitment meet civil service Order in Council regulations about fair and open recruitment.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current hourly rate of security and messengerial staff at the Health and Safety Executive headquarters at Bootle, Merseyside.

Mr. Oppenheim: The security staff at the Health and Safety Executive headquarters at Bootle are employed by a private contractor, and I am unaware of their wage rates.

The current hourly rate for messengerial staff employed at HSE HQ at Bootle is £4.71 per hour.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what further contracted-out operations the Health and Safety Executive plans in 1994–95.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive has no further contracted out operations planned for the financial year 1994–95.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what legal provisions allow the Health and Safety Executive to exclude premises from its future inspection programmes; what classes of premises are being excluded; and what procedures are in place to allow challenges to this practice.

Mr. Oppenheim: There are no legal provisions concerning the exclusion by the Health and Safety Executive of premises from its future inspection programmes.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what steps his Department intends to take to inform speakers of Bengali, Gujerati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu of the availability of the Health and Safety Executive leaflet "Your Health and Safety-a guide for workers";

(2) what steps his Department intends to take to publicise the availability of the Health and Safety Executive leaflet "Your Health and Safety—a guide for workers".

Mr. Oppenheim: This leaflet was published in English and five Asian languages in November 1994. The Health and Safety Executive initially distributed a package including an advertising poster and copies of the leaflet in each language to around 3,000 organisations including community centres, citizens advice bureaux, legal advice centres and ethnic minority libraries. Copies of the leaflet were sent, with a press release, to the ethnic minority press and all local radio stations broadcasting in ethnic minority languages. The leaflets are available free of charge from HSE books. Demand so far has been high: over 180,000 copies of the leaflet have now been distributed.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what commercial involvement Ernst and Young has with the information technology division of the Health and Safety Executive; and what steps have been taken by him or by the commission to avoid conflicts of interest in the case of commissioners who have other dealings with Ernst and Young.

Mr. Oppenheim: Ernst and Young is nearing the end of an assignment to assist the in-house bid for the market test of the Health and Safety Executive's information technology services. Their appointment followed a competitive tendering exercise in which four consultancy firms submitted tenders and were interviewed by a panel. To avoid any conflicts of interest, tenderers were required to provide CVs of staff who would be involved in the work. The decision to use Ernst and Young was taken by the executive in accordance with civil service rules. The commission was not involved in the decision.

Construction Regulations

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the Construction (Designed Management) Regulations and approved code of practice will be approved; when they were submitted to him; and what factors were responsible for the length of the interval.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 1994 were signed on 19 December 1994 and consent given to the code of practice, which was approved by the Health and Safety Commission on 3 January 1995. Both were submitted to the then Minister of State on 18 March 1994 and passed to me following the Cabinet changes on 20 July 1994.

Making new regulations is an important ministerial responsibility. It was necessary to be absolutely certain that this complex package of regulations was as fair and reasonable as possible and this inevitably took time.

Job Advertisements (European Commission)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about advertisements for United Kingdom-based European Commission jobs, with particular reference to any restrictions on the nationality of applicants.

Mr. Oppenheim: The wording of advertisements for jobs with the European Commission is a matter for the Commission.

Offshore Safety Division

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which trade union representatives the contracted-out administrative support at the offshore safety division office at Norwich; and what is the average hourly wage rate *(a)* at the offshore safety division office at Norwich and *(b)* other area Health and Safety Executive offices.

Mr. Oppenheim: The administrative support staff at the offshore safety division office in Norwich are employed by Manpower plc, and I am unaware of either their wage rates or trade union representation.

The average hourly rate for administrative staff employed at Health and Safety Executive offices is £4.47 per hour—excluding additional allowances paid to staff working in the London area.

Health and Safety Commission

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the meetings of the Health and Safety Commission and its industrial advisory committees will be open to the press and public under the open government initiative.

Mr. Oppenheim: Under the code of practice on access to government information and the Environmental Information Regulations 1992 the Health and Safety Commission and its advisory committees will normally release information about the decisions it has taken and the facts and analyses behind those decisions, subject to the exempted categories of information in the code and regulations. The commission believes that to open its

meetings to the press and public would harm the frankness and candour of internal discussion, as is recognised in the code and the regulations.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many copies of "Fraud, Theft and Impropriety" have been issued; and if all members of the Health and Safety Commission have received a copy.

Mr. Oppenheim: The leaflet "Fraud, Theft and Impropriety" was issued on a ratio of one copy for each member of the Health and Safety Executive's staff. The members of the Health and Safety Commission were not issued with this leaflet.

Social Charter

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list in chronological order, all regulations and directives arising from article 118A of the amended treaty of Rome, stating in each case the title and objective, the number as published in the *Official Journal* of the European Community and the relevant United Kingdom Act and regulation, where applicable; and if each instrument is part of the work programme envisaged by the social charter, adopted by some member states in 1989.

Miss Widdecombe: As the information is contained in a number of tables, I shall write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

Fishermen (Redundancies)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many fishermen have been made redundant as a result of the existing decommissioning scheme offered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is not available.

Departmental Employees

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is given in the following table:

Women in the Employment Department group

Grade level	April 1991	April 1992	April 1993	April 1994
Grade 3	2	2	1	2
Grade 7	128	160	182	197
EO	9,756	11,711	11,792	10,322
AO	20,401	23,718	23,925	23,424
AA	2,241	2,422	2,366	1,902
Total women in ED group	36,879	42,344	42,340	38,786

Labour Statistics

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were *(a)* the hours worked per week, *(b)* the number of full-time workers and *(c)* the number of part-time workers in each year since 1979.

Mr. Oppenheim: The available information from the labour force survey is given in the following table. There are no comparable figures before 1983.

Total actual weekly hours of work, and full and part-time classification of all employees and self-employed Great Britain

Quarter	Total actual hours worked per week (millions)	Number in full time employment (thousands)	Number in part time employment (thousands)
Not seasonally adjusted			
Spring 1983	787	18,253	4,336
Spring 1984	777	18,244	4,828
Spring 1985	802	18,401	4,943
Spring 1986	805	18,398	5,036
Spring 1987	810	18,529	5,230
Spring 1988	857	19,163	5,402
Spring 1989	885	19,936	5,546
Spring 1990	885	20,114	5,612
Spring 1991	866	19,561	5,633
Seasonally adjusted (quarterly survey introduced)			
Spring 1992	808	18,917	5,689
Spring 1993	807	18,556	5,807
Spring 1994	816	18,529	5,990
Autumn 1994	—[1]	18,722	6,004

Note:
[1] Not yet available.
Source:
Labour force survey.

Social Fund

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many schemes have been approved and at what total value in pound sterling for each of the member states of the European Union and for Wales and Scotland under objective 4 of the European social fund since its inception; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The current objective 4 of the European social fund was created by the structural fund regulations passed in July 1993. Plans for implementing it in eight member states were provisionally approved by the Commission in November 1994. It is not possible to say how many schemes other member states have approved.

As far as the United Kingdom is concerned, no schemes have been approved under objective 4. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by the then Minister of State on 25 January 1994, *Official Report*, column *223*.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Diary Farmers

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the approximate average net profits for dairy farmers were in each year since 1985.

Mr. Jack: Information on incomes of full-time dairy farms and other farm types is collected in the farm business survey and published each year in "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom". The latest edition, "Farm Incomes in United Kingdom 1992–93", shows estimates of several different measures of income for

dairy farms in 1991–92 and 1992–93. Definitions of these income measures are contained in appendix 2.

To illustrate longer-term trends in incomes, index series are also given for net farm income, occupier's net income and cash income back to 1986–87—table 1.1 and appendix 1, tables 1 and 2—the earliest year for which data are available on a consistent basis.

"Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom 1993–94" will be published in spring.

Integrated Administration and Control System

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what are the requirements for IACS applications in England and Wales in 1995.

Mr. Jack: I have consulted closely with the industry on the detail and the timing of the IACS arrangements for 1995 to ensure that they are kept as straightforward as possible.

I am pleased to be able to announce that, as a result of pressing strongly for a UK deadline later than 31 March 1995 to meet farmers' needs, we will be applying the latest possible date of 15 May.

The IACS explanatory booklet and forms will be issued in March. The documentation is designed to be as helpful and as easy to follow as possible given the complex nature of the rules.

I recognise that farmers will want to do as much as they can in advance to prepare for IACS. The mapping and field data requirements set out in the 1994 guidance note on mapping and field data requirements will continue to apply in 1995.

No maps will be required where applications relate only to forage area. Nor will they be required for arable area, provided the land was registered as eligible for future arable payments in 1993 or 1994 and has not changed significantly since then. Applicants will need to supply a single national grid reference number for each field and the Ordnance Survey map sheet reference in order to comply with the basic requirements of the IACS rules. Fields which have been permanently amalgamated, divided or which are on more than one map sheet must have a single field number for 1995.

Fields which are on more than one map sheet must, from 1995, be allocated a new number based on the centre point of the whole field. If farmers obtained new numbers on a different basis in 1994, they do not need to provide another number this year. Estimates of area will continue to be accepted, but if areas are found to be over-declared, we have no option but to apply the strict penalties set out in the rules.

I strongly urge farmers to obtain any necessary maps, field numbers and area measurements from the Ordnance Survey or other professional advisers as soon as possible and not leave this to the last minute, otherwise they risk missing the application deadline.

Melatonin

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what procedures are in place to monitor and control the use of melatonin in the breeding of lambs.

Mrs. Browning: One marketing authorisation has been issued for the use of melatonin in the breeding of lambs. This product is available on prescription only and must be used under the direction of a veterinary surgeon. Any suspected adverse reactions to the use of medicinal products should be reported to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. The state veterinary service is responsible for the enforcement of legislation which protects the welfare of the lambs and their mothers.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what survey his Department has conducted into external research; and what research his Department has conducted into *(a)* the administering of melatonin to ewes, *(b)* the breeding cycles of ewes artificially induced and *(c)* the risks to humans of consumption of sheep meat from flocks in which melatonin is used to control artificially the breeding cycles of ewes.

Mrs. Browning: No research is currently being funded by MAFF into the use of melatonin in the breeding of lambs. However, a three-year project investigating the use of melatonin and light treatment as a new method of producing autumn lambs, was funded in 1986. Before any veterinary medicinal product is authorised to be placed on the market in the United Kingdom, it is carefully assessed by the licensing authority, which consults independent scientists, against the statutory criteria of safety—including to the animal, the operator and the consumer of meat and meat products—quality and efficacy. This applies to medicinal products containing melatonin.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many prosecutions have been pursued against sheep breeders for the conditions under which they have reared winter lambs born as a result of the administering of melatonin to their mothers in each of the past three years.

Mrs. Browning: The information requested is not available.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what statistics his Department compiles on the use of melatonin in the breeding of lambs.

Mrs. Browning: The use of a medicinal product, once authorised, is a matter for the marketplace to determine and not for the licensing authority. My Department therefore compiles no statistics on the use of melatonin in the breeding of lambs.

Lambs

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what procedures are in place to monitor and control the conditions under which winter lambs are reared.

Mrs. Browning: The Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 makes it an offence to cause unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress to any livestock on agricultural land. Subordinate legislation and the associated welfare code lay down more detailed requirements for the welfare of sheep. The state veterinary service is responsible for the enforcement of these provisions.

Agricultural Council

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 23 January.

Mr. Waldegrave: As I had signalled beforehand, I took the opportunity of this Council to explain the public concern about the transport of farm animals and the conditions in which calves are reared for veal in some member states. I stressed my determination to see that the law requiring freedom of trade is upheld. But I also emphasised the urgent need for the Community as a whole to recognise these concerns, which are being expressed widely, not just in the United Kingdom, and to take effective measures as soon as possible to improve the standards for the welfare of farm animals.

I am glad to say that a considerable number of Council members agreed with British concerns. Five Ministers pointed out that, like the UK, they had already banned the use of veal crates. There was wide support for, and no dissent from, my proposal that the review of the directive, planned for 1997, that allows the use of this method should be brought forward, the Agriculture Commissioner, Mr. Fischler, undertook to produce a report as soon as possible. All also agreed to make a determined effort to adopt rules on transport: this will be on the Council's agenda at its next meeting.

The only other substantive debate was on the Commission's proposals for adjusting the support system for sugar. I regretted that the Commission had not seized the opportunity to propose more radical changes. I urged that, in so far as sugar quotas might have to be cut to keep within the general agreement on tariffs and trade limits on subsidised exports, these cuts should be targeted on the surplus-producing member states. I also underlined the need to guarantee adequate supplies of raw sugar for the refining industry. The Council will return to these proposals at its next meeting.

I welcomed the appearance of the Commission's proposal creating a link between set-aside and arable land taken out of production for environmental and forestry purposes, and urged its speedy adoption.

DEFENCE

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by the Department or agency.

Mr. Freeman: Information is not held in the form requested and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Discipline (Armed Forces)

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the circumstances in which a service man may find himself liable to disciplinary action when refusing drugs or vaccine in a theatre of war.

Mr. Soames: In operational circumstances where it is regarded as reasonable to issue an order for service personnel to receive drugs or vaccines to protect them against the threat of biological or chemical warfare agents, refusal of such a lawful order might render members of the armed forces liable to disciplinary action. The lawfulness of the order could be raised as an issue in the disciplinary proceedings, and the individual's rights would be taken into account. Any such case would turn on its own merits, including the fact that such vaccines and drugs could be life saving in operational circumstances.

Operation Granby

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration was given to monitoring for health effects after administration of the drugs and vaccines administered to service men, either during or after Operation Granby, with particular reference to compounds that were unlicensed at the time of administration.

Mr. Soames: All aspects of the health of service personnel are monitored, in peace and war, as a matter of routine. During the Gulf war, routine monitoring did not detect any adverse effects to health which would warrant special additional monitoring either during, or after, Operation Granby.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration was given to administering toxicology and virology tests to all those suffering from illness related to Operation Granby; and what was the reason for not doing so.

Mr. Soames: Individuals who believe that they are suffering from unexplained illnesses as a result of service in Operation Granby are offered a medical examination through my Department's Gulf assessment programme. The special tests employed on this programme are tailored to the particular requirements of each patient after considering the medical and occupational history, the reported symptoms and clinical signs found on examination. If indicated, these special tests can include toxicological and virology tests.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), of 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *1179*, if he will set out the reasons why the specific counter-measures adopted against potential biological warfare by British forces in Operation Granby in the Gulf war are classified.

Mr. Soames: Information relating to the specific counter-measures adopted against potential biological warfare by British forces in the Gulf war could be useful to terrorists and potentially hostile intelligence services. Its continued classification is to protect British troops who may face a biological warfare threat in the future.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration was given to compiling a list of all recipients of the drugs or vaccines administered during Operation Granby, with particular reference to prescription-only medicines, with a view to recording them on the recipient's medical records; and what were the reasons for not doing so.

Mr. Soames: Standard peacetime procedures involve records of vaccines and prescribed medication being kept on every individual's service medical documents. Under operational conditions, individual service medical records are not held locally for logistic reasons, and a field medical documentation system is invoked. During

Operation Granby, vaccinations or prescribed medications are entered on a nominal roll for later transfer to individual records. Given the repaid repatriation and demobilisation of personnel at the end of the conflict, it is likely that some individual medical records were not fully annotated. As a result, no reliable comprehensive list of recipients could be now compiled.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence from whom and by what means plague vaccine, batch No. 10H03A, was obtained.

Mr. Soames: Details of specific medical counter-measures employed by British forces against potential biological warfare threat during Operation Granby remain classified.

Nerve Agent Immobilised Enzyme Alarm Detector

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of whether NAIAD can be triggered by the toxic compound given off from jet engines.

Mr. Soames: Nerve agent immobilised enzyme alarm and detector is designed to be used in conditions where it would not normally be in close proximity to jet engines. Nevertheless, NAIAD was extensively evaluated against a wide range of aircraft engine effluent during acceptance tests for military use. Out of the 18 aircraft type evaluated, in only one case was alarm condition attained. It follows that, although NAIAD is not commonly triggered by compounds emitted from jet engines, circumstances might arise in which this could happen.

Electro-shock Batons

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the inclusion of electro shock-batons which formed part of the Al-Yamamah defence deal was known to Ministers or civil servants.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 17 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *452*.

Defence Housing Executive

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the salary and length of contract of the new chief executive of the defence housing executive; and what is the estimated cost of establishing the defence housing executive.

Mr. Soames: Arrangements for the appointment of the chief executive have yet to be finalised. It is not possible to apportion costs between the establishment of the defence housing executive and the work undertaken previously to establish a housing trust.

Married Quarters Estate

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the individuals and companies who have been employed as paid consultants by his Department to advise on the management of the married quarters estate during the last three years.

Mr. Soames: Since January 1992, the following consultants have provided my Department with advice on the future arrangements for the services' married quarters estate:

Firm	*Subject*
Ashurst Morris Crisp Trowers and Hamlins (and Counsel) Allen and Overy Government Property Lawyers	Legal
Macklay Murray and Spens Henderson Boyd and Jackson Shepherd and Wedderburn Robson Mclean	Legal (Scotland)
Coopers and Lybrand Price Waterhouse NatWest Markets UBS	Business and Finance
Chapman Hendy Alistair McIntosh	Housing
Cluttons Chestertons DTZ Debenham Thorpe Knight, Frank and Rutley Savills Valuation Office Agency	Surveys and Valuation
Recruitment and Assessment Service	Recruitment
Government Actuary's Department	Pensions
Major General J.F.J. Johnston CB CBE (Retd)	Chairman designate of Housing Trust

Crown Housing Trust

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *451*, if the chief executive of the Crown housing trust has or will be, receiving the £20,000 bonus which is linked to performance.

Mr. Soames: The bonus is payable in April this year on the anniversary of the chief executive designate's appointment. The final amount will, however, depend on performance over the year.

Royal Navy Armaments Depot, Trecwn

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to announce the successful tenderer for RNAD Trecwn.

Mr. Soames: It is too early to say when a successful tenderer will be announced.

Tremoram

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to release documents on work on the chemical tremoram; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer Tuesday 17 January 1995]:* These records will be reviewed in accordance with the terms of the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967. If release does not prejudice the Government's undertaking not to aid the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, they will be released in due course.

Documents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will release the reference numbers and title of all

documents relating to works at Nancekuke that are more than 30 years old but have not been released for public inspection; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer Tuesday 17 January 1995]:* The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out his reasons for not releasing the document reference 195/155956, which refers to work undertaken more than 30 years ago.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer Tuesday 17 January 1995]:* There is no document with this reference. W0195/15956, however, is closed for reasons of continuing sensitivity. The release of the report would enable others to acquire details of weapons technology that would be contrary to our commitment of non-proliferation.

Vacant Dwellings

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of vacant dwellings currently owned by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer Tuesday 17 January 1995]:* As at 31 December, my Department owned 12,408 vacant dwellings in the following categories:

	Number
Service married quarters	9,992
Former married quarters in the process of sale	2,160
MOD civilian houses	218
Former civilian houses in the process of sale	38

Discussions are currently taking place with the Housing Corporation on an enhanced programme of short-term leasing to housing associations for married quarters which are temporarily surplus to our requirements. However, the majority of the vacant service married quarters are not surplus but are undergoing or awaiting major maintenance, held for future deployments, or form part of the management margin needed to ensure that accommodation is available for entitled service families.

Of the vacant civilian houses, 71 are leased properties awaiting return to Dumbarton district council, 97 are houses recently taken over from the United States air force awaiting occupation by Ministry of Defence police and the remainder are mainly properties in secure areas which cannot be sold for security or safeguarding reasons.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 25 January 1995

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the absenteeism rate for *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Historic Royal Palaces agency and *(c)* the Royal Parks agency in each year since 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: The absenteeism—sick absence—rate for the Department of National Heritage since it was created in April 1992, is shown below. The information for the two executive agencies, Historic Royal Palaces and Royal Parks, is not held centrally and is unavailable in the format requested. When the information is provided we will write to the hon. Member and arrange for copies of the letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

	Number of days absent	*Total number of staff*
1992	280	207
1993	516	301
1994	459	362

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is as follows. The Department of National Heritage was created on 13 April 1992 and the Royal Parks agency on 1 April 1993. While Historic Royal Palaces has been an executive agency since 2 October 1989, a breakdown of staffing figures in the format requested is not available for 1991.

Grade	*1992 (Percentage of total)*	*1993 (Percentage of total)*	*1994 (Percentage of total)*
Grade 3	1 (33)	1 (25)	1 (25)
Grade 7	6 (19)	11 (22)	16 (27)
EO	30 (43)	52 (48)	62 (47)
AO	48 (29)	76 (37)	91 (37)
AA	52 (55)	69 (50)	80 (39)

Sports Council

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how provision for disabled people will be included in the three new policy areas chosen for emphasis by the Sports Council GB.

Mr. Dorrell: Under the proposals announced by the Minister with responsibility for sport on 8 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *584–92*, I shall expect the Sports Council, and its successors, to give full weight to the needs of sport for able-bodied people and people with disabilities in spending its grant in aid from the Government. We have also asked the Sports Council to consider particularly the needs of those with physical or other disabilities in its distribution of national lottery funds.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Research and Development

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was Government expenditure on research and development, civil and defence, for each of the last 10 years as a percentage of gross domestic product; and what were the equivalent figures for France, Germany, America and Japan.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The information requested is shown in the table.

Government funding of research and development for civil and defence objectives (as percentage of GDP): 1983 to 1992

Research and Development expenditure	*UK*	*France*	*Germany*[1]	*USA*	*Japan*[2]
1983					
Total	1.32	1.38	1.14	1.16	0.52
Civil	0.66	0.93	1.03	0.41	n/a
Defence	0.65	0.45	0.11	0.74	n/a
1984					
Total	1.25	1.43	1.11	1.19	0.50
Civil	0.64	0.95	1.00	0.40	n/a
Defence	0.61	0.48	0.11	0.79	n/a
1985					
Total	1.19	1.46	1.15	1.24	0.48
Civil	0.63	0.99	1.02	0.40	0.46
Defence	0.57	0.48	0.14	0.84	0.02
1986					
Total	1.11	1.42	1.11	1.26	0.48
Civil	0.61	0.94	0.98	0.39	0.46
Defence	0.50	0.48	0.13	0.87	0.02
1987					
Total	1.02	1.39	1.11	1.27	0.48
Civil	0.57	0.89	0.97	0.40	0.46
Defence	0.45	0.50	0.14	0.87	0.02
1988					
Total	0.93	1.36	1.06	1.22	0.46
Civil	0.54	0.86	0.93	0.39	0.44
Defence	0.40	0.51	0.13	0.83	0.02
1989					
Total	0.90	1.36	1.06	1.19	0.46
Civil	0.51	0.86	0.93	0.41	0.43
Defence	0.39	0.50	0.14	0.78	0.02
1990					
Total	0.88	1.42	1.04	1.17	0.45

Government funding of research and development for civil and defence objectives (as percentage of GDP): 1983 to 1992

Research and Development expenditure	*UK*	*France*	*Germany*[1]	*USA*	*Japan*[2]
Civil	0.51	0.85	0.90	0.44	0.43
Defence	0.37	0.57	0.14	0.73	0.02
1991					
Total	0.88	1.43	1.05	1.17	[3]0.45
Civil	0.49	0.89	0.94	0.47	[3]0.42
Defence	0.40	0.53	0.12	0.70	[3]0.03
1992					
Total	0.87	1.39	[3]1.03	1.16	[3]0.46
Civil	0.50	0.92	[3]0.93	0.48	[3]0.43
Defence	0.37	0.47	[3]0.11	0.68	[3]0.03

Notes:[1] For 1991 there is a break in series with previous year for which data is available.
[2] Data for Japan are adjusted by OECD.
[3] = provisional.
Sources:
Annual Review of Government Funded R&D, 1990 (Table 6.9)
Annual Review of Government Funded R&D, 1991 (Table 1.6.5)
Forward Look 1994 Statistical Supplement (Table 1.6.7)

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. David Hunt: Officials receive representations about a wide variety of matters, but the information requested is not collected.

Mr. Campbell Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. David Hunt: Ministers receive numerous representations about a wide variety of matters, but the information is not collected.

TRANSPORT

Coventry Airport

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of safety at Coventry airport.

Mr. Norris: The Civil Aviation Authority's aerodrome standards department is responsible for ensuring that United Kingdom civil aerodromes meet prescribed safety standards. I have therefore asked the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority to write to the hon. Member.

Rail Safety

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many rail passengers were killed or injured (i) by the opening or closing of carriage doors, falling through open doors or entering or alighting from trains and (ii) during train movement for each of the last five years *(a)* over the whole rail network, *(b)* in the Network SouthEast region, *(c)* in mark I electrical multiple unit slam door rolling stock in the Network SouthEast region and *(d)* in Networker 465 rolling stock in the Network SouthEast region.

Mr. Watts: The table gives the details requested of passenger injuries for all railways in Great Britain since 1989.

The following table gives details for Network SouthEast and covers the period from its creation in 1992 to its reorganisation in March 1994, following the restructuring of the railway industry.

Passenger Injuries
All railways Great Britain
Entering or alighting from trains

	Fatal	*Major injuries*	*Minor injuries*	*Total*
1989	2	51	691	744
1990	2	55	736	793
1991–92	0	39	623	662
1992–93	3	34	665	702
1993–94	0	9	652	661
Total	7	188	3,367	3,562

Opening or closing of carriage door

	Fatal	*Major injuries*	*Minor injuries*	*Total*
1989	0	5	441	446
1990	1	13	803	817
1991–92	0	5	637	642
1992–93	0	8	627	635
1993–94	0	2	680	682
Total	1	33	3,188	3,222

Falling out of carriages during running of trains

	Fatal	*Major injuries*	*Minor injuries*	*Total*
1989	19	16	12	47
1990	19	9	20	48
1991–92	19	4	13	36
1992–93	9	6	28	43
1993–94	8	2	13	23
Total	74	37	86	197

Passenger Injuries Network Southeast
1 April 1992–31 March 1994

	Fatal	*Major injuries*	*Minor injuries*	*Total*
Entering or alighting from trains	0	9	551	560
Opening or closing of carriage doors	0	1	414	415
Falling out of carriages during running of train	2	1	14	17
Total	2	11	979	992

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to press British Rail to implement the recommendation of the Cannon street rail accident inquiry that class 415 EMUs should be replaced by new Networker units as quickly as possible; when he estimates that this process will be completed; and what plans he has to press British Rail to replace other mark I EMUs and against what time scale.

Mr. Watts: I understand that the last class 415 EMU will be withdrawn from the Kent suburban fleet on 13 April 1995, along with classes 413 and 416.

The replacement and deployment of rolling stock, and the appropriate timing of an order, is a decision for BR. However, I understand BR's view is that all remaining "mark I" rolling stock on south eastern is likely to need replacement during 1999.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much it costs to strengthen a single mark I slam door railway carriage to the standard required by HM railways inspectorate in relation to recommendation 55 of the Hidden investigation into the Clapham Junction railway accident.

Mr. Watts: British Rail's estimate of the cost of strengthening mark I rolling stock is around £300,000 per coach.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many successful prosecutions for contravention of the *(a)* showman's vehicle and *(b)* agricultural vehicle excise duty concessions have taken place in the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Norris: These figures are not collected separately by the Department.

Transport and Pollution

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what response he has made to the recommendations of the Royal Commission report on transport and pollution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The Government have welcomed the royal commission's report as a valuable contribution to the debate about transport and the environment. We are now studying the report's conclusions and recommendations and considering how we should respond.

Integrated Regional Offices

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list those of his Department's responsibilities which are administered by the integrated regional offices and, for each integrated regional office, the estimated annual expenditure on each of these responsibilities;

(2) if he will list those of his Department's responsibilities on which integrated regional offices are responsible for preparing, advising on or implementing regional policy;

(3) if he will list those of his Department's responsibilities on which the integrated regional offices are required to advise him on the allocation of resources and, for each integrated regional office, the annual expenditure on each programme.

Mr. Norris: The Government offices for the regions play an important role in advising Ministers on the regional implementation of national transport policies, covering all modes of transport. They advise on local authority transport programmes and policies and on the allocation of resources for local transport capital expenditure, including transport supplementary grant, public transport facilities grant—under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968—Industrial Development Act grant and associated credit approvals.

The Government offices liaise with the Highways Agency on the trunk road programme and contribute to advice to Ministers on the programme's content and progress. They also provide advice to Ministers on the transport aspects of programmes administered by other Departments.

Local transport capital expenditure in 1993–94, the last complete financial year, is shown in the table.

The total running cost to the Department of the Government Offices for the current financial year is forecast to be as follows:

	£ million
Eastern	0.247
East Midlands	0.218
London	2.462
Merseyside	0.079
North East[1]	0.443
North West	0.180
South East	0.430
South West	0.260
West Midlands	0.227
Yorkshire and Humberside	0.230
Total	4.784

[1] The figure for the Government office for the north east includes running costs incurred in carrying out the Secretary of State's role in confirming orders promoted by local authorities under the Highways Act 1980 and for highways under the Acquisition of Land Act 1981, a national activity carried out for all regions.

Local transport capital—1993–94

	South East	*South West*	*West Midland*	*North West*	*Mersey-side*	*North East*	*Yorks & Humber-side*	*East Midland*	*Eastern*	*London*	*Total*
Transport Supplementary Grant	77.718	32.278	61.856	49.858	15.098	24.347	54.584	21.509	35.283	58.310	430.841
Public Transport Facilities Grant	0.0	0.0	0.013	0.0	0.0	0.0	18.156	0.250	0.0	0.0	18.419

Local transport capital—1993–94

	South East	South West	West Midland	North West	Mersey-side	North East	Yorks & Humber-side	East Midland	Eastern	London	Total
Industrial Development Act Grant	0.0	0.124	0.428	0.276	0.0	0.494	0.446	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.768
Total Credit Approvals	112.096	50.632	85.930	76.810	40.541	38.456	146.195	34.690	48.793	83.770	717.913
Total	189.814	83.034	148.227	126.944	55.639	63.297	219.381	56.449	84.076	142.080	1,168.941

Note: All Figures in £ Million

Bids for support are considered competitively on merit. There are no set allocations for regions, and funding will fluctuate from year to year according to need and progress on major schemes

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Fishing Industry (Accidents)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were disabled as a result of accidents at work in the sea fishing industry in the years 1992, 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Norris: This information is not available.

Motorways (Coaches)

Mrs. Gillian: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce a decision on the proposal to ban coaches from the outside lanes of motorways with three or more lanes.

Mr. Norris: I have today laid regulations implementing such a ban with effect from 1 January 1996. The ban will be for a trial period and will be reviewed when two years' accident data are available.

EDUCATION

Liverpool Education Authority

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if Liverpool education authority spent all its standard spending assessment for education in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Robin Squire: The latest data on provisional outturn expenditure indicate that Liverpool city council's education expenditure was some 3.6 per cent. less than its education standard spending assessment for 1993–94. But education SSAs are not prescriptive and each council is free to determine its spending priorities between and within services.

Schools, Wolverhampton

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of a secondary school place in a grant-maintained school in Wolverhampton in 1993–94; and what is the estimated cost in 1994–95.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information relating to the cost of secondary school places in grant-maintained schools in Wolverhampton for the years in question is held by the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the agency to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was *(a)* the total cost of the assisted-places scheme at Wolverhampton grammar school and *(b)* the average cost per pupil in 1993–94; and what is the estimated cost in 1994–95.

Mr. Robin Squire: The total cost of the scheme at Wolverhampton grammar school for the academic year 1993–94 was £792,715 and the average cost per pupil was £3,109. The estimated cost of the scheme for the academic year 1994–95 is £863,125 and the average cost per pupil is expected to be in the region of £3,230.

Computers

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what measures she is taking to ensure that all pupils gain skills in using computer keyboards, word processing and spreadsheet software and information networks such as the Internet.

Mr. Forth: The Government are supporting the development of pupils' information technology skills through the inclusion of IT capability in the national curriculum; through a £187 million programme of grants for education support and training; and through the work of the National Council for Educational Technology. My right hon. Friend announced on 11 January an initiative on information super-highways for education, which will begin with a major consultation exercise in the spring.

Further and Higher Education

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will publish for *(a)* England and *(b)* the United Kingdom, for the last three available years, the number of full-time students in (i) further education, (ii) higher education and (iii) further and higher education in total, indicating the percentage of women in each case.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is shown:

Numbers of students in further and higher education in England and the UK—1990 to 1992
Full-time and sandwich only
Home and overseas

	England Total 000s	*United Kingdom Women 000s*	*Women Percentage*	*Total 000s*	*Women 000s*	*Women Percentage*
1990–91						
Further Education	402.9	219.2	54.4	480.4	260.9	54.3
Higher Education	592.8	277.3	46.8	747.0	352.0	47.1
Total	995.7	496.5	49.9	1,227.4	612.9	49.9
1991–92						
Further Education	465.2	248.0	53.3	542.6	289.6	53.4
Higher Education	670.7	317.7	47.4	844.0	400.0	47.4
Total	1,135.8	564.9	49.7	1,386.6	689.6	49.7
1992–93						
Further Education	498.0	260.5	52.3	586.0	305.9	52.2
Higher Education	762.3	365.0	47.9	958.0	461.0	48.1
Total	1,260.3	625.5	49.6	1,544.0	766.9	49.7

Sources USR, DFE (FESR), Welsh Office, Scottish Office and DENI.

Education Authorities (Expenditure)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has had from the North West Regional Association for Education Authorities in regard to the standing spending assessments and capping limits for its constituent authorities; what reply she has sent; what action she is taking; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations from the North West Regional Association of Education Authorities. I have arranged for copies of the correspondence and my reply to be placed in the Library.

National Youth Agency

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the amount of grant given to the National Youth Agency for each year since 1991 and the estimated grant for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98.

Mr. Boswell: The grant paid or allocated to the National Youth Agency in the period 1991–92 to 1995–96 is as follows:

	£ million
1991–92	1.840
1992–93	1.495
1993–94	1.687
1994–95	1.716
1995–96	1.655

Funding for 1996–97 and future years will be reviewed as part of the annual public expenditure survey and in the light of the outcome of the policy review of the agency.

Proposed School Closures

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals she is considering from Nottinghamshire county council for the closure or merger of schools; what schools are involved; and when she received these proposals.

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows the proposals, published by Nottinghamshire county council, under section 12 of the Education Act 1980, to cease to maintain schools. These are currently under consideration by the Department.

Proposals	*Date received by the Department*
Padstow comprehensive	1 July 1994
Releigh Infant's School	10 November 1994
Windley Junior School	10 November 1994
Thomas Magnus VC Upper School	5 December 1994
Magdalene CE VC High School	5 December 1994
Lilley and Stone VC Upper School	5 December 1994
Sconce Hill High School	5 December 1994

The Department is also considering associated proposals from Nottinghamshire county council to establish a new primary school on the site of Windley junior school.

The governing bodies of Thomas Magnus school and Lilley and Stone school have published proposals, under section 13 of the Education Act 1980, to establish new 11 to 18 schools on the sites of Thomas Magnus school and Lilley and Stone school. These proposals relate to the county council's closure proposals. Padstow comprehensive school has submitted an application for grant-maintained status which will be determined with the closure proposal.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) on how many occasions in the last four months of which she has knowledge any civil servants in her Department have been approached by commercial

lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months she or any of her Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many parents voted *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against in all ballots for grant-maintained status in those schools currently operating as grant maintained.

Mr. Robin Squire: In ballots at schools in England which are currently grant maintained, 450,819 parents voted in favour and 145,005 voted against.

ENVIRONMENT

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made across Government Departments towards meeting the energy saving targets given in "Climate Change: the UK Programme".

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I refer the hon. Member to tables one to three following chapter five of "This Common Inheritance: The Third Year Report," column *2549*. Further data will be published shortly.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what attempt will be made by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to recover the costs of cleaning up the uranium dumped at the Chelveston farm in Northamptonshire from those responsible for the radioactive pollution of the area;

(2) if he will ask Her Majesty's chief inspector of pollution to establish an investigation into the fly tipping of uranium at a farm in Chelveston, Northamptonshire; and if he will make it his policy to publish the report of such an investigation.

Mr. Atkins: The scrap metal containing uranium found on land at Poplar farm, Caldecott, Northamptonshire is of unknown origin. Investigations are continuing to try and trace the source of the material and those involved in its movement. As the results of this investigation may form the basis of a prosecution under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993, detailed information will not be published until any such enforcement action is completed by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. The possibility of recovering costs of waste removal and clean up of the site will also be fully investigated.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the process and timetable for the investigation of the Drigg low-level radioactive waste disposal site by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer given Thursday 19 January 1995]:* Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has already thoroughly investigated allegations made by Greenpeace about Drigg, following its illegal entry to the site and has confirmed that there has been no breach of the site's certificate of authorisation. The certificate of authorisation contains conditions and limits which impose specific requirements on the company, relating to the type of waste disposed of, the method of disposal and the radioactive content of disposals made. HMIP is satisfied that operations at the site properly protect the public.

With regard to the more general question of the disposal of radioactive waste at landfill sites, the Government's consultation document "Review of Radioactive Waste Management Policy: Preliminary Conclusions", published on 5 August, proposed that there may be advantage in encouraging waste producers to make greater use of such controlled burial. This form of disposal is already used by major hospitals and universities and some sections of the nuclear industry for their low-level waste, and the proposals do not involve any deregulation. Encouraging greater use of controlled burial would help to relieve pressure on capacity at Drigg.

However, this remains only a proposal, and there are no plans in relation to specific sites. The consultation document invited views on the subject, and these are currently receiving careful consideration. A statement of future policy will be made in due course.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the effect of low-level radioactive waste dumping in landfill sites on house prices in the vicinity of authorised sites.

Mr. Atkins: None.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from local authorities submitting unsuccessful bids for single regeneration budget moneys alleging that they were encouraged to believe that their bids would succeed in discussions with the relevant regional office.

Mr. Curry: There have been five such representations from local authorities.

Waste Management Licensing

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to conclude his consideration of the consultation on exemptions from waste management licensing for the recovery of scrap metal and the dismantling of waste motor vehicles; when he proposes to publish the new guidance and the new regulations; how many responses he received to the consultation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: We have received 115 direct responses to the consultation paper published on 8 November 1994 proposing exemptions from waste management licensing for the recovery of scrap metal and the dismantling of waste motor vehicles. Some respondents also requested Members of Parliament to make representations on their

behalf. Our aim is to conclude our consideration of all these responses and to lay the regulations providing any exemptions from licensing within the next three weeks. Our guidance is dependent on the terms of any exemptions provided and will be published as soon as possible after the regulations have been laid.

Right-to-buy Scheme

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tenants have bought their homes under the right-to-buy scheme; and how many subsequently sold their homes *(a)* in total and *(b)* in Stockport.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Between October 1980 and September 1994 over 1.2 million tenants of local authorities and new towns in England purchased their homes under the right-to-buy legislation. Of these, some 3,500 sales were to local authority tenants in Stockport metropolitan borough council.

Information on housing association sales at local authority level is not available; sales for the country as a whole are estimated to be almost 27,000.

Data on subsequent sales by former tenants are not collected by the Department.

Departmental Employees

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and, of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Sir Paul Beresford: The following information covers non-industrial staff in my Department, excluding PSA Services:

Grade	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Grade 3	4	5	5	4
Grade 7	104	118	128	138
EO and equivalent	544	516	553	533
AO and equivalent	976	962	1,021	972
AA and equivalent	574	563	558	489
Total female staff	2,672	2,628	2,763	2,630

Home Renovation Grants

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his oral answer of 18 January, *Official Report* columns 696–97 to the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), if he will list the number of home renovation grants not including disabled facilities or minor works grants approved in 1993.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Some 40,221 renovation grants were approved in 1993.

Local Authority Mortgages

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide additional resources to local authorities that wish to offer mortgages to tenants who wish to buy homes which have been designated as defective.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: There are no plans to make additional resources available to local authorities for this purpose. Local housing authorities receive a housing investment programme allocation each year. It is for each authority to decide how best to use this allocation to meet local housing needs.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has relating to the number of applications made by boarding houses and hotels for change of use to houses of multiple occupation or hostels since the relevant changes in the planning law.

Sir Paul Beresford: As planning applications are made to local planning authorities detailed information of this kind is not held centrally.

Energy Saving Trust

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has considered for funding the Energy Saving Trust after the gas market has been deregulated.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The finances of the Energy Saving Trust are properly a matter for the trust, which is an independent company. However, the Government are currently considering a range of options for funding the trust and the schemes it promotes, including the involvement of private sector finance and input from the energy consumer.

National Parks (Quarries)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* working and *(b)* disused quarries there are in each of the national parks.

Sir Paul Beresford: Separate figures are not available for working and disused quarries. The table shows numbers of sites for surface mineral workings—"quarries"—in each of the national parks in England and Wales as of 1988, taken from surveys carried out for the Department of the Environment and for the Welsh Office. Similar statistics for national parks in England for 1994 will be available later this year in the results of an updated survey.

National park	*Number of surface mineral workings*
Brecon Beacons	27
Dartmoor	9
Exmoor	Nil
Lake District	20
North York Moors	21
Northumberland	5
Peak District	121
Pembroke Coast	10
Snowdonia	92
Yorkshire Dales	13

Air Quality Report

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria underlay the decision to exclude the contribution of radioactive particulate material and radioactive gases, including krypton, from the report "Air Quality: Meeting the Challenge".

Mr. Atkins: "Air Quality: Meeting the Challenge" details the Government's strategic policies for improving air quality. It sets out a new framework for setting and achieving air quality targets and standards for the nine toxic pollutants of most concern. Radiotoxides are adequately addressed elsewhere.

Urban Waste Water Directive

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) on what date he supplied the European Commission with a list of less-sensitive areas and copies of studies of them carried out in respect of such areas under article six of the urban waste directive;

(2) what plans he has to request an extension of time from the European Commission in respect of listing and forwarding copies of studies of less-sensitive areas under article six of the urban waste water directive;

(3) when he submitted to the European Commission proposals under article 8(5) of the urban waste water directive listing the areas subject to the proposals and the basis of those proposals;

(4) what information he has provided to the European Commission on its implementation programme as required by article 17(2) of the urban waste water directive indicating the outline and nature of the information provided; and what extension of time for providing the information was requested.

Mr. Atkins: A list of the less-sensitive areas—known as high natural dispersion areas in the United Kingdom—identified under the directive was sent to the European Commission on 24 May 1994. Under the terms of the directive, comprehensive studies must be carried out following identification of the areas, before a discharge consent can be given for a minimum of primary treatment. The studies will be carried out in time for relevant discharge consents to be given for the discharges concerned before the end of the years 2000 or 2005, whichever of the directive's implementation dates applies to each affected discharge. The question of applying for an extension of time does not arise.

Where relevant, proposals for applying article 8(5) of the directive will be made to the Commission after comprehensive studies have been completed and before the relevant implementation deadline. Such proposals will be made only where it can be demonstrated that no environmental benefit will accrue from the provision of a higher level of treatment than the requirements of article 6(2).

Information required by article 17(2) of the directive was provided to the Commission on 25 November 1994 without application for an extension of time for its provision. The information given was that required by the Commission decision of 28 July 1993—93/481/EEC; OJ No L 226, 28.7.1993, p.23. A copy of the "Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive—UK Article 17 Report" has been placed in the Library of the House.

Housing Stock Transfers

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a list of those local authorities which have completed voluntary transfer of their housing stock, and the date on which the transfer was completed.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Since 1988, 35 local authorities have transferred a total of 156,739 homes through large scale voluntary transfer. These authorities are listed, together with the dates on which they completed transfer.

Authority	*Date of Transfer*
Chiltern	15 December 1988
Sevenoaks	29 March 1989
Newbury	30 November 1989
Swale	28 March 1990
Broadland	4 April 1990
North Bedfordshire	13 June 1990
Medina	27 July 1990
Rochester	27 July 1990
South Wight	30 July 1990
Mid Sussex	9 November 1990
East Dorset	3 December 1990
Tonbridge and Malling	15 January 1991
Ryedale	28 February 1991
South Bucks	26 March 1991
Christchurch	28 March 1991
Suffolk Coastal	22 May 1991
Tunbridge Wells	29 January 1992
Bromley	6 April 1992
Surrey Heath	15 January 1993
Breckland	30 March 1993
East Cambridgeshire	31 March 1993
Hambleton	29 April 1993
West Dorset	27 May 1993
Havant	31 January 1994
Epsom and Ewell	14 February 1994
Hart	9 March 1994
South Shropshire	23 March 1994
Leominster	25 March 1994
South Ribble	30 March 1994
Hertsmere	31 March 1994
Penwith	16 May 1994
North Dorset	6 September 1994
Wychavon	3 October 1994
Mid Bedfordshire	4 October 1994
Thanet	19 December 1994

Integrated Regional Offices

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those of his Department's responsibilities on which the integrated regional offices are required to advise him on the allocation of resources and, for each integrated regional office, the annual expenditure on each programme.

Sir Paul Beresford: In 1993–94 the Department of the Environment's regional offices advised Ministers on the programmes shown in the table. The Department of the Environment's regional offices became part of the Government offices for the regions in April 1994.

Department of the environment programme expenditure through the Government offices for the regions, 1993–94 outturn (£ million)

	North East	North West	Merseyside	Yorkshire and Humberside	West Midlands	East Midlands	Eastern	South West	South East	London	Total
Housing Investment Programme	83.0	162.0	53.8	154.6	194.7	116.2	142.4	140.6	187.5	530.4	1,765.2
Estate Action[1] [4]	28.7	60.3	39.6	41.8	46.1	27.0	5.9	12.2	3.8	85.3	350.7
Housing Partnership Fund	3.6	2.6	0.7	2.8	3.4	4.0	3.9	4.8	3.1	1.1	30.0
Housing Actions Trusts[1]	—	—	16.0	26.5	2.0	—	—	—	—	30.6	75.1
Flats over shops	1.0	0.8	0.3	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.7	1.0	0.8	1.9	9.3
Energy Efficiency Programme	0.4	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.5	0.7	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.3	5.2
Derelict Land Grant[2]	7.8	27.5	8.0	23.9	19.9	8.7	0.8	3.3	0.8	3.6	104.3
Urban Programme[1] UPF[4]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	166.5
City Action Team[1]	0.8	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	—	—	—	0.5	3.4
Task Forces[1]	1.8	1.0	2.2	2.3	2.6	2.3	—	0.6	—	5.0	17.8
Urban Development Corporations[1]	78.5	37.1	22.5	16.7	62.4	—	—	20.7	—	105.4	343.2
City Challenge[1] [6]	45.8	31.8	22.3	27.8	29.0	21.2	—	—	—	52.3	230.2
Coalfield Areas Fund[5]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.3
Manchester Regeneration	—	23.3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	23.3
Docklands Light Railway	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	28.1	28.1
Merseyside Special Grant	—	—	0.6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.6
ERDF[3]	41.2	28.2	23.0	32.6	34.3	10.4	—	2.4	11.5	—	142.4

Notes:

[1] Subsumed within single regeneration budget from April 1995.

[2] Transferred to English Partnerships from April 1994.

[3] ERDF payments, made on behalf of the European Community, include payments on projects which are the responsibility of other Government Departments.

[4] Figures for the urban programme, urban partnership fund (UPF) and Coalfield areas fund are not held centrally on a region by region basis. The Urban programme will be subsumed within the SRB from April 1995.

[5] Estate Action figures exclude resources for design improvement controlled experiment (DICE).

[6] City challenge figures include city challenge Housing Corporation expenditure in 1993–94 and exclude payments made in 1993–94 for expenditure actually incurred in 1992–93.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those of his Department's responsibilities which are administered by the integrated regional offices and, for each integrated regional office, the estimated annual expenditure on each of these responsibilities.

Sir Paul Beresford: On my right hon. Friend's behalf, the Government offices for the regions administer the single regeneration budget, housing and regeneration programmes, undertake certain planning and environment functions and provide the main local points of contact between the Department and local authorities. In 1994–95, the Government offices expect to spend the following sums in pursuit of these functions:

	£000s
Government Office for the North East	3,174
Government Office for the North West	4,682
Government Office for Yorkshire and Humberside	3,532
Government Office for Merseyside	2,086
Government Office for the West Midlands	3,547
Government Office for the East Midlands	2,579
Government Office for the Eastern Region	2,063
Government Office for the South West	2,143
Government Office for the South East	3,177
Government Office for London	4,785

The Department does not allocate running cost resources at the level of individual programmes or functions.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total number of staff working in each integrated regional office; and in each integrated regional office, what is the total annual cost of their employment.

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is shown in the table.

Government office	Total number of staff (as at December 1994)	Total annual cost of staff employed £ million
North East	289	6.2
North West	383	8.4
Merseyside	157	3.5
Yorkshire and Humberside	340	6.9
West Midlands	360	7.5
East Midlands	264	5.5
Eastern	191	4.5
South West	234	5.2
South East	241	6.0
London	340	8.8

The total annual cost of staff employed is based on the forecast pay costs of each office in 1994–95.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those of his Department's responsibilities on which integrated regional offices are responsible for preparing, advising on or implementing regional policy.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government offices in the regions assist my Department in work on preparing and disseminating regional planning guidance, and on European regional development fund matters. They also advise bidders under the single regeneration budget on those bids of regional scale.

Green Ministers

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times the Green Ministers met as a group during 1994.

Mr. Gummer: Green Ministers met twice as a group in 1994, in addition to fulfilling their continuing responsibilities to integrate environmental considerations into their own Department's strategies and policies.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of Duchy of Lancaster earlier today.

Dioxins

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, if his Department has responded to the public review draft of the United States Environmental Protection Agency's report on dioxins.

Sir Paul Beresford: Yes. The Government have completed their initial study of the EPA's draft report on dioxins. My Department has summarised the results of the study in a factual and technical commentary that it has sent to the EPA.

The commentary concentrates on the problems of assessing exposure to dioxins. It deals particularly with those aspects of exposure assessment that have been the subject of considerable recent research and analysis in this country and the rest of Europe. We hope this additional perspective may contribute further depth to what is already a very substantial and important draft.

An expert review of recent scientific work on the health effects of dioxins—including work reported in the EPA draft—is being carried out for the Department of Health by the committee on toxicity of chemicals in food, consumer products and the environment. This review will not be completed for some months: it would, therefore, have been premature to comment in depth on those volumes of the EPA's draft that deal with the health effects of dioxins. Meanwhile, established research findings indicate that the dioxin levels to which the UK population is exposed do not, on the basis of the COT's current advice, present a threat to health.

A copy of the material my Department has sent to the EPA has today been placed in the Library of the House.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Dourine

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of dourine were reported in each year since 1985.

Mrs. Browning: No cases of dourine have ever been reported in this country.

Grubbing Out Grants

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what financial assistance is available from Her Majesty's Government or the European Commission for the grubbing out of *(a)* orchards and *(b)* vineyards.

Mr. Jack: Financial assistance is available for applicants who grub at least one hectare of culinary or dessert orchards. To qualify apple trees must be less than 20 years old, healthy, capable of bearing a full crop of fruit and planted at a density of more than 400 to the hectare. Grant rates are 5000 ecu—approximately £4,600—per hectare for total grubbing and 3500 ecu—approximately £3,200—per hectare for partial grubbing. The scheme closes on 31 January 1995.

There is no scheme of financial assistance for the grubbing out of United Kingdoms vineyards.

Fishing (Spanish Vessels)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about the numbers of Spanish-owned vessels on the fishing register of each of the other EEC fishing nations.

Mr. Jack: The Ministry does not keep information on the composition of fishing vessel registers maintained by other member states.

Departmental Employees

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Jack: The information for MAFF, including its executive agencies, is as follows:

Grade	1991 Women	1991 Total staff	1991 Per cent. of total	1992 Women	1992 Total staff	1992 Per cent. of total	1993 Women	1993 Total staff	1993 Per cent. of total	1994 Women	1994 Total staff	1994 Per cent. of total
3	1	25	4.0	1	24	4.2	1	25	4.0	0	23	0.0
7	130	957	13.6	134	924	14.5	150	920	16.3	161	885	18.2
EO	773	1,721	44.9	786	1,731	45.4	965	1,946	49.6	928	1,905	48.7
AO	1,365	2,064	66.1	1,377	2,057	66.9	1,541	2,274	67.8	1,656	2,297	72.1
AA	1,499	2,056	72.9	1,576	2,086	75.6	1,541	2,065	74.6	1,564	1,991	78.6

Notes:
1. All figures are based on 1 April and are for permanent non–industrials and exclude staff on loan or secondment to other Government Departments.
2. Figures for part–time staff in 1991 are counted as ½ units. Part–time staff from 1992 are counted by head count.

Equine Infectious Anaemia

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of equine infectious anaemia there have been in each year since 1985.

Mrs. Browning: There have been no recorded cases of equine infectious anaemia in this country since 1976.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of sheep scab there were in each year since 1990 and in each month for 1994.

Mrs. Browning: The total number of confirmed cases of sheep scab in England for the years 1990 to 1992 was as follows:

	Number
1990	82
1991	96
1992 (to 30 June)	63

The collation of official records on the number of outbreaks of sheep scab was discontinued after deregulation of compulsory controls in 1992.

Industry reports have indicated that sheep scab has been discovered in every county in Britain. A surveillance exercise during spring 1994 identified 177 batches of sheep suspected of having sheep scab from 869 visits to sheep sales and markets. These and other reports confirm that the disease is probably present in all parts of the country.

The Government announced on 17 May 1994 that they would conduct a publicity campaign and increase the official veterinary presence at sheep markets. To date, in Great Britain suspected sheep scab has been detected at only 14 of 1,982 market visits conducted since 1 September 1994. In total 189 animals have been withdrawn from sale and treated under the Welfare of Animals at Markets Order 1990, and a further 103 animals with suspected sheep scab were sent direct to slaughter.

A further surveillance exercise will be carried out this spring.

Generic Milk Production

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons generic milk production is excluded from the Milk Development Council.

Mr. Jack: With a levy-funded budget limited to £6.5 million a year, the Milk Development Council would not have sufficient resources to run expensive generic promotion campaigns while at the same time undertaking its principal function of sponsoring R and D on dairying. Generic promotion was not therefore among the tasks listed in the polling papers sent to all producers in Great Britain last year and on the basis of which they voted in favour of the establishment of a Milk Development Council.

Fishing (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to establish the origins of the 1,000 tonnes of fish reported as an extension of the Northern Irish fish entitlement as a result of the debate in the House of 18 January, *Official Report*, columns 771–822; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: As part of the swaps traditionally negotiated each year with other member states following the December Fisheries Council, the United Kingdom this year acquired 750 tonnes of Irish sea cod and 250 tonnes of Irish sea whiting from the Republic of Ireland.

Live Animal Imports

Sir Jerry Wiggin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his response to the recommendations in the recent Agriculture Select Committee report on health controls on live animal imports.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government have today laid before Parliament a Command Paper which details its response to the various recommendations in the Agriculture Select Committee report on health controls on live animal imports. This welcomes the Agriculture Select Committee's thorough examination of the health controls which operate for agricultural animals, birds and fish and details our intentions for implementing them. We are also pleased to note the Committee's general endorsement of our current health controls on imported livestock and their recognition that these controls enabled the lifting of routine internal border controls to take place on 1 January 1993 without appreciable increase in the risk of livestock disease entering the United Kingdom.

The Government also welcome the important contribution which the Committee's report has made to the discussion about future policy on rabies. We believe the changes which the Select Committee recommended would be premature before the eradication programme for rabies in the European Union is complete, and while the new import arrangements for traded cats and dogs in the UK, as well as the rules operating in Norway and Sweden which the Select Committee has taken as a model, are novel and unproven. The Government will, however, continue to monitor closely the performance of these new arrangements and the progress being made within the European Union towards the eradication of rabies.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at what time his Ministry's vets reported the first animals loaded on the livestock trucks in respect of the first sailing carrying live farm animals from Shoreham to Dieppe; and at what time the last animals were unloaded and placed in a lairage in France.

Mrs. Browning: This first consignment on the Shoreham-Dieppe route was accompanied by Ministry staff from Shoreham port to the lairage at Dieppe. They reported that the convoy of livestock vehicles was at the dockside at 00.10 hours on 5 January. Loading was completed by 02.10 hours and the vessel left Shoreham at 02.30 hours, arriving at Dieppe at 12.50 hours. Unloading of animals at the lairage was completed at 13.25 hours—all timings are given in British time.

Fishing (Decommissioning)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many British fishing vessels he estimates will take up the additional £28 million decommissioning programme.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* The decommissioning scheme operates through a tendering system in order to obtain best value for money for the available funds. It is not therefore possible to say in advance how many bids will be approved. Details of the uptake of decommissioning in 1993 and 1994 were given in the reply to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 20 January 1995, *Official Report*, columns *736–37.*

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Lord President of the Council (1) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months he has been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Attorney-General (1) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

Combat 18

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what reports he has received from the Metropolitan police for proceedings to be considered under the Public Order Act 1986 against two men associated with Combat 18; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will consult his counterpart in the United States of America to discuss whether invitations to readers of publications produced by Combat 18 in the United Kingdom to send information to Combat 18 via a PO box number for the Dixie Press in America about individuals to be harassed, intimidated or attacked, contravenes American law.

The Attorney-General: Neither I nor the Crown Prosecution Service has yet received a report from the Metropolitan police, whose investigation into Combat 18 continues. It is not possible to assess in advance of receipt of the police report what action or further inquiries may be appropriate.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Shipbuilding

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the size of the shipbuilding industry in Tyne and Wear in 1979; and what its size is now.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Comparable data for the years in question are not available. Employment in shipbuilding and ship repairing in Tyne and Wear in September 1981 was 18,257 and in September 1989 was 5,229. Since then employment has declined further with the contraction of the industry in Tyne and Wear.

Security Equipment

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the Government's policy on the export,

or arrangement of sale, by British companies of electronic riot shields and electronic batons.

Mr. Needham: The export of certain security and paramilitary police goods is controlled. This includes portable anti-riot devices for administering an electric shock or an incapacitating substance. In considering applications for licences for the export of such equipment the DTI, together with advisers in other Government Departments, takes special care and considers very carefully the political and military implications of allowing consignments to go overseas. Particular attention is paid to proposed exports to countries with poor human rights records, where the equipment might be used for internal repression.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with BAe's Royal Ordnance division about the supply of electric shock batons to Saudi Arabia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: None. The company has denied both publicly and to my officials that any such supply has taken place.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the occasions and the dates on which his Department *(a)* received information in respect of and *(b)* supported the export of electro-shock weapons to (i) China and (ii) Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* A number of allegations have been made: they have been followed-up by my officials. The companies involved have made public denials. I am not aware of any support given for the export of electro-shock weapons to these destinations.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what electro-shock equipment has been exported by *(a)* the Royal Ordnance, *(b)* British Aerospace or *(c)* any other British companies in the last 10 years.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* Controls exist on the export of portable anti-riot devices for administering an electric shock. Other equipment of this sort is not licensable under the Export of Goods (Control) Order. This question could be answered in respect of controlled equipment only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures his Department is taking to pursue the Government's policy of preventing the export of equipment and weapons which can be used for torture.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* My Department gives careful consideration to applications for the export of weapons. In considering such proposals, special care is taken over the political and military implications of allowing consignments to go overseas. Particular attention is paid to countries with poor human rights records, where equipment might be used for internal repression. However, the list of seemingly innocuous equipment that can be used for the purposes of torture is endless and there is a real problem in controlling trade in legitimate goods which could be misused. The Government are willing to look at any tangible evidence of British companies knowingly involved in supplying materials and expertise for the purposes of repression.

Uranium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what quantities of reprocessed uranium have been exported under licence to the Russian Federation since 1991 for re-enrichment before return to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Since 1991 there have been no exports of reprocessed uranium from the United Kingdom to the Russian Federation.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what applications have been made by British Nuclear Fuels or Nuclear Electric for import licences for enriched uranium purchased from companies in the Russian Federation or other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Mr. Needham: As a general matter, applications for import licences are treated as commercially confidential.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what memoranda of understanding exist between the United Kingdom and the former Soviet Union which have been inherited by the Russian Federation providing for a framework agreement for the import of uranium hexafluoride from Russia for commercial use.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Before the former Soviet Union came to an end in December 1991, imports of uranium hexafluoride were made on a purely commercial basis. None of the Government's obligations in the field of nuclear non-proliferation required an inter-governmental memorandum of understanding.

Nuclear Industry (Accident Liability)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what criteria were used in setting the level of nuclear industry's liability in the event of a nuclear accident at £140 million; and when he next intends to review this level of liability.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The figure of £140 million is in line with the recommendation of the steering committee for nuclear energy of the OECD for countries which are parties to the Paris convention. It also takes account of the level of commercial insurance cover available. The figure is kept under review.

Nuclear Reactors (Cracking)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will instruct Her Majesty's nuclear installations inspectorate to investigate the safety of the similar AGR plant of Hartlepool in respect of cracking problems as discovered at the Heysham and Dungeness AGR reactors.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand that a programme of periodic inspections is already undertaken at Hartlepool, where the superheater headers are similar to those at Heysham 1, where cracks have been found. The headers are included in the routine inspection programme. At the last such inspection at Hartlepool in June 1994, no cracks were identified in the equivalent header welds. As a precautionary measure, the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate has agreed with the operator, Nuclear Electric, a programme of additional inspections.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what reports have been brought to his attention by

the nuclear installations inspectorate over the past two years in regard to the discovery of cracks found in the steam generator of the boilers at the Heysham A and Dungeness B nuclear plants; and what decisions he has taken in response to the nuclear installations inspectorate reports.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate does not report to this Department on its day-to-day inspection activities at nuclear power plants. The answer I gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 19 January, *Official Report*, column *589*, referred to the action being taken by Nuclear Electric on cracks discovered at Dungeness B and Heysham 1 and explained that both plants would be brought back into operation only once the NII is satisfied that it is safe for them to do so.

Nuclear Reprocessing

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations his Department received from German nuclear companies on their intentions regarding cancellation of reprocessing contracts into British Nuclear Fuels prior to the thermal oxide reprocessing plant being licensed; and what assessment he has made of them.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No such representations were received.

Aerosols

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that the risks of injury resulting from accidental ignition of aerosols and aerosol contents are minimised;

(2) how many injuries are sustained annually from the accidental ignition of aerosols and aerosol contents;

(3) what plans he has to encourage aerosol manufacturers to improve the safety of their products.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Department's home accident surveillance system estimate, from a sample of accident and emergency hospital accident data, is that the number of injuries due to the accidental ignition of aerosols in United Kingdom is no more than 200 injuries in any year. There were 750 million aerosols sold in the UK in 1993. Aerosols are subject to the Aerosol Dispensers (EEC Requirements) Regulations 1977, as amended, the General Product Safety Regulations 1994 and the Consumer Protection Act 1987. Subject to the need to implement the recent Commission directive 94/1/EEC adapting to technical progress directive 75/324/EEC on aerosol dispensers and the thirteenth amendment to directive 76/769/EEC on the marketing and use of dangerous substances and preparations, I have no plans for any additional legislation.

World Trade

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was *(a)* the total volume of world trade in dollars and *(b)* the percentage increase year-on-year in each year from 1990–91 to 1993–94.

Mr. Needham: The information, where available, is given in the following table:

World Trade[1] in Goods

	1991 US Dollars (billions)	*Per cent. change on previous year*
1990	821.6	n/a
1991	856.3	4.2
1992	901.0	5.2
1993	927.3	2.9

Note:
[1] Trade is calculated as the arithmetic mean of exports and imports.
Source:
OECD Main Economic Indicators, December 1994.

Trade Balance (Vehicles)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 11 January to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), *Official Report*, column *156*, if he will make a statement as to his Department's analysis of the reasons for the worsening of the trade balance in cars and commercial vehicles.

Mr. Needham: Despite an upturn in the United Kingdom car market during the last two years, continued recession in continental Europe has drastically affected car exports from the UK to those markets. Similarly, the strong growth in the UK commercial vehicle market last year led European manufacturers aggressively to target the UK at a time when their domestic markets have remained in recession. UK car and commercial vehicle manufacturers are well placed to reverse this position as the economy of mainland Europe recovers.

Merchant Banks

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when merchant banks became exempt from legislation requiring disclosure of share purchases; and if he will review the procedure.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Merchants banks as such are not exempt from the law on disclosure of interests in shares. Certain categories of interests in shares have been exempt from disclosure since a law on disclosure of interests in shares was first introduced in 1967. These categories have been updated subsequently and now include interests in shares held by banks and others by way of security; interests in shares held by market makers for the purposes of their market making business; and interests held by custodians in their capacity as such.

The law on disclosure of interests in shares is now being examined as part of the Department's company law reform programme.

Business Start-up

Mr. Allason: To ask the President of the Board of Trade by what percentage the single regeneration budget will be reduced in 1995–96; and what will be the impact in cash terms on the Devon and Cornwall training and enterprise council's funding for business start-up.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

Total national expenditure on the single regeneration budget in 1995–96 is expected, on current plans, to be 8 per cent. lower in cash terms than that in 1994–95. Expenditure on business start-up schemes by Devon and Cornwall training and enterprise council in 1995–96 cannot yet be estimated. Existing commitments will continue to be honoured, but contracts for 1995—96 have not yet been signed. In addition, Devon and Cornwall

TEC is a partner in three successful SRB bids which include business start-up and business training and advice project. The partnerships are currently preparing their delivery plans for these schemes.

Coal Imports

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many million tonnes of coal were imported into the United Kingdom in 1994; and what was the impact of coal imports on the United Kingdom balance of payments.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Figures for the whole of 1994 are not yet available. Coal imports for the first three quarters of the year amounted to 11.9 million tonnes and were 13 per cent. below the level in the same period of 1993. The negative impact of these imports on the balance of payments figures will be about £400 million.

Manufacturing Supplies

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what capacity his Department has to supply comprehensive lists of manufacturing supplies in specific sectors to prospective purchasers of United Kingdom goods;

(2) what progress his Department has made in producing an acceptable comprehensive system for priority information on United Kingdom suppliers in each section of the manufacturing process.

Mr. Eggar: The network of regional supply offices currently being set up in England by my Department will provide major purchasers with information on competitive suppliers in their region and more widely. Each of the 10 offices will focus on particular business sectors taking into account local strengths and weaknesses. The network will complement similar initiatives run by the Welsh and Scottish development agencies.

In addition, the overseas trade services, jointly provided by my Department and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, supply information on United Kingdom suppliers to potential overseas purchasers through commercial staff overseas, either from the extensive information sources held overseas or by referral back to the United Kingdom to the source of supply service run on our behalf by Prelink Ltd.

Retail Price Maintenance

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the policy justification for the continuation of retail price maintenance for *(a)* pharmaceuticals, *(b)* newspapers and *(c)* periodicals; and what other products or services for which retail price maintenance is still in force there are.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Resale price maintenance is unlawful under the Resale Prices Act 1976, subject to the possibility of exemption by the restrictive practices court on public interest grounds. Two exemptions are in force, for books and for certain pharmaceuticals, which were exempted on the grounds that price competition between retailers would be likely to lead to a reduction in the number of outlets offering prescription services. No exemption exists in relation to newspapers or periodicals.

Leeds Training and Enterprise Council

Dr. Hampson: To ask the President of the President of the Board of Trade how much funding his Department will be providing to Leeds TEC in 1995–96 for small and medium businesses; and how much was provided in 1994–95.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The DTI grant offer to Leeds TEC for small and medium businesses in 1994–95 was £410,000. The budget for 1995–96 has yet to be settled.

Integrated Regional Offices

Mr. Denham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those of his Department's responsibilities on which the integrated regional offices are required to advise him on the allocation of resources and, for each integrated regional office, the annual expenditure on each programme.

Mr. Heseltine: Regional directors advise on a range of programmes but do not hold programme budgets and are not therefore responsible for allocating resources to programmes. The 1993–94 expenditure proposed on each programme was detailed in the DTI's published MINIS 1994, available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Denham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those of his Department's responsibilities which are administered by the integrated regional offices and, for each integrated regional office, the estimated annual expenditure on each of these responsibilities.

Mr. Heseltine: The range of activities undertaken by DTI in the regions has not changed with the introduction of the Government offices. The activities and the running costs associated with them for 1993–94 were published in MINIS 1994, available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Denham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those of his Department's responsibilities on which integrated regional offices are responsible for preparing, advising on or implementing regional policy.

Mr. Heseltine: The Government offices in the regions assist my Department in work on a range of regional policy issues including regional selective assistance applications, the preparation of single programming documents for the structural funds and administering the regional innovation grants.

Inward Investing Companies

Mr. Deva: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what the total value of the output of inward investing companies in the United Kingdom was in 1993;

(2) what was the total value of the exports of inward investing companies in the United Kingdom in 1993.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information is not available at present. However, in view of the importance of the contribution of these companies to the economic performance of the United Kingdom, the Department approached the Central Statistical Office last month to ask it to produce the information.

Green Minister

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the responsibilities of the Green Minister in his Department regarding oil and gas exploration and extraction.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has designated me as the Green Minister for the Department. I take decisions on oil and gas exploration and extraction on the basis of a number of criteria, including the possible effect such activities may have on the environment. In reaching these decisions, I take account of advice from a wide range of environmental organisations, including the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

National Engineering Laboratory

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what additional funds have been made available to the national engineering laboratory; and for what reason.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The National Engineering Laboratory is subject to net expenditure control. Therefore it is required to recover its full economic costs from work carried out for my Department and third parties. Any additional cash provisions are dealt with as part of the annual public expenditure settlement and presented to Parliament in my Department's main estimates.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which organisations have expressed an interest in purchasing the national engineering laboratory; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: A number of organisations have expressed such an interest. Their identities are commercially confidential.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what parts of the national engineering laboratory, including building and land, have been included in the prospectus for the sale of the national engineering laboratory.

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department has offered for sale the business and assets of the national engineering laboratory. The buildings and lands are not owned by the Department.

Glass Oven Doors

Mr. David Young: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cases have been reported of exploding glass oven doors; what safety monitoring of ovens with such doors has taken place; and what action is being taken by his Department.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* The number of incidents involving exploding glass oven doors which have been reported to my Department's consumer safety unit is:

Year	*Number*
1984	12
1985	25
1986	32
1987	28
1988	34
1989	9
1990	10
1991	8
1992	2
1993	2
1994	3

Although very few injuries occurred, the increase in the number of reported incidents between 1984 and 1988 prompted my Department to discuss the problem with industry. This led to a significant improvement to British standard 3193—specification for thermally toughened glass panels for use in domestic appliances. Improvements were also made in the way in which glass doors are attached to cookers, and both aspects are reflected in the reduced number of incidents since that time.

Although there has been a significant reduction in the number of incidents reported since 1989, my Department continue to monitor the situation and to contribute to the relevant European standards—CEN and CENELEC—safety committees on cookers and glass which now fully reflect the British standard.

Internet

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will encourage the establishment of a British-based equivalent of the Internet system in order for Britain to promote its interests worldwide.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* The Internet is now so international and amorphous that its operation would be very difficult to influence in order to provide a national benefit. However, the DTI is monitoring its development and the prospect of other networks closely.

The United Kingdom's interests are best served by the fullest development of new telecommunication networks and services, led by the private sector and reflecting the economic interests of businesses, public institutions and households. The UK is in a very strong position to use these capabilities because of the state of development of our communications infrastructure. The Government's policy of telecommunications liberalisation has encouraged substantial investment in modern communications networks with the capacity to support the multimedia applications that the new communications networks require. There are many companies in Britain working on such applications.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Immigration Appeals Authority

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many special adjudicators are employed by the Immigration Appeals Authority; and what plans he has to increase that number.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has designated 62 immigration adjudicators to be special adjudicators for the purposes of section 8(5) of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, 18 of whom are full-time adjudicators. Ten new part-time special

adjudicators were designated in December 1994 and further increases in the numbers are likely during the course of the year, the precise numbers depending on the work load of the immigration appellate authorities.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the total establishment of the Immigration Appeals Authority; and if he will provide a breakdown of that establishment by function and location.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information is set out in the tables:

1. Adjudicators

Centre	*Staff in post*	*Adjudicators*		*Courtrooms*
		Full-time	*Part-time*	
London	52	7	17	8
West London	43	7	26	15
Birmingham	8	2	13	4
Leeds	8	1	14	3
Manchester	7	—	15	4
Glasgow	7	1	8	2
	125	18	93	36

2. Immigration Appeal Tribunal

		No.
Staff in post		12
Chairmen	Full-time	3
	Part-time	7
Lay members		26
Courtrooms		2

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidance is given to special adjudicators of the Immigration Appeals Authority on the level of recognisance to be required when granting bail to persons detained under Immigration Act powers.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No such guidance is given by the Lord Chancellor's Department. The level of recognisance in these cases is a matter for the special adjudicator's discretion.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many applications for bail were made to the Immigration Appeals Authority by persons detained under Immigration Act powers in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994 to date; and how many of these applications were successful.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There were 531 such applications in 1993; 898 in 1994; and to date there have been 56 in 1995. The outcome of a bail application is recorded on the individual file but results are not collated centrally. The information requested could therefore be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the total cost in the financial year 1993–94 to his Department of hearing applications for bail by persons detained under Immigration Act powers.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 15 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *729*.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the total budget of the Immigration Appeals Authority in the financial year 1993–94.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The total budget of the immigration appellate authorities in the financial year 1993–94 was £6,397,850.

Magistrates Courts (Appointment System)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate there is of savings likely to the legal aid fund by the adoption of an appointment system in magistrates courts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No estimate has been made of potential savings to the legal aid fund.

Solicitors Complaints Bureau

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking to ensure that practice rule 15 does not prevent the Solicitors Complaints Bureau from investigating a serious complaint.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Law Society's statutory powers to deal with complaints about solicitors have been delegated to the Solicitors Complaints Bureau. The legal services ombudsman has paid particular attention to the application of practice rule 15 by the SCB and in his third annual report he warned that many complaints could only be dealt with effectively if investigated by the SCB. The SCB has a statutory duty to have regard to the recommendations of the ombudsman.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) on how many occasions in the last four months he or his ministerial colleagues have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

PRIME MINISTER

World Summit for Social Development

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if he will be attending the world summit for social development.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) on 23 January, *Official Report*, column *23*.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Parliamentary Questions

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parliamentary questions he has referred to chief executives of next steps agencies.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Since 1992, 16 parliamentary questions have been referred to the chief executives of the United Kingdom Passport Agency, of the Forensic Science Service and of the Fire Service College. The Prison Service Agency does not maintain a central record of parliamentary questions answered by the director general and the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Prison Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by prison *(a)* the target prison population, *(b)* the actual prison population, *(c)* the staff establishment in full-time equivalents and *(d)* staff in post in full-time equivalents for each year since 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Services, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 25 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about a list by prison of (a) the target prison population, (b) the actual prison population, (c) the staff establishment in full-time equivalents and (d) staff in post in full-time equivalents for each year since 1971.

Individual Prison Service establishments do not have target populations. Information on the accommodation (at 31 March) and average population of prison establishments is published in the Prison Service annual reports, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

The annual report for 1993–94 has yet to be published but the information on total accommodations and average number of prisoners is as in the attached table (annex 1).

Information on the average population of establishments for April to November 1994 is set out in the attached table at annex 2, together with the average certified normal accommodation (CNA).

Copies of both annexes have been placed in the House of Commons libraries.

I will write to you separately with the figures on staffing levels at establishments.

Director General of the Prison Service

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures were undertaken when the Director General of the Prison Service was selected; how many candidates were considered for this post; and what criteria were used in assessing the candidates.

Mr. Howard: The Civil Service Commissioners are required to approve all agency chief executive appointments and the appointment of the Director General of the Prison Service was approved by them in the normal way. The appointment was advertised and an executive search conducted. The First Civil Service Commissioner chaired the selection procedure. The board considered nearly 40 candidates and interviewed five. Three were assessed as of an acceptable standard and, in view of the importance of the appointment, the procedure adopted was that the board adjourned in order to allow the then Home Secretary to meet those candidates. The board then reconvened. The appointment was a matter for my predecessor but the candidate he appointed was approved by the board under the First Civil Service Commissioner's chairmanship. The main criteria for selection were set out in the advertisement for the post: experience, most probably at chief executive level, of leading a substantial organisation in the public or private sector; a track record of successful management of large-scale change, delivering improved quality and efficiency; first-class communication skills and good judgment.

Prison Damage

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of refurbishing prisons following damage by prisoners acting unlawfully for each year since 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 25 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the cost of refurbishing prisons as a result of damage caused by prisoners acting unlawfully for each year since 1990.

The total costs for refurbishing establishments damaged by prisoners in each financial year since 1990/1, for which figures are available, are as follows:

1990–91: £27.9 million

1991–92: £512,000

1992–93: £464,000

1993–94: £5,072,000

1994–95: £135,000*

*Costs for the current financial year to date.

High Security Prisons (Costs)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the annual cost at current prices of keeping a man in a high security prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. David Nicholson, dated 25 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the annual cost of keeping a prisoner in a high security prison.

The annual average net operating cost per prisoner place in dispersal prisons in 1993–4 was £26,671.

Blakenhurst Prison

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish Her Majesty's chief inspector's report into Her Majesty's prison, Blakenhurst; and what are the reasons for the delay in its publication.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 25 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the publication of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's report into Blakenhurst.

It is expected that the report will be published on 1 February. Publication has not been unduly delayed. The report was received from the Inspector on 10 October 1994. Careful consideration is given to all such reports before publication and this has been so for the Blakenhurst report.

Pucklechurch Remand Centre

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers have been on detached duty to Pucklechurch remand centre to cover 24-hour surveillance duty since 2 January; and from which prisons.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 25 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question abut the number of prison officers on detached duty at Pucklechurch Remand Centre to cover 24 hour surveillance duty since 2 January and from which prisons they have been sent.

A total of seventeen offices have been used on detached duty from Swansea, Leyhill, Winchester, Stoke Heath, Portland, Usk, Guy's Marsh, Wandsworth and Bristol prisons.

Electro-shock Equipment

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the commissioning of medical studies regarding the safety and effectiveness of vehicle mounted or fence or perimeter mounted electro-shock devices.

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office has no plans to commission such studies.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what arrangements are made between his Department and private companies or individuals to lease or rent electro-shock equipment;

(2) if he will make a statement on the holding of stocks of electro-shock devices by his Department;

(3) how many United Kingdom police forces hold supplies of electro-shock shields of electro-shock batons;

(4) what information he has of fatalities attributable to the use of electro-shock devices;

(5) how many United Kingdom, military, security or police personnel have attended training or instruction courses in the use of electro-shock devices with overseas manufacturers or suppliers.

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office does not hold stocks of this equipment nor is it party to any leasing or rental agreements with third parties. Information concerning the number of police forces holding supplies of electro-shock shields or batons is not held centrally. As I made clear in my written answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *383*, some forces have obtained electro-shock equipment only to protect officers against ferocious dogs in pre-planned operations. The Home Office has no details of fatalities from the use of electro-shock devices. I have no knowledge of any staff in Home Office areas of responsibility attending manufacturers' or suppliers' training courses in the use of such equipment.

Noise Pollution

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what instructions have now been issued to officers of the Metropolitan police to reduce unnecessary noise pollution by the use of police car sirens following the review mentioned in his answer of 23 June 1994, *Official Report*, column *258*.

Mr. Maclean: A copy of the Metropolitan police notice announcing an amendment to the Metropolitan police instruction manual has now been approved and a copy of the notice will be placed in the Library as soon as possible.

Motorists (Retesting)

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many motorists have been obliged to undergo compulsory retesting in the last two years for which figures are available.

Mr. Maclean: The information available to me suggests that some 1,000 disqualifications were imposed in 1992 in England and Wales which also included a driving test requirement. The figure for 1993 was 2,700.

Electoral Fraud

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new proposals he intends to make to eliminate electoral fraud caused by the depositing of fraudulent votes in ballot boxes.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: None. The Representation of the People Act 1983 contains provisions for the prevention and detection of fraudulent votes. The Act also provides for sanction in respect of illegal practices, corrupt practices and other offences. We have no proposals for any change.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

Visa Refusals

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the rate of refusals of visas for entry into the United Kingdom from *(a)* Thailand, *(b)* New Zealand, *(c)* Australia, *(d)* Canada and *(e)* India for each year since 1990.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information is given in the table.

Table 1: Refusal Rates [1] for entry clearance applications made in Thailand, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and India, 1990–1993

Percentages

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Entry clearance made for temporary purposes[2]				
Thailand	2	4	3	3
New Zealand	1	—	1	1
Australia	—	1	—	—
Canada	1	1	1	—
India[3]	12	10	8	7

Table 1: Refusal Rates [1] for entry clearance applications made in Thailand, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and India, 1990–1993

Percentages

	1990	1991	1992	1993
Entry clearance applications made for settlement[4]				
Thailand	5	16	19	21
New Zealand	—	2	—	—
Australia	—	1	—	—
Canada	—	—	—	—
India[2]	19	22	20	21

Source:

Foreign and Commonwealth Office (for Thailand, New Zealand, Australia and Canada) and Home Office (for India).

Notes:

[1] Calculated as applications refused initially, as a percentage of applications granted (in total) and refused.

[2] Some applications will have been made by nationals of other countries.

[3] Ultimate refusal rate calculated as applications initially refused, minus applications subsequently granted on appeal, as a percentage of applications decided.

[4] Includes applications for a certificate of entitlement to the right of abode.

— = less than 0.5 per cent.

Football Pools

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans there are to change the Government's policy in relation to broadcast advertising of the football pools.

Mr. Howard: The Government have been reviewing the restrictions on the ban on broadcast advertising by the football pools as part of the deregulation initiative and have decided that it is not necessary in the public interest for the ban to be maintained.

The Government have today invited the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority to consider amending their advertising codes. The ITC and the Radio Authority are required to consult with all interested parties.

Immigration Detainees

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were detained under Immigration Act powers in each month in 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Persons[1] detained under Immigration Act powers

Month[2]	*1993*	*1994*[3]
January	852	1,090
February	927	1,000
March	878	1,050
April	871	850
May	881	830
June	721	820
July	927	950
August	772	1,080
September	799	1,100
October	756	1,100
November	771	*360
December	966	*250
Year	10,121	*10,470

Notes:

[1] Passengers at ports detained overnight or longer, and persons detained as illegal entrants or under deportation powers (excluding persons detained pending deportation following completion of a custodial sentence).

[2] For persons detained as illegal entrants or under deportation powers, the month relates to when the illegal entrant was detected or when the notice of intention to deport was served, not when the person was detained.

[3] Data for 1994 are provisional and have been rounded to the nearest 10.

[4] Excluding passengers at ports detained in November and December 1994, the data on whom are not yet available.

Drownings

Mr. Hinchcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons died as a result of drowning on bathing beaches, in each year since 1980 and *(a)* in England and *(b)* in each English coastal resort; and how many of these were under the age of 18 years.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Statistics that would identify drownings off beaches in Britain are not collected centrally, but since 1983 the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents has produced and published annual statistics on drownings in the United Kingdom based on collation of press reports. I understand that they may hold information which could assist in answering the hon. Member's question.

Scanners

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the use of scanners to detect offensive weapons in places of public entertainment.

Mr. Maclean: A number of products are available commercially which are capable of detecting concealed metal objects, including offensive weapons. These are evaluated regularly by the Home Office police scientific development branch. Its evaluations are made available to the police and persons wishing to acquire such equipment may obtain appropriate advice from their local crime prevention officer.

It is open to he owners of private premises used for public entertainment to make it a condition of entry that persons wishing to enter their premises submit themselves to a search. Such searches may be conducted by means of hand-held scanners.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Dairy Farmers

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the approximate average net profits for dairy farmers in each year since 1985.

Mr. Ancram: The net profits of dairy farmers is not determined each year as net profits is not one of the measures used to assess farm profitability in the United

Kingdom. Information on incomes of full-time dairy farms and other farm types is collected in the farm business survey and published each year in "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom". The latest edition, "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom 1992/93", shows estimates of several different measures of income for dairy farms in 1991–92 and 1992–93.

To illustrate longer-term trends in incomes, index series are also given for net farm income, occupier's net income and cash income back to 1986–87—table 1.1 and appendix 1, tables 1 and 2—the earliest year for which data are available on a consistent basis.

"Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom 1993–94" will be published in March 1995.

Dourine

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of Dourine were reported in each year since 1985.

Mr. Ancram: Dourine has never been recorded in Northern Ireland.

Repossessions

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the figures for house repossessions have been in each of the last three years.

Mr. Moss: Repossessions statistics are not provided by the mortgage-lending institutions on a regional basis and therefore are not available for Northern Ireland.

However, I understand that the enforcement of judgments office issued 683 orders for repossessions in 1992, 492 in 1993 and 468 in 1994.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given him by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster earlier today.

TREASURY

Exchange Rate Mechanism

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *289*, if he will outline the common procedure mentioned in paragraph 1 of the communiqué and the steps therein.

Mr. Nelson: Article 3 of the resolution of the European Council of Brussels of 5 December 1978 provides that

"adjustments of central rates will be subject to mutual agreement by a common procedure which will comprise all countries participating in the exchange rate mechanism and the Commission. There will be reciprocal consultation in the Community framework about important decisions concerning exchange rate policy between countries participating and any country not participating in the system"

Any member state intending to change, establish or re-establish the parity, central rate or intervention points of its currency within the ERM is required to initiate a prior consultation procedure by informing the relevant authorities of member states.

ECOFIN

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the most recent meeting of the Economic and Finance Council.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I represented the United Kingdom at the Economic and Finance Council of the European Union in Brussels on 16 January.

The French presidency outlined its work programme for the coming Economic and Finance Councils, based on the three priorities: sustainable growth and the creation of employment; the enhancement of the credibility of European policies; and the completion of the single market.

In reply, I welcomed the presidency's work programme, particularly its stress on improvements in the fight against fraud. I stressed that economic conditions in member states were now the best for several years and that it was vital to use this opportunity to tackle long-term unemployment and other structural problems through more flexible labour markets. I underlined the need to respect the convergence criteria on low inflation and reduced public deficits set out in the Maastricht treaty and stressed the need for a systematic review of the Community's balance of payments support outside the EU.

The Council agreed to the presidency's procedural proposals for dealing with the follow-up to the Essen European Council on: the financing of trans-European networks; the parameters within which member states wishing to do so could introduce a CO_2-energy tax; fraud and financial management; and the employment situation.

No formal votes were taken at the Council meeting.

Insider-Dealing

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will be meeting the chairman of the stock exchange to discuss the rules on insider dealing and disclosure of marketing stakes.

Mr. Nelson: My right hon. and learned Friend meets the chairman of the stock exchange from time to time to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them publish periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing

and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. Nelson: The information sought falls within the operational responsibilities of the chief executives of the Royal Mint, Central Statistical Office, Paymaster and Valuation Office executive agencies and I have asked each of them to arrange for a reply to be given. The four agencies did not form part of the Treasury prior to becoming agencies.

Letter from Mr. R. Holmes to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to provide, in relation to the Royal Mint, the information sought in your Question concerning Agency expenditure on a number of specific matters.

I will respond to each of these as they appear in your Question:

1. The Royal Mint is a Government Department which has been a Trading Fund since 1975 and an Agency since 1990. The change to Agency status did not result in any additional expenditure on buildings or staff.
2. The Royal Mint issues a monthly staff newsletter at an annual cost of £4,000.
3. The Royal Mint has no personally allocated executive cars.
4. Coincidental with our new Agency status in 1990, the Royal Mint commissioned a new Corporate identity—for commercial reasons and totally unrelated to our new status. The total cost of this was £32,000.
5. The Royal Mint provides clothing where there is an occupational or safety requirement eg protective clothing in the factory. The annual cost is approximately £95,000.
6. The Royal Mint has incurred no costs in specially designed and printed corporate stationery since our logo was changed in 1990.

I hope this information is helpful.

Letter from W. McLennan to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply to your Question of 20 January about Next Steps agencies.

2. The Central Statistical Office (CSO) became an Executive Agency on 19 November 1991. The following are the answers to the specific points raised in your Question:

The CSO has not acquired its own headquarters buildings.

No additional support staff were required when the CSO became an agency, because it was a separate department then and has remained one since.

CSO has continued to publish statistics on a regular basis and the full costs of the agency are set out in its Annual Report and Accounts (copy attached).

The CSO has no executive cars.

The CSO introduced a new logo in 1993, which was designed in–house.

No extra cost was incurred in printing corporate stationery for the agency compared with previous stationery costs.

Letter from Keith Sullens to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

I am writing as Chief Executive of PAYMASTER in response to your written question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer about costs of the Next Steps Agencies in his Department.

PAYMASTER continues to occupy the premises it was in prior to becoming an Executive Agency. Sutherland House, Crawley is a Crown building for which Property Holdings is paid a current rent of £1,327,000 pa. Due to restructuring of the Agency the space occupied will be reduced considerably by 31 March 1996, the rental will be £862,000—a saving of 36%.

Historically the Office of the Paymaster General had been an autonomous unit within HM Treasury and therefore no significant additional numbers of support staff were required.

PAYMASTER does not issue periodic journals, other than the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts as required by statute.

There are no personally allocated executive cars in PAYMASTER. Two cars are hired for official business on a first come first served basis and they are available for all staff. The annual cost of hire is £5,856 pa, excluding petrol and oil.

PAYMASTER commissioned a design for a new corporate identity with new logo for the Agency launch, the cost of which was £12,500 excluding VAT.

A very small sum, (less than £200) has been spent on corporate clothing for messengerial staff.

A limited amount of new corporate stationery was produced at a cost of £15,000, excluding VAT. Design costs were included in the overall figure quoted.

I hope that this answers your queries satisfactorily but if you need any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Letter from A. J. Langford to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply to your Question about the cost of certain operational functions since becoming an Executive Agency under the Next Steps programme.

Headquarters buildings

The Valuation Office's head office continues to be based in the same building as before. No additional accommodation has been taken for headquarters buildings.

Support staff

No additional support staff have been taken on by the Valuation Office in consequence of its move to Executive Agency status.

Periodical journals

The Valuation Office continues to produce a Property Market Report on a twice yearly basis. This is on sale to the public and is priced on a cost recovery basis.

Executive cars

The Valuation Office does not have any executive cars.

Agency logo

The Valuation Office's logo was designed in-house at no additional cost.

Corporate clothing

The Valuation Office provides uniforms incorporating the Agency logo for its messengerial and security staff in its head office. Uniforms were provided to this group of staff pre Agency status and the additional cost of incorporating the Agency logo was minimal. The annual running cost of uniforms is in the order of £1,950. There is no other form of corporate clothing.

Corporate stationery

As the move to Agency status developed, opportunities were taken to run down existing stocks of stationery and reprinting with the Agency title gradually introduced and no additional costs arose.

Please let me know if I can assist further.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees for which his departments are responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The combined totals for the Chancellor's departments are:

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
All women	62,561	62,379	61,736	59,205
Grade 3	4	4	5	4
Grade 7	354	420	548	563
EO	12,236	13,147	12,995	12,703
AO	19,792	23,006	22,799	22,860
AA	18,879	20,207	18,714	17,311

The figures mostly relate to 1 April for each year in question, however three of the Chancellor's departments do not have the data requested for 1991, and one has

shown its total female staff at the end of each year requested. Part-time staff are included by head count—not by full-time equivalent.

National Audit Office

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future role of the National Audit Office in vetting United Kingdom contributions to the European Union.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* United Kingdom contributions to the European Community budget are paid from the Consolidated Fund. As with all payments from the Consolidated Fund, the National Audit Office already approves all these contributions before they are paid. In addition, the NAO conducts a full annual audit of the Consolidated Fund.

Yorkshire Electricity Group plc

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set up an inquiry into the Swiss Bank Corporation's acquisition of Yorkshire Electricity Group plc shares; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: Inquiries into transactions involving securities are matters for the appropriate regulatory authorities.

Economic Prospects

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current estimate of the prospects for the economy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The latest forecasts available, published in last November's "Financial Statement and Budget Report", show continuing steady growth and low inflation. The economy is projected to grow by 3¼ per cent. in 1995.

Inward Investing Companies

Mr. Deva: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much inward investing companies paid in tax in 1993.

Sir George Young: Corporation tax paid by United Kingdom companies with foreign parents accounted for about one tenth of the total yield of £15 billion in 1993–94.

Green Minister

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will outline the main activities of the Green Minister in the Treasury, in his role as Green Minister, during 1994.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: During 1994, my predecessor and I have continued to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account in the strategies and policies of the Department.

Income Tax

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 10 January to the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East, (Mr. Thurnham), *Official Report*, column 7, if he will reproduce the answer together with columns showing the share of income coming to the top 1, 5 and 10 per cent.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* The latest estimates for 1978–79 and 1983–84 to 1995–96 are given in the tables. Information for other years could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Estimates of income are based on information reported to tax offices and collected through annual surveys of personal incomes. For years before 1985–86, estimates exclude employees' contributions to occupational pension schemes and some investment income on which tax is deducted at source. For years up to and including 1989–90, married couples are counted as one taxpayer and their incomes are combined. Following the introduction of independent taxation, for 1990–91 onwards, husbands and wives are counted separately. Estimates are based on the surveys of personal incomes for years up to 1992–93 and projections of the 1992–93 survey for subsequent years; the latter are therefore provisional.

Group of taxpayers[1]

	Shares of total income tax liability			*Shares of gross incomes before tax*		
	Top 1 per cent.	*Top 5 per cent.*	*Top 10 per cent.*	*Top 1 per cent.*	*Top 5 per cent.*	*Top 10 per cent.*
1978–79	11	24	35	5	15	24
1979–80	10	23	34	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980–81	11	24	35	n/a	n/a	n/a
1981–82	11	25	35	n/a	n/a	n/a
1982–83	12	25	36	n/a	n/a	n/a
1983–84	11	25	36	6	16	26
1984–85	12	26	38	6	17	26
1985–86	13	27	38	6	17	26
1986–87	14	29	39	6	17	27
1987–88	15	30	41	6	18	28
1988–89	15	31	42	7	18	28
1989–90	15	31	42	7	19	29
1990–91	15	32	42	8	19	29
1991–92	16	33	43	8	20	29
1992–93	16	33	44	8	19	29
1993–94[2]	16	33	44	8	19	29
1994–95[2]	16	33	44	8	20	29
1995–96[2]	15	32	44	8	20	30

[1] For years up to and including 1989–90 married couples are counted as one taxpayer and their incomes are combined. Following the introduction of independent taxation in 1990–91 husbands and wives are counted separately.
[2] Provisional.

Denatured Alcohol

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the products included in the list of denatured alcohol.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* Alcohol is exempt from excise duty when denatured to the standards set out in Commission regulation (EC) No. 3199/93 and the Methylated Spirits Regulations 1987. This allows United Kingdom business access to duty relieved alcohol for the manufacture of a wide range of industrial and scientific products.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them publish periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. Baldry: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to Wilton Park under its chief executive, Richard Langhorne, and to the Natural Resources Institute under its chief executive, Anthony Beattie. I have asked them to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Professor R. T. B. Langhorne to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

I have been asked to respond to your question of 18 January, 1995, concerning Next Steps Agencies.

In the case of Wilton Park the answers are as follows:

(i) We have been in the same leased headquarters here at Wiston house since 1951:

(ii) We have engaged three support staff since we became an Agency. Two of these followed upon a 60% increase in our programme of work and were not the consequence of being turned into an Agency. One, an additional book keeper, was needed in order to fulfil the accounting needs of Agency status:

(iii) We do not publish a periodical journal;

(iv) We do not have any executive cars;

(v) We do not have corporate clothing, though we are under pressure at present from the Trade Union Side to introduce it;

(vi) We have always had Wilton Park stationery, and no extra cost was incurred by reason of being turned into an Agency.

Letter from Anthony Beattie, to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

1. Mr. Baldry has asked me to reply to your question about Next Steps Agencies as this relates to the Natural Resources Institute, which is an agency of the Overseas Development Administration.

2. The answers to the questions you have posed are as follows:

(a) The Institute moved to a single site at Chatham between 1988 and 1990 from nine sites previously occupied by the separate scientific units which it replaced. The majority of the staff were on three sites in central London. The consolidation was planned in advance of the decision to move to agency status. The rental cost of the Chatham site (net of the cost of that part of it now occupied by the University of Greenwich) is £3,387,000 in 1994–95.

(b) Prior to NRI becoming an agency it already operated as a specialised unit outside ODA HQ. Following its change to an agency NRI increased its support staff by 12 posts, mostly in finance and accounting, to meet new financial requirements and to help achieve increases in business from non-ODA customers. Subsequent staff reductions have brought the number of NRI support staff down to 132 as against 131 prior to the change of status.

(c) The annual production and distribution cost of NRI's newsletter (which was in existence prior to agency status and which is sent to selected recipients in the developing world and the donor community) is £11,000.

(d) NRI has no executive cars.

(e) The cost of design and art work for the Institute's stationery and signage was £23,500.

(f) NRI does not provide corporate clothing.

(g) Annual stationery costs are of the order of £11,000 (the original design cost is given at (e) above).

MI6 Headquarters

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current annual cost per member of staff accommodated at the MI6 headquarters building at Vauxhall Bridge road-Albert embankment, London.

Mr. Hurd: It is long-standing Government policy not to provide detailed information about the expenditure of the security and intelligence agencies.

Sri Lanka (Anti-paedophile Policy)

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in co-ordinating an anti-paedophile policy with the Sri Lankan Government.

Mr. Baldry: We have kept in close touch with the Sri Lankan authorities about child prostitution. I discussed the matter with them most recently during my visit in November. At our invitation, their deputy inspector general of police responsible for crimes, in whose department there is a special section for dealing with paedophilia, visited last summer to study United Kingdom police techniques.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

Mrs. Andleeb H. Khan

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision is expected to be taken on the application—REF/C/7426—made to the United Kingdom post in Islamabad by Mrs. Andleeb H. Khan to join her husband in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the letter of 19 January 1995 to him from the migration and visa correspondence unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

I have asked the high commission at Islamabad for details of any further progress in her application and shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from MVCU as soon as possible.

Iraq

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline the Government's response to the interim report, prepared by Mr. Max van der Stoel, special rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights, on the situation in Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We welcome Mr. van der Stoel's report and share his condemnation of the Iraqi regime for the continuing deterioration in human rights in that country. We will continue to insist that Iraq complies in full with the terms of United Nations Security Council resolution 688, which calls for an end to the repression of the Iraqi people, and to demand that Iraq give access to UN human rights monitors.

Kobe Earthquake

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the British Government have provided to victims of the Kobe earthquake.

Mr. Goodlad: Immediately after the earthquake, we told the Japanese Government that we stood ready to send any assistance they required and gave examples of what we could offer.

They made a specific request on 21 January, and the Overseas Development Administration at once chartered an aircraft to deliver a first consignment of relief supplies. The cargo consisted of over 18,000 blankets, 35 rolls of black plastic sheeting, 500 collapsible 20 litre water containers and 500 plastic bowls, totally filling the aircraft by volume. The aircraft arrived on Monday 23 January at Kansai international airport near Kobe.

The Japanese authorities have requested some other items including bandages, dressings and sanitary napkins. The Overseas Development Administration sent a consignment of three tonnes on 24 January, British Airways donating the freight space.

In addition, the International Rescue Corps, a British charity which supplies fully trained, self-sufficient rescue teams, has sent a 15-member group to assist in the rescue operations.

HEALTH

Midwives (Northumberland)

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many midwives there were in *(a)* Northumberland health authority and *(b)* Cheviot and Wansbeck hospital in each year since 1990.

Mr. Sackville: The information available centrally is shown in the tables.

Midwives in Northumberland District Health Authority 1990–92 at 30 September each year

	Whole-time equivalents		
	1990	*1991*	*1992*
Midwives	110	110	110

Midwives in Cheviot and Wansbeck hospital 1991–92 at 30 September each year

	Whole-time equivalents	
	1991	*1992*
Midwives	80	80

Source:
Non-medical work force census.
Notes:
1. All figures are rounded to the nearest 10 whole-time equivalents.
2. All nursing and midwifery figures exclude agency staff.

Medical Students

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many medical students worked for the Northumberland health authority in each year since 1990;

(2) how many medical students are working in maternity units in *(a)* the Northumberland health authority and *(b)* the Wansbeck and Cheviot hospital trust.

Mr. Malone: These are matters for the Cheviot and Wansbeck national health service trust and Northumberland health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the trust and the vice-chairman of the authority, Mr. Roger Baker and Mr. David Wright, for details.

Research and Development Forum

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how she will ensure the widest possible input from the health profession into the work of the new NHS research and development forum;

(2) what plans she has to invite representatives of user groups and NHS professional organisations to become members of the new NHS research and development forum;

(3) if she will consult health organisations about the advice she receives from the new NHS research and development forum.

Mr. Malone: The national forum will bring together the major health-related research funders to provide advice to the national health service and the Government at a strategic level on health-related research and development issues. It will provide an important means of establishing closer working links between research interests in the national health service and in the research councils, the research charities, universities and industry.

An important role for the national forum will be to help set the strategic framework within which the central research and development committee will advise on how national health service funds should be used to support research and development. Membership of the central

research and development committee reflects a wide range of interests.

The central research and development committee will consult widely on national health service needs for research and development and will benefit from advice from regional research and development committees through the regional research and development directorates. These have a broad membership including representatives of the service and others who use research-based information.

Research (Human Beings)

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if her Department accepts the principles of recommendation No. R(90)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states concerning medical research on human beings; and if she will incorporate them into United Kingdom legislation.

Mr. Malone: The Department accepts the principles contained in this Council of Europe recommendation on medical research and human beings. They reflect current good medical research practice across the United Kingdom, particularly in terms of informed consent which is underpinned by the Department's own guidelines on medical research given in the booklet "Local Research Ethics Committees", which was published in 1991. It has no plans to incorporate the principles into UK legislation.

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is her latest estimate of the cost of closing Bart's hospital and moving the facilities to Whitechapel;

(2) what is her estimate of the annual revenue saving from operating Bart's and Royal London, Whitechapel hospitals on one side;

(3) what is the estimated extra revenue cost of a two-site solution of merging Bart's with the Royal London hospital, over the one-site solution.

Mr. Malone: Estimated revenue and capital costings are contained in the East London and the City health authority's consultation document "Health services for the future", copies of which can be obtained from the authority.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is Bart's hospital projected trading surplus for the current financial year.

Mr. Malone: St. Bartholomew's hospital together with the Royal London and London chest hospitals comprise the Royal Hospitals trust. The hon. Member may wish to approach Sir Derek Boorman, chairman of the trust, to establish the availability of this information.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much capital has been invested in Bart's hospital over the years 1989 to 1995.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Derek Boorman, chairman of the Royal Hospitals trust, for details.

Mental Handicap Hospitals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many long-stay mental handicap hospitals have gained trust status.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available in the form requested. There are, however, 101 national health services trusts which provide long-stay mental handicap beds.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions blood collected by the blood transfusions service and contaminated with hepatitis C has been sold to private sector hospitals.

Mr. Sackville: The national health service does not sell blood. It has always been the policy of the NHS to meet independent hospitals' reasonable requests for blood on the basis of availability and clinical need. Independent hospitals will be included in the look-back exercise to trace, counsel and—if necessary—treat those who have been inadvertently infected with hepatitis C in this country, as I announced on 11 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *145*.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has of hepatitis C infected blood volumes donated prior to current testing methods but during the period when other testing regimes were available to the blood transfusion service.

Mr. Sackville: Testing regimes were not available to the blood transfusion service until September 1991, when routine testing of all blood donations for antibodies to the hepatitis C virus was introduced. The blood transfusion service directors estimate that around 3,000 people may have been infected through blood transfusions prior to September 1991. The look-back exercise, which I announced on 11 January, will enable a more precise calculation to be made.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of expenditure has been committed to combat hepatitis C infection within the blood transfusion service from 1990 to the present.

Mr. Sackville: The cost of measures to combat hepatitis C infection within the blood transfusion service is not separately identifiable. Since September 1991, all blood donations have been routinely tested for antibodies to the hepatitis C virus.

Mental Illness

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to publish the 1994 social services inspectorate monitoring report on the mental illness specific grant.

Mr. Bowis: This has not yet been received.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the report of the 1994 survey of English mental hospitals initiated by the mental health task force has now been submitted to Ministers; and when its publication may be expected.

Mr. Bowis: No.

General Medical Council

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the lay members of the General Medical Council; on what date each was appointed; what qualifications they hold; when each term of office ceases; and what is their remuneration.

Mr. Malone: The current lay members of the General Medical Council are:

Name	*Date appointed*	*Expiry date of term of Office*
Mr. John Ifron Davies	2 August 1992	1 August 1997
Professor Christine Chapman	16 September 1992	15 September 1997
Mr. James Campbell Morton	1 August 1993	31 July 1998
Mrs. Rani Atma	1 August 1993	31 July 1998
Rabbi Julia Neuberger	1 August 1993	31 July 1998
Mr. Rodney Brookes Yates	1 August 1993	31 July 1998
Mrs. Angela Macpherson	18 May 1994	17 May 1999
Mr. Roy Goddard	18 May 1994	17 May 1999
Mrs. Johanna White	18 May 1994	17 May 1999
Mr. William Darling CBE	13 June 1994	12 June 1999
Mr. Roger Sims (Conservative)[1]	1 August 1994	31 July 1999
Mr. Alec Carlile (Liberal Democrats)[1]	1 August 1994	31 July 1999
Mr. Gareth Wardell (Labour)[1]	1 August 1994	31 July 1999

[1] Political nominations.

There are no formal requirements concerning lay members' qualifications other than that a lay member must neither be a fully registered medical practitioner, nor hold a qualification registrable under the Medical Act 1983.

Lay members receive no renumeration, but are able to claim their expenses for attending council and committee meetings.

NHS Centre for Information Technology

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the staff of the NHS centre for information technology became civil servants when CIT merged with the corporate data administration to form the NHS information management centre in May 1988.

Mr. Sackville: The staff of the national health service centre for information technology remained employees of the NHS when CIT merged with the corporate data administration.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of her departmental colleagues were responsible for the setting up of the NHS centre for information technology in 1985; what considerations underlay the decision to set up the centre, and what documents have been published setting out the justification for the centre.

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State at the time was responsible for setting up the national health service centre for information technology. CIT was concerned primarily with the development and application of common standards and systems for the NHS. Further details were contained in the document "A National Strategic Framework for Information in the Hospital and Community Services" published in October 1986, copies of which are available in the Library.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *1145*, if the agency agreement with the west midlands regional health authority was the sole legal basis for the centre for information technology.

Mr. Sackville: West Midlands regional health authority was given formal status within existing legislation to act as agents of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the employment of centre for information technology staff.

Private Detectives

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health trusts hired private detectives in the last year; for what purpose; at what cost; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what circumstances regional health authorities may make use of private detectives; and what guidelines her Department has issued on their use.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is not available centrally. It is the responsibility of each health authority and trust, after seeking appropriate advice, to consider the circumstances under which they would wish to take such action.

Special Transitional Grant

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by authority the amount of special transitional grant for 1993–94 spent on *(a)* nursing home placements, *(b)* residential home placements and *(c)* non-residential services.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which authorities failed to spend 85 per cent. of the special transitional grant in the independent sector during 1993–94.

Mr. Bowis: Audited returns detailing community care spending in the independent sector by local authorities in 1993–94 were due to be submitted to the Department by 31 December 1994. Some returns are still outstanding and are being followed up through the Audit Commission.

Blood

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide a full list of tests undertaken to identify pathogens in donated blood.

Mr. Sackville: In the United Kingdom, all blood donations are screened for hepatitis B surface antigen, and antibodies to hepatitis C and HIV1 and 2, and syphilis.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to require NHS trusts *(a)* to hold all meetings in public and *(b)* to publish minutes of all meetings.

Mr. Malone: No. National health service trusts are already required to hold one public meeting each year, at which they must present their annual accounts, annual report and any report on the accounts.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many trusts have introduced some aspect of performance-related pay for their staff;

(2) how many trusts have negotiated their own pay awards for staff.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* As national terms and conditions for management, ancillary, maintenance and ambulance staff have included performance-related pay for some time all trusts will have staff who benefit from such pay. Comprehensive information is not available centrally about the nature of new local terms and conditions being introduced in national health service trusts. However, from responses to a survey of trusts in autumn 1994, it is estimated that around 70 per cent. of trusts already had some staff on locally determined pay—involving over 10,000 nursing staff and a small but growing number of hospital doctors.

EC Butter

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she has taken or intends to take against Doncaster royal infirmary and Montagu Mexborough NHS trust in their selling to the public at the Doncaster royal infirmary coffee shop European Community intervention board butter; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We have been assured that no charge was made for the European Community intervention board butter when a small quantity was used in the hospital's coffee shop, and that all remaining supplies will be used, as the scheme intends, solely for the benefit of hospital patients and staff. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the Doncaster Royal and Montagu national health service trust, Mr. Raymond Tonkinson, for further details.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the number and percentage of emergency ambulance calls in the London area that took (1) up to 14 minutes, (2) 15 minutes, (3) 16 minutes, (4) 17 minutes, (5) 18 minutes, (6) 19 minutes, (7) 20 minutes, (8) 21 minutes, (9) 22 minutes, (10) 23 minutes, (11) 24 minutes, (12) 25 minutes, (13) 26 minutes, (14) 27 minutes, (15) 28 minutes, (16) 29 minutes, (17) 30 minutes, (18) 31 minutes, (19) 32 minutes, (20) 33 minutes, (21) 34 minutes, (22) 35 minutes, (23) 36 minutes, (24) 37 minutes, (25) 38 minutes, (26) 39 minutes, (27) 40 minutes, (28) 41 minutes, (29) 42 minutes, (30) 43 minutes, (31) 44 minutes, (32) 45 minutes, (33) 46 minutes, (34) 47 minutes, (35) 48 minutes, (36) 49 minutes, (37) 50 minutes, (38) 51 minutes, (39) 52 minutes, (40) 53 minutes, (41) 54 minutes, (42) 55 minutes, (43) 56 minutes, (44) 57 minutes, (45) 58 minutes, (46) 59 minutes and (47) 60 minutes during *(a)* October 1994, *(b)* November 1994, *(c)* December 1994 and *(d)* in total since April 1994.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested has been supplied by the London ambulance service, and will be placed in the Library.

The hon. Member may wish in future to write to Martin Gorham, chief executive of the LAS, asking for the information.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the absenteeism rate for the London ambulance service in 1994.

Mr. Sackville: The London ambulance service states that in the year 1994–95 to date the absenteeism rate is as follows:

	Per cent.
Accident and Emergency Service	7.79
Central Ambulance Control	8.14
Patient Transport Service	10.51

Appendicectomy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in respect of the recent appendicectomy case in Cornwall, what considerations underlay the decisions *(a)* to suspend the theatre sister, *(b)* initially not to suspend the surgical registrar and *(c)* to take no action against the anaesthetist.

Mr. Malone: This is a matter for the Royal Cornwall Hospitals national health service trust and the South and West regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. John Williams, chairman of the trust, and Ms Rennie Fritchie, chair of South and West regional health authority, for details.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many employees for which her Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, (b) in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and of these, how many were i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Female	*All*	*UG3*	*UG7*	*EO*	*AO*	*AA*
1991[1]	2,431	—	—	—	—	—
1992[1]	2,586	—	—	—	—	—
1993	2,552	6	108	389	494	185
1994	2,584	7	135	384	537	205

Note:
[1] Individual grade data not available.
Source:
DH staff in post returns for 1 April in each of the years. Figures represent a head count of full and part-time staff.

Conception Rates

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the rate of conceptions among under-16s for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Conception rates per thousand girls under 16 (England and Wales)

Year	
1982	7.8
1983	8.3
1984	8.6
1985	8.6
1986	8.7
1987	9.3
1988	9.4
1989	9.4
1990	10.1
1991	9.3

The provisional figure for 1992 is broadly in line with the 1991 figure.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS hospitals, overall and by region, have been closed since 1979; and how many NHS hospitals there are at present.

Mr. Sackville: There are at present, depending on definition, 1,600 national health service hospitals in England. Information about the numbers of hospital closures since 1979 is not available centrally.

Consultants

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS consultant doctors currently opt for maximum part-time NHS contracts; and what is the average and median amount of hours per week that these consultants spend in their private practices.

Mr. Malone: At 30 September 1993, 28.7 per cent. of national health service hospital medical consultants in England were on maximum part-time contracts. Information is not available on the amount of hours per week that those consultants spend on private practice.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS hospital consultants also practise in the private sector of health-care.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Compulsory Registration (Care Workers)

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to introduce a compulsory registration process for all paid care workers.

Mr. Bowis: Many people in the care professions already have to be registered with a professional organisation. Proposals for a general social services council have been submitted to the Government. These include a recommendation that all persons employed in the personal social services should be registered. We are considering these.

NHS Boards

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who appoints those individuals who have responsibility for interviewing and assessing the suitability of applicants for positions as non-executive members of NHS boards; and what criteria are used to select them.

Mr. Malone: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health appoints the chairmen of regional health authorities, who are responsible for making recommendations to Ministers on appointments in their region. Regional chairmen are appointed for their personal qualities, knowledge and skills.

Supplementary Medicine

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to extend statutory powers to require continuing professional development in medical and nursing professions to professions supplementary to medicine.

Mr. Sackville: We are considering the scope for a review of the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960.

GP Lists (Patients' Removal)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were removed from general medical practitioners' lists in each year since 1989 *(a)* in total and *(b)* at the request of the doctor by regional health authority area.

Mr. Malone: Information is available only for 1992–93 and I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Minister for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), to the hon. Member for Ynys Mon (Mr. Jones) on 19 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *367-68*.

Medicines Expenditure

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library a copy of the statistical model used by her Department to forecast future expenditure on medicines.

Mr. Sackville: No. The details of the Department's spending models comprise an important strand of the Government's internal public expenditure discussions, informing but not determining decisions about public spending priorities. It would not be appropriate to publish this material.

Patients Charter

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what increased resources she has provided for the NHS to fulfil the standards and expectations raised by the patients charter.

Mr. Malone: The patients charter is about doing things differently, changing ineffective working practices, providing a more patient-orientated service and adopting good practice from elsewhere. This need not require additional resources. Funding for the national health service in 1995–96 will increase by £1.3 billion—that is 1 per cent. in real terms. In addition, we expect hospital and community services to improve efficiency by at least 3 per cent. which is equivalent to an extra £600 million for patient care. As a result patients will continue to receive improving standards of service across the whole of the NHS, including those set out in the patients charter.

Operations

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average number of operations carried out per NHS hospital surgeon per week.

Mr. Sackville: This cannot be determined from the data available. Information on the number of cases operated on in operating theatres in 1993–94 is available in "NHS operating theatres availability and use: England 1993–94", and the number of hospital medical staff at 30 September 1993 is available in the "Statistical Bulletin: Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Service Medical and Dental Staff in England 1983 to 1993". Copies of both publications are available in the Library.

Asthma

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will commission a report into the level of asthma in rural areas; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We have no plans to do so.

Waiting Times

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average time it takes for a patient to be admitted on to a waiting list including time accounted for by self-deferral; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: Data on the time to first appointment are collected. It is not possible to separate data relating to patients who have out-patient appointments and who are then put on to waiting lists for in-patient or day case treatment; nor does it include time elapsed as a result of self-deferral.

Cigarette Advertising

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the findings of a recent survey on the level of compliance with the voluntary agreement covering cigarette advertising at newsagents.

Mr. Sackville: As part of the 1991 voluntary agreement on tobacco products' advertising and promotion, the industry undertook to reduce the number of external permanent advertising signs for cigarette and hand-rolling tobacco brands at retail premises by 50 per cent. over five years. The committee for monitoring agreements on tobacco advertising and sponsorship last year commissioned an independent survey to monitor the industry's progress in this undertaking in the year from July 1993. The findings of the survey will be announced in the committee's eighth report, which is expected to be published in summer 1995.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) on how many occasions in the last four months of which she has knowledge any civil servants in her Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months she or any of her Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave him today.

Abortions

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the latest available data on the percentage of abortions which are funded by the national health service in each regional health authority area.

Mr. Sackville: The latest year for which the data requested are available is 1992.

	NHS funded percentage of total
England	56.8
RHA	
Northern	85.4
Yorkshire	58.3
Trent	70.6
East Anglian	82.9
North West Thames	47.0
North East Thames	56.2
South East Thames	53.6
South West Thames	41.4
Wessex	51.5
Oxford	55.7
South Western	79.2
West Midlands	53.0
Mersey	51.3
North Western	45.0

Breast and Cervical Cancer

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many breast cancer *(a)* cases and *(b)* deaths occurred in each health region in the latest available year.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Deaths and new registration of malignant neoplasm of female breast—ICD[1] 174—by regional health authority, for the latest years for which data are available.

	Deaths (1992)	*Registrations (1989)*
Northern	796	1,472
Yorkshire	888	1,918
Trent	1,287	2,166
East Anglian	593	1,144
North west Thames	819	1,821
North east Thames	938	2,125
South east Thames	1,061	2,069
South west Thames	885	1,762
Wessex	871	2,004
Oxford	648	1,132
South Western	989	1,976
West Midlands	1,402	2,860
Mersey	646	1,356
North Western	981	2,032
Wales	824	1,931

[1] International classification of diseases, 9th revision.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of female deaths were a result of *(a)* breast and *(b)* cervical cancer in each regional health authority area, in the latest period for which data are available.

Mr. Sackville: This information is shown in the table.

Percentage of all female deaths that were a result of *(a)* malignant neoplasm of female breast (ICD[1]174) and *(b)* malignant neoplasm of cervix uteri (ICD[1]180), by regional health authority 1992.

RHA	*Breast*	*Cervix uteri*
Northern	4.2	0.5
Yorkshire	4.2	0.6
Trent	4.9	0.6
East Anglian	5.3	0.5
North west Thames	5.0	0.6
North east Thames	4.8	0.6
South east Thames	4.9	0.6
South west Thames	5.1	0.4
Wessex	5.1	0.4
Oxford	5.5	0.5
South western	4.9	0.7
West Midlands	5.0	0.6
Mersey	4.5	0.6
North western	3.9	0.6
Wales	4.7	0.6

[1] International classification of disease, 9th revision.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities routinely carry out cervical smear tests every *(a)* two, *(b)* three, *(c)* four and *(d)* five years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Dental Services

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many dentists were offering national health service treatment in September 1994;

(2) how many salaried dentists were employed by English family health service authorities in December 1992, 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* At 30 September 1994, excluding salaried dentists, there were 15,084 principal general dental practitioners on the dental lists of family health services authorities. Additionally, although not on family health services authority lists, there were 801 assistants and vocational trainees working under the supervision of a principal.

The number of salaried dentists employed by English family health services authorities is shown in the table.

Table 1: General Dental Service: Number of salaried dentists[1] by family health services authority as at 31 December[2]
England

FHSA	*31 December 1992*	*31 December 1993*	*30 September 1994*
All FHSAs	66	91	115
Cumbria	—	—	1
Derbyshire	1	1	3
Cambridgeshire	2	3	3
Norfolk	—	1	3
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	8	9	9
Essex	2	3	2
City and East London	8	8	9
Kent	3	5	5
Greenwich and Bexley	6	7	7
Bromley	—	1	1
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	28	31	31
Surrey	—	3	5
West Sussex	1	1	1
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	1	1	2
Wiltshire	—	1	2
Isle of Wight	—	1	2
Buckinghamshire	1	2	4
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	2	4	3
Gloucestershire	—	1	3
Somerset	—	4	4
Staffordshire	—	—	1
Cheshire	—	—	8
Liverpool	2	2	2
Lancashire	—	1	2
Manchester	—	—	1
Salford	1	1	1

Source:
Dental Practice Board.

Notes:
[1] This is the number of salaried dentists with contracts registered at the DPB. It is not the number of salaried dentists in employment at the actual specified dates.
[2] December data for 1994 are not available.

Dental Services

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many unfilled vacancies for salaried dentists there were in English family health service authorities in December 1994;

(2) how much was spent on providing the services of salaried dentists employed by English family health services authorities, including establishment costs for 1992–93, 1993–94 and to date in 1994–95; and if she will provide a breakdown of those costs.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* The information is shown in the table:

Expenditure on salaried dentists employed by English family health service authorities

		£ million
1992–93	Remuneration	1.805
	Expenses	0.594
	Total	2.399
1993–94	Remuneration	2.729
	Expenses	1.907
	Total	4.636

Expenditure on salaried dentists employed by English family health service authorities

		£ million
1994–95 (to November)	Remuneration	2.398
	Expenses	1.439
	Total	3.837

Notes:

1. The above figures show a gross expenditure by FHSAs for the provision of general dental services by salaried dentists and include National Insurance costs and superannuation contributions. These figures are reported by the FHSA through the financial information system.
2. Figures under the heading of expenses, including establishment costs.
3. Figures for 1994–95 are year to date to November.

The information on numbers of unfilled vacancies in December 1994 is not available centrally.

GP Surgeries

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list the average value of capital projects *(a)* at general practitioner fundholders' surgery premises and *(b)* non-general practitioner fundholders' premises in each regional health authority area in each of the past three years;

(2) what estimate she has made of the average capital value of the surgery premises of *(a)* general practitioner fundholders and *(b)* non-fundholders and of any change in the average value of such premises since 1991; and if she will make it her policy to carry out a full valuation of all surgery premises at five-yearly intervals.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* General practitioners are independent self-employed contractors to the national health service. Under their terms of service, they are required to provide adequate practice premises from which to see their patients. The capital value of and investment in premises they own is a matter for them or the owners of any accommodation they rent.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been allocated to general practitioner fundholders for *(a)* computer hardware costs and *(b)* computer software costs in each of the last five years in each region.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* Family health services authorities are not allocated separate funds for general practitioner fundholder computers. Available information about expenditure is shown in the table. It is not possible to identify hardware and software costs.

Spend on information technology to Support GP fundholding

£000s

Region	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Northern	736	900	835
Yorkshire	1,363	2,193	1,294
Trent	1,337	2,949	2,395
East Anglian	200	612	752
North west Thames	741	1,411	1,298
North east Thames	95	398	367
South east Thames	783	1,455	1,868
South west Thames	1,029	916	1,160
Wessex	952	626	939
Oxford	1,246	1,377	1,392
South western	1,165	1,121	1,149
West Midlands	1,152	2,371	2,413
Mersey	463	731	1,024
North western	361	994	1,619
Total	11,623	18,054	18,505

Expenditure figures are estimates taken from FIS4 returns by English FHSAs.

EMPLOYMENT

Lambeth College

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if his Department accepts responsibility for payments due from South Thames training and enterprise council to Lambeth college; and how much his Department estimates is due from the council to the college.

Mr. Paice: The Department is making payments for legitimate claims to providers, including Lambeth college, for training delivered under the terms of their contract with South Thames training and enterprise council between 7 November 1994 and 1 January 1995 for the following Government programmes: training for work, youth training/credits, careers and guidance years nine and 10, work-related further education, child care and careers libraries.

For the period of three months from the appointment of the receiver the Department will make available to the receiver sufficient funds to ensure that providers receive payments for training delivered by them under the terms of their contract with South Thames TEC for the same programmes.

The amount of money owed by South Thames TEC to Lambeth college prior to 7 November 1994 is a matter for the administrative receiver.

Integrated Regional Offices

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list those of his Department's responsibilities on which the integrated regional offices are required to advise him on the allocation of resources and, for each integrated regional office, the annual expenditure on each programme;

(2) if he will list those of his Department's responsibilities which are administered by the integrated regional offices and, for each integrated regional office, the estimated annual expenditure on each of these responsibilities;

(3) if he will list those of his Department's responsibilities on which integrated regional offices are responsible for preparing, advising on or implementing regional policy.

Mr. Paice: Government offices for the regions are primarily concerned with delivering the Department's training, enterprise and education responsibilities. The estimated allocation of resources for the administration and the programmes delivered through the offices in 1994–95 is shown in the following tables:

Administration expenditure

	£000
South East	2,170
London	3,653
Eastern	1,960
South West	2,098
West Midlands	2,456
East Midlands	1,941
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,508
Merseyside	1,371
North West	2,904
North East	2,018
Total	23,079

Programme expenditure

£000

Region	Youth training	Training for work	Employer investment in People
East Midlands	57,644	36,309	3,440
South West	55,568	28,115	2,738
London	58,441	58,430	5,967
South East	68,028	26,967	4,488
Eastern	56,713	22,892	2,260
Northern	60,784	39,137	3,574
North West (GM)	46,958	23,573	3,089
North West	74,718	37,914	4,353
Yorkshire and Humberside	80,136	47,047	3,978
West Midlands	74,916	44,052	5,247
Total	633,906	364,436	39,135

Programme expenditure continued

£000

Region	Business start up[1]	Local initiative fund[1]	TEC management fee
East Midlands	7,230	5,539	9,259
South west	9,230	4,638	11,089
London	9,447	6,497	19,809
South east	7,868	4,461	13,031
Eastern	5,405	3,094	9,842
Northern	4,938	4,933	11,730
North west (GM)	5,869	3,083	8,720
North west	6,833	2,845	12,543
Yorkshire and Humberside	11,140	8,373	16,159
West Midlands	9,416	4,206	14,775
Total	77,377	47,669	127,303

1. Programme expenditure based on 1993–94 estimated regional expenditure (latest available figures).

[1] Business start up and local initiative fund now form part of the single regeneration budget.

Inward Investing Companies

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the British work force is employed by inward investing companies within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Oppenheim: In 1991, foreign owned firms accounted for 17 per cent. of manufacturing employment in the United Kingdom. The information is not available for the service sector.

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many new jobs have been created by inward investing companies in the United Kingdom since 1979.

Mr. Oppenheim: According to figures notified to the Department of Trade and Industry's Invest in Britain Bureau, 320,104 new jobs were created and 302,143 jobs were sustained in the United Kingdom as a result of inward investment for the financial years 1979–80 to 1993–94.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for how long the Child Support Agency has been logging telephone calls from clients.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 24 January 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency logging telephone calls.

The Agency has logged the number of calls received from clients since operations began in April 1993.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will instruct the CSA to terminate Mrs. Sandra Thurlbeck's (Ref. 1002139325) authority to act on her behalf in collecting maintenance.

Mr. Burt: I shall write to my hon. Friend separately.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals have been made to child support appeal tribunals since 1 April 1994; what is the total number of cases awaiting a Child Support Agency tribunal hearing; how many have been waiting more than three months; in how many of these cases the Child Support Agency has forwarded submissions; how many of these met the target of responding to the Independent Tribunal Service within 18 days; and what has been done

since his answer of 17 May 1994; *Official Report*, column *440*, to improve the success rate.

Mr. Burt: I am informed by his honour Judge Bassingthwaighte, the president of the Independent Tribunal Service, that since 1 April 1994 it has received, 4,876 appeals. At 31 December 1994, 4,337 were waiting to be heard. On these cases they have received 1,022 submissions: six within 18 days of lodgement. The information requested about the number which have been waiting over three months is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I am informed that the chief executive of the Child Support Agency set up a centralised appeals unit on 30 August 1994 as a measure to improve the production of submissions. Since then clearance rates have improved significantly.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many child support appeal tribunal hearings have been held since 1 April 1994, how many of these have been adjourned; in how many cases *(a)* the absent parent and *(b)* the parent with care attended; in how many one of the parties was represented; and in how many cases the child support officer's decision has been overturned.

Mr. Burt: I am informed by his honour Judge Bassingthwaighte, the president of the Independent Tribunal Service, that 1,446 cases have been heard since 1 April 1994 and of these 132 were adjourned. In 229 cases one of the parties was represented. In 614 instances the child support officer's decision was overturned. The information requested on the number of absent parents and parents with care who attended the hearings is not available. However I can inform the hon. Gentleman that the appellant attended 976 hearings and the other party attended on 378 occasions. Both the absent parent and the parent with care can appeal against a child support decision.

Family Credit

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many parents are in receipt of family credit child care disregard;

(2) what proportion of parents who are in receipt of family credit child care disregard receive *(a)* less than £10 per week, *(b)* £10 to £20 per week, *(c)* £20 to £30 per week and *(d)* more than £30 per week or the best available breakdown of the amount paid.

Mr. Roger Evans: In the three-month period to 31 December 1994, the latest date for which figures are available, 7,180 families received higher family credit awards as a result of the new help with child care charges. The amounts of additional family credit, and the proportion of families receiving these amounts, were as follows:

(a) 35 per cent. received less than £10 a week

(b) 27 per cent. received between £10 and £19.99

(c) 38 per cent. received between £20 to £28.00

The maximum extra help in family credit alone is £28 a week although families may benefit by up to £38.20 a week if they also receive housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Source:
Five per cent. sample of family credit awards made between 1 October 1994 and 31 December 1994. The figures do not include claims made by 31 December 1994 but decided after that date.

Back-to-work Bonus

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his most recent calculation on the financial consequences of the proposed back-to-work bonus.

Mr. Roger Evans: Our latest estimate of the financial implications of the back-to-work bonus is that the scheme will bring an estimated increase in benefit expenditure of around £20 million in 1996–97 and around £50 million in 1997–98. However, when behavioural effects are taken into account, the scheme is likely to be broadly cost neutral.

Notes:
1. Assumes 2.4 million unemployed.
2. Estimates rounded to nearest £10 million in cash prices.

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost to the national insurance fund of all current holders of an APP who make no additional contributions with an annual income of

(a) £2,000 or below *(b)* up to £3,000, *(c)* up to £4,000, *(d)* up to £5,000, *(e)* up to £6,000, *(f)* up to £7,000, *(g)* up to £8,000, *(h)* up to £9,000 and *(i)* up to £10,000 opting back into SERPS.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total cost to date to the national insurance fund of national insurance rebates, tax relief and other incentives paid in respect of personal pensions contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of Tuesday 10 January to the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra), *Official Report*, column *56*.

There is no cost to the national insurance fund of tax relief as the fund is continually reimbursed by the Inland Revenue for any payments of tax relief. Total tax relief to appropriate personal pensions amounted to £0.8 billion up to and including 1992–93.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the cost to date to the national insurance fund of national insurance rebates, tax relief and other incentives paid in respect of personal pensions contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme of individuals with an annual income of *(a)* £2,000 or below *(b)* up to £3,000, *(c)* up to £4,000, *(d)* up to £5,000, *(e)* up to £6,000, *(f)* up to £7,000, *(g)* up to £8,000, *(h)* up to £9,000 and (i) up to £10,000.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is shown in the table.

Rebates and incentives for Personal Pension holders with earnings under (£ per annum)	*Total up to and including 1991–92 GB, £ millions Cumulative by earnings*
2,000	0
3,000	16
4,000	114
5,000	341

Rebates and incentives for Personal Pension holders with earnings under (£ per annum)	*Total up to and including 1991–92 GB, £ millions Cumulative by earnings*
6,000	724
7,000	1,246
8,000	1,887
9,000	2,600
10,000	3,350

Notes:
1. Data is based on an analysis of a 1 per cent. sample of people who are recorded on the Department of Social Security national insurance recording system as contributing to an appropriate personal pension scheme.
2. The figures are for accruals of rebates and incentives up to and including 1991–92 which are normally paid in the next year. The figures are therefore comparable with figures for total payments up to and including 1992–93.
3. The cost of tax relief is not included as this is not a charge to the national insurance fund.
4. Earnings are used, as a breakdown by income is not available.

The following table shows estimates of tax relief.

Tax relief for PP holders with earnings under (£ per annum)	*Total up to and including 1991–92 GB, £ millions*
2,000	0
3,000	2
4,000	10
5,000	40
6,000	62
7,000	107
8,000	163
9,000	223
10,000	289

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to him by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Severe Disability Premium

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made, following the recent appeal court judgment, of how many severely disabled people should have been receiving the premium between April 1988 and 1 December 1994, when the amending regulations were laid, but did not receive it; what steps are being taken to identify these people; and where the premium is now being awarded for the years in question, what policy he has with regard to suspending payment pending the appeal which he and the chief adjudication officer are seeking to bring to the House of Lords; and in how many cases a suspension has been imposed.

Mr. Roger Evans: The Court of Appeal decision given on 30 November 1994 resulted in entitlement to the severe disability premium being extended until the amendment regulation came into force on 2 December 1994. Consideration is still being given as to how the cases affected for these few days might be identified.

It is our practice to suspend payment in cases which are subject of an appeal to the courts, or in cases where benefit would be affected by the outcome of such an appeal. The number of cases in which payment of the severe disability premium has been suspended in these particular circumstances is not known.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently in receipt of the severe disability premium as part of income support.

Mr. Roger Evans: As of February 1994, the latest date for which figures are available, the total number of claimants whose income support entitlement included the severe disability premium was 184,000.

Source:
"Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry" February 1994—based on a 5 per cent. sample.

Note:
The figure has been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Jobseekers Bill

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the impact of the provision of the Jobseekers Bill on the classification of unemployment benefit and analogous expenditure on income support into *(a)* planned expenditure and *(b)* cyclical expenditure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Like the benefits which it is to replace, jobseeker's allowance will be, subject to passage of necessary legislation, cyclical social security expenditure.

WALES

Dental Services, Gwynedd

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what emergency provision there is for dental patients in Gwynedd who cannot get access to NHS dental treatment.

Mr. Richards: According to information supplied by the Gwynedd family health services authority, there are 11 emergency sessions each week, at various times, on most days, including weekends, in clinics throughout Gwynedd.

That authority is best placed to advise and assist patients who require emergency treatment. Patients can also be referred to the community dental service, which provides a "safety net" for those unable to obtain general dental services.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received during the past three months on the subject of dental service provision in Gwynedd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Since 1 October 1994, 38 representations have been made on the subject of dental service provision in Gwynedd. During the same period, three questions have been asked in the House on the same subject.

I am aware that patients in Gwynedd who are not registered with a dentist may have difficulty in obtaining NHS treatment. I fully recognise the unsatisfactory situation in the county and officials are in frequent contact with the Gwynedd health authorities. I will continue to assist them in their efforts to find solutions.

Nurses

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of those now being taken on in Wales for training as qualified nurses come as graduate entrants; and if he will make a statement on the changing qualification patterns for nurses in Wales and its implications for recruitment in future.

Mr. Richards: The current proportion of graduate entrants to Project 2000 student nurses is approximately one to 12. It remains the responsibility of the United Kingdom Central Council, as the statutory body governing nurse registration, to ensure that nurse training is tailored to meet the requirements of the NHS. This is monitored in Wales by the Welsh National Board.

It was anticipated that the recent introduction of Project 2000–September 1991 in Wales—with its emphasis on a broader-based training would better meet the needs of patients. This diploma level qualification will be evaluated including the implications for recruitment.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy that the forthcoming increase in nurses pay will not be financed by a reduction in the number of nurses employed in the NHS.

Mr. Richards: This is a matter for individual health authorities and NHS trusts to determine.

Police Funding

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on the standard spending assessment proposed for the North Wales police authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have received 67 written representations on the proposed standard spending assessment for North Wales police. On 20 December, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), the Under-Secretary, met a deputation from the police authority to discuss its concerns. I will announce my final settlement decisions shortly.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the consultation period for discussion on the standard spending assessment proposed for Welsh police authorities will expire.

Mr. Redwood: Formal consultation in respect of my provisional standard spending assessment and capping proposals for Welsh police authorities ended on 9 January. I am considering all the representations received and I will make my final settlement decisions shortly.

Training Providers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the companies in *(a)* Gwent and *(b)* the Islwyn constituency that facilitate the work of training and enterprise councils by being training providers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Gwent TEC has contracts with the following training providers who arrange placements for trainees in a wide range of companies across the country.

Provider	*Location*
(a) Gwent	
Age Concern	Ebbw Vale
Agency for Caring Environments (ACE)	Cardiff Office
	Gwent-wide
Beacon Training Ltd.	Pontypool
	Gwent-wide
Blaenau Gwent Borough Council	Tredegar
British Steel Llanwern	Newport
British Steel Tinplate	Ebbw Vale
CITB	Gwent-wide
CTF	Cwmbran
Focal	Gwent-wide
Gwent NCT	Blaina
	Newport
Gwent Quality Training	Newport
	Gwent-wide
Gwent Tertiary College	Newport
	Pontypool and Usk
	Ebbw Vale
Hill Management Criteria	Newport
JHP Training Ltd.	Brynmawr
	Newport
	Cwmbran
	Ystrad Mynach
Link Training	Cwmbran
	Brynmawr
Lucas Automotive Braking Division	Cwmbran
Monmouth Borough Council	Monmouth
Newport and District GTA	Pontypool
Saunders Valve Co. Ltd.	Cwmbran
Torfaen Training	Cwmbran
Training Management (Wales) Ltd.	Cwmbran
	Gwent-wide
Victoria Training	Ebbw Vale
(b) Islwyn	
Gwent NCT	Pontllanfraith
Gwent Tertiary College	Crosskeys
Mates Training Design and Development Ltd.	Blackwood

Dairy Farmers

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the approximate average net profit for dairy farmers in each year since 1985.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on incomes of full-time dairy farms and other farm types is collected in the farm business survey and published each year in "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom". The latest edition, "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom 1992/93", shows estimates of several different measures of income for dairy farms in 1991–92 and 1992–93. Definitions of these income measures are contained in appendix 2.

To illustrate longer-term trends in incomes, index series are also given for net farm income, occupier's net income and cash income back to 1986–87—table 1.1 and appendix 1, tables 1 and 2—the earliest year for which data are available on a consistent basis.

"Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom 1993/94" will be published in the spring.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them publish periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. Redwood: CADW: Welsh Historic Monuments is the Welsh Office's sole wholly-owned, executive agency. The body's corporate identity was established in 1984 when it was launched as a discrete management unit in its own headquarters, where it remains. No additional costs arose in this area when the agency was vested in April 1991. However, four additional support staff were required. A uniform or protective clothing is provided for some staff, but no additional costs arose from agency status. A newsletter is provided for members of Heritage in Wales—a subscription scheme which allows admission to CADW sites without further charge. The agency does not provide executive cars.

Animal Diseases

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of sheep scab there were in each year since 1990 and in each month for 1994.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The total number of confirmed cases of sheep scab in Wales for the years 1990 to 1992 was as follows:

	Number
1990	9
1991	15
1992 (to 30 June)	14

The collation of official records on the number of outbreaks of sheep scab was discontinued after deregulation of compulsory controls in 1992.

Environmental Policy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out those matters in regard to environmental policy in Wales that are the responsibility of his Department and those which are primarily the responsibility of other Government Departments or non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Details of the Welsh Office's environmental policies and programmes and information on the environmental activities of its public bodies are given in the departmental report, Cm 2515, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. Information on the environmental policy responsibilities of other Departments and their public bodies is similarly available in their reports.

Air Pollution

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new measures he proposes to lessen air pollution in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: On 19 January, the Government published new proposals for improving air quality in the paper "Air Quality: Meeting the Challenge", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The measures detailed there will apply, as appropriate, in Wales as elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Council Tax

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average council tax for a band D house in *(a)* Alyn and Deeside district council and *(b)* Westminster.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The average band D council tax for 1994–95 in Alyn and Deeside is £385 and in Westminster £245. The value of properties in valuation band D ranges from £51,000 to £66,000 in Wales and from £68,000 to £88,000 in England.

Millennium Fund

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what projects under the control of his Department he will be applying for funds from the millennium fund; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given on 20 December by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage, which explains the relationship between Ministers, Departments and the lottery distributing bodies.

Fluoride

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to implement the recommendation of Health Promotion Wales to add fluoride as a supplement to Welsh water supplies.

Mr. Richards: None. This is a matter for local determination.

Through Ticketing

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he will be making to the rail regulator concerning the future availability of through ticketing from railway stations in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Rail Regulator and Ministers are committed to continuing easy access to through ticketing for passengers. Ministers will consider carefully the Rail Regulator's decisions on ticketing obligations at railway stations after his wide-ranging consultations.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated number of *(a)* jobs lost and *(b)* new jobs created in each of the last five years for which figures are available for (i) each district council area in Wales and (ii) Wales as a whole.

Mr. Redwood: Comprehensive information on the number of jobs lost and created is not available. Information on employees in employment for district council areas is available from the 1989 and 1991

censuses of employment. Figures for Wales are available from the Employment Department's quarterly estimates series and are published in table 1.5 in the *Employment Gazette*. All these data are available from the NOMIS database which can be accessed by the staff of the Library of the House.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. Redwood: Officials may receive representations about a variety of matters, but the information requested is not collected.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. Redwood: My Ministers and I meet a wide range of people from many organisations at informal and official occasions.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the letter from the Under-Secretary of State for Employment to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West of 11 January, concerning outcomes-based funding of training and enterprise councils, if he will give details of the consultation exercise referred to as it applies in Wales; and which organisations in Wales have been consulted.

Mr. Redwood: My Department is currently in the process of consulting TECs in Wales on the prospective changes in the funding arrangements for training for work before the determination of contacts for 1995-96.

Mr. W. C. Powell

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) of 7 January, concerning Mr. W. C. Powell, what proposals he has to issue new guidelines to require the participation of general fundholders in inquiries such as the one agreed with Mr. Powell.

Mr. Redwood: There are no plans to issue guidelines. Informal inquiries of the kind offered to Mr. W. C. Powell, do not include powers to compel the attendance of witnesses. There is no distinction to be drawn between fundholders and non-fundholders.

SCOTLAND

Higher and Further Education

18. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of students entering higher and further education in 1994–95.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of students who entered higher education in Scotland for the first time in 1994–95 is currently estimated to be 46,800.

Many FE students enter courses at different times or for studies of less than one academic year. The current estimate of the total number of students on all FE courses in 1994–95 is 169,200.

Poverty

19. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his best estimate of the number of people in Scotland living in poverty; what plans he has to reduce this figure; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Statistics on patterns of household disposable income are provided in "Households Below Average Income 1979 to 1991–92", published in July last year. The best response to low household income is to sustain economic recovery and to assist those in greatest need. The Government's policies address both these aspects.

Nursing and Residential Homes

20. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to modify the rules governing the ownership and management of both nursing and residential homes for elderly citizens.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no present plans to modify the rules governing the ownership and management of nursing and residential care homes for the elderly. Officials are, however, reviewing the procedures and standards in both sectors.

Motorail Service

21. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the effect on tourism of the proposals to terminate the motorail service and reduce sleeper services to Scotland; and when he was consulted on these matters.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Responsibility for railways rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. However, I understand British Rail has yet to decide the future of these services in the light of the franchising director's decision not to include certain services in passenger service requirements.

Scottish Prison Officers Association

22. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Scottish Prison Officers Association; what he discussed with them; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend last met representatives of the Scottish Prison Officers Association on 6 May 1994 when he met a delegation from the Scottish Prison Service trade union side.

The subjects discussed were the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, market testing and staff morale in the Scottish Prison Service.

Local Government Reorganisation

23. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what further assessment he has made of the staff and other costs of work being undertaken by local authorities in preparing for the new authorities.

Mr. Stewart: I have nothing to add to my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for

Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), on 13 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns 595-96, which outlined his plans for funding the costs of local government reorganisation in 1995–96.

Local Government Expenditure

24. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from local authorities in Scotland on their spending plans.

Mr. Stewart: The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and some individual local authorities have made representations to my right hon. Friend about the level of the 1995–96 local government finance settlement and the implications for authorities' budgets.

Health Care, Lanarkshire

25. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chief executive of Lanarkshire health board to discuss the provision of health care in Lanarkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Minister of State regularly meets representatives from all health boards to discuss health issues.There are no immediate plans for a meeting with Lanarkshire health board.

Manufacturing Industry

26. **Mrs. Liddell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to meet the chairman and chief executive of Scottish Enterprise National to discuss the state of manufacturing industry in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend regularly meets the chairman and chief executive of Scottish Enterprise. He has, however, no immediate plans for a meeting.

Floods, Strathclyde

27. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the recent floods in Strathcylde.

Mr. Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the replies to his parliamentary questions answered last week and to his recent meeting with my right hon. Friend and me.

29. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to meet Strathclyde regional councillors to discuss flood prevention.

Mr. Stewart: Although there are no such plans at present, my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for agriculture and the environment, who is responsible for flood prevention matters, would be willing to meet the hon. Gentleman together with representative Strathclyde councillors, if this would be helpful.

Proposed Bridge, Kelso

28. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will approve the financial consents necessary to enable Borders regional council to build a new bridge at Kelso.

Mr. Stewart: Final decisions have not yet been made about the distribution of roads and transport capital allocations for 1995–96. The case for a new Kelso bridge will be taken into consideration, along with other proposals, in setting the levels for individual councils.

Prison Cell Searches

30. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the adequacy of prison cell searches.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E.W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Lady Olga Maitland, dated 25 January 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about what assessment has been made of the adequacy of prison cell searches.

Cell searches are an essential element in a range of security measures, which includes the use of drug detection dogs, closed visits, rub down and strip searches, to prevent the introduction of unauthorised and/or prohibited articles into prisons. A comprehensive set of guidelines on the safe custody of prisoners, including cell searches, was issued to all Governors-in-Charge of establishments in 1991. These are subject to continuous review.

In the year ended 31 March 1994, 2079 punishments against prison discipline were awarded by Governors to prisoners who either took or were found in possession of unauthorised or prohibited articles. We have no statistical information which would indicate how many of those offences against discipline were the result of cell searching, but Governors are aware of the importance of the security guidelines and of the need for cell searching to be properly carried out.

Rail Privatisation

31. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the impact of rail privatisation upon the economy of the highlands and islands; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Responsibility for railways rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. However, the Government believe that private sector involvement in the railways will benefit users and the economy as a whole.

Secondary Schools

32. **Sir David Know:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent per pupil in secondary schools in Scotland in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what were the figures in 1978–79 at constant prices.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Current expenditure per secondary pupil in 1992–93 was 46 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1979. The latest figure is £2,914 per secondary pupil.

Details of budgeted school running costs per pupil for 1994–95, for individual primary and secondary schools in Scotland, were published last month and a copy has been placed in the Library.

Scottish Homes (Tenants)

33. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy that tenants of Scottish Homes are entitled to remain with Scottish Homes if they vote against the takeover of a new landlord.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Disposal of housing stock by Scottish Homes must be in accordance with

guidelines issued by my right hon. Friend which promote substantial safeguards for tenants. These provide that the majority view should prevail and all the tenants in a ballot area will transfer if a majority of those voting are in favour. Throughout the consultation process Scottish Homes emphasises to tenants the importance of casting a vote. My right hon. Friend has no plans to change these arrangements.

Forth Rail Bridge

34. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he is going to publish the results of the Scottish Office independent engineering and structural survey of the Forth rail bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No such survey has been undertaken.

35. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the result of the meeting arranged by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) between Mr. Patrick Hetherington of the Scottish Office, Mr. Colin Aston and Mr. John Watson of Maid of the Forth in relation to metallic problems of the Forth rail bridge and of the subsequent inspection of the bridge by Mr. Hetherington in relation to bird remains, bird droppings in crevices and the non-function of lights installed by Scottish Power.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Inquiries are continuing and I shall write to the hon. Member when these are complete.

Bank Holidays

36. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he has taken to safeguard bank holidays in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The dates of bank holidays in Scotland are either defined in schedule 1 to the Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971 or designated each year by royal proclamation under section 1(3) of the Act. There are no proposals at present to change these dates.

Rented Housing

37. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to increase the supply of affordable rented housing in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Our policy is to assist and enable provision of an adequate supply of housing, by monitoring housing supply and demand and encouraging housing agencies to identify and address local imbalances in the supply of housing.

Labour Statistics

38. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many men were in full-time jobs in Scotland *(a)* in June 1979 and *(b)* at present.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Information on male full-time employment is not available for 1979. The total number of male employees, in June 1979, was 1,205,200. In June 1994, there were 972,800 male employees, of whom 876,300 were full-time. The total number of employees in June 1979 was 2,102,300, and in June 1994 was 1,963,600.

In comparison, the total civilian work force in employment fell by 29,600 over this period. This includes an increase of 76,900 in the number of self-employed and the introduction of the work-related Government training schemes.

NHS Waiting Lists

39. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the trend in national health service waiting lists in Scotland; and what comparable statistics he has on waiting lists elsewhere.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As the information requested is lengthy, I have arranged for a copy to be sent to the hon. Gentleman and for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

Scottish Constitution

40. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what pamphlets or speeches he wrote or delivered in 1994 setting out his views on the Scottish constitution.

Mr. Lang: During 1994, my belief that Scotland's constitutional future lies firmly within the United Kingdom was expressed on many different occasions.

Barnacle Geese

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland further to his answer of 16 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *1055*, if he will give details of the conditions attached to the licence issued to a farmer on Solway firth on 15 December 1994 for the killing of barnacle geese.

Sir Hector Monro: The current licence was issued on 11 November 1994. As the information requested is rather lengthy, I am arranging for a copy of the licence and guidance notes to be sent to the hon. Member and placed in the Library of the House.

NHS Trusts

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent by each hospital trust in Scotland on public relations for each year for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available centrally.

The Arts

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to fund overseas presentation of Scottish arts linked to efforts by Scottish businesses to win contracts.

Sir Hector Monro: None. Government support for overseas activities by arts organisations is primarily a matter for the British Council. The business sponsorship incentive scheme, which provides matching government funds for private sponsorship moneys, may also help.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to assist arts organisations to make themselves and their educational services known to individual schools and to the new unitary authorities.

Sir Hector Monro: The Scottish Office Education Department will draw the potential role of arts

organisations in education to the attention of the new local authorities in a guidance circular on the arts to be issued later this year.

The Scottish Arts Council has identified education as a priority and has published a handbook "Now to Create: Arts and Education in Partnership", a copy of which has recently been sent to every school in Scotland, to every school board and to appropriate local authority officers.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to increase pupils' access to active participation in arts activities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: National guidelines on the expressive arts, issued in 1992, offer schools advice on art education for pupils aged five to 14. The guidelines cover art, drama and music, and place emphasis on the value of active participation. They set out attainment targets and programmes of study in which performance, participation and appreciation have a place. The arts community generally has welcomed this advice to schools.

Guidelines issued by the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum for pupils aged 14 to 18 also ensure that the arts have a secure place within the curriculum. Scottish Examination Board and Scottish Vocational Education Council courses and qualifications are available at standard grade, higher grade, certificate of sixth year studies and national certificate in the areas of music, drama and art. Within the higher still programme, a unified framework of study programmes and qualifications will be developed in these areas.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funding is available to arts organisations to assist them with tourism-related projects.

Sir Hector Monro: Relevant financial assistance is available to arts organisations from the Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise networks, including the local enterprise companies, and the Scottish tourist board. The Scottish Arts Council has a general responsibility for funding and encouraging the arts in Scotland; in partnership with the Scottish tourist board and the Scottish Museums Council among other public sector organisations, the council is actively involved in various initiatives to develop arts-based tourism.

Tanker Terminals (Benzene Emmissions)

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the levels of benzene emissions from tanker terminals in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: Benzene is a commodity chemical that has well-recognised toxic and carcinogenic properties and transfers of the chemical itself into tankers of all sorts are undertaken using closed vapour handling systems to prevent emissions leading to unacceptable exposures to the process operators.

Benzene is also a constituent of petrol and its precursor component mixtures. Vapours given off by such materials contain only very low concentrations of benzene which is vented along with the displacement gases during tanker loading. The implementation of the stage 1 petrol vapour recovery directive, formally adopted by the European Union in December 1994, and intended primarily to reduce emissions of ozone precursors, will see the progressive installation of closed vapour handling systems at all road, rail and inland waterway terminals. For shiploading terminals such as Hound point and Braefoot bay, the International Maritime Organisation is negotiating amendments to the MARPOL convention that, once implemented, will extend closed vapour handling systems to ships. An incidental benefit of these changes will be to reduce further the very low levels of benzene emissions arising currently during tanker loading.

Monitoring exercises in the Grangemouth area have detected benzene at levels consistently below 1 part per billion—14-day average. Some at least of this concentration can be attributed to tanker loading, but when compared with the 1ppb air quality target recommended by the expert panel on air quality standards, it is clear that the operation of the tanker terminals in the Grangemouth area has a negligible impact on air quality in that locality.

A recent monitoring exercise carried out around the Braefoot bay terminal during shiploading of natural gasoline, which contains low concentrations of benzene, and is used in petrol formulation, demonstrated that peak concentrations—eight-hour averages—in the Aberdour area were greater in numerical terms than the levels recommended by EPAQS for adoption as annual average air quality concentrations. The panel, in making its recommendation, noted that at concentrations occurring in the ambient atmosphere benzene does not have short-term, or acute, effects. In these circumstances, any carcinogenic effect is attributable to the total intake of the material over a lifetime and short-term peaks are of themselves of little import. Concentrations in the Aberdour area measured at times other than during shiploading of natural gasoline were found to be negligible.

Student Finance

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on guidelines on the award of bursaries and students by the new unitary authorities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The power to award bursaries to further education students is discretionary and it is for the authorities themselves to determine if and how these awards are to be made. Officials from the Scottish Office Education Department, COSLA, and the Employers Association for Further Education Colleges meet periodically to discuss the operation of the guidelines for existing education authorities. I expect such discussions to continue when the new authorities come into existence.

Homelessness

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was the level of additional capital allocations to Scottish local authorities for projects for homelessness people in each of the past five years;

(2) what has been the level of direct Government subsidy to public bodies for tackling homelessness in Scotland in each of the past five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Specific supplementary allocations totalling almost £30 million for homelessness projects have been issued to local authorities in each of the past four years as follows:

1991–92: £7.6 million
1992–93: £15 million
1993–94: £4.35 million
1994–95: £2.62 million

Since March 1993, homelessness has been designated as a national priority for housing investment and some local authorities also received an increase in their mainstream allocations for 1993–94 and 1994–95 based on the homelessness strategies included in their housing capital programmes.

Local social work authorities, new towns, Scottish Homes and health boards also make a contribution to tackling homelessness. Normally, neither mainstream capital allocations nor the substantial grants in aid or other direct central Government subsidies given to public bodies are earmarked for specific activities.

Exceptions to this relating to homelessness are:

	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Hostel housing support grant	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.6	1.6
Urban programme	0.8	0.8	0.9	1.1	1.1

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the age profile of emergency admissions recorded for each health board for the last five years for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As the information requested is rather lengthy, I have arranged for copies of the age profiles to be placed in the Library of the House.

Dourine

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of dourine were reported in each year since 1985.

Sir Hector Monro: No cases of dourine have ever been reported in Scotland.

Equine Infectious Anaemia

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of equine infectious anaemia there have been in each year since 1985.

Sir Hector Monro: There have been no recorded cases of equine infectious anaemia in Scotland over this period.

Robes and Regalia

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy in respect of the availability for use on appropriate ceremonial occasions of robes and regalia used by office holders in the former Scottish boroughs.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* Following local government reform in 1975, ownership of the former burgh councils' civic robes, insignia and so on, passed to the new district councils. However, entitlement to the wearing of robes requires royal approval. The design and use of coats of arms on chains of office and other insignia are matters for the Lord Lyon King of Arms.

Liver Transplants

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many liver transplants were carried out in 1994.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* Thirty-one liver transplants were carried out in 1994.

DEFENCE

Gulf War

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what triggered the nerve agent immobilised alarm detectors alarms on the night of 20–21 January 1991 during Operation Granby.

Mr. Soames: We have found no record of such an incident. There are, however records of an incident in the Al Jubayl area on 19 January 1991 when chemical agent monitor—CAM—and residual vapour detector—RVD—indicated the presence of blister agent—mustard. Nerve agent immobilised enzyme alarm and detector—NAIAD—did not respond, however, thus ruling out the presence of nerve agent.

An immediate follow up by explosive ordnance device—EOD—and chemical reconnaissance teams failed to find any evidence of chemical attack, which if it had taken place, would have included ground contamination, blister is a persistent agent, and weapon debris.

The identity of the compounds which caused the CAM and RVD to alarm on 19 January 1991 is therefore not known. It was assessed that the most likely cause of the incident was a damaged aircraft jettisoning JP4 fuel which is consistent with reports of air activity at the time.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent the administration of nerve agent pre-treatment set, anthrax and plague inoculations would normally require a medical consultation with the patient to determine whether there are counter indications; to what extent these drugs were administered to military personnel involved in the Gulf war without such consultation; and for what reasons.

Mr. Soames: Standard peacetime medical practice is for consent to be obtained before immunisation with any vaccine. Specific details of anti-biological warfare medical counter-measures employed by British forces remain classified. However, in Operation Granby it was policy for vaccines against those biological agents identified as a threat to be made available to service personnel on the standard basis of informed consent. This entailed informing service personnel of the vaccines they were receiving, their purpose and their possible side effects. In the operational circumstances pertaining in the Gulf it is not possible to guarantee that this policy was universally adhered to.

Standard text books on immunisation detail no specific contraindications for the anti-biological warfare vaccines used during Operation Granby.

The universal and regular basis on which the nerve agent pre-treatment set—NAPS—has to be taken do not allow for individual medical consultation. However NAPS is a licensed drug and the safety and efficacy of its active ingredient, pyridostigmine bromide, in giving protection against chemical warfare agents is internationally medically recognised.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when personnel at Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, acknowledged that chemical detectors, nerve agent immobilised alarm detectors and chemical agent monitors, could be activated by substances other than the toxic chemicals they were designed to detect; and by what means military personnel involved in Operation Granby were expected to know when they should use their personal protective equipment;

(2) when a copy of the report by Major John Watkinson, the Officer Commanding 21 EOD squadron, was received by Major Parsons of M.O.1/MoD UK Army and Mr. P. Hearn of Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down; and when the memorandum written by Captain Michael Johnson, Commander of the US 54 Chemical Troop, dated 4 January 1994, was seen by MoD officials;

(3) what assessment the MoD has made of the availability of the plague and anthrax vaccines; and what are their common applications.

Mr. Soames: These are matters for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham S. Pearson to Mr. Peter Robinson, dated 25 January 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking when personnel at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, acknowledged that chemical detectors (NAIAD and CAM) could be activated by substances other than the toxic chemicals they were designed to detect, and by what means military personnel involved in Operation GRANBY were expected to know when they should use their personnel protective equipment has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the British Armed Forces have the most effective protective measures possible against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The staff of the Chemical and Biological Establishment have long recognised that any detection system for chemical warfare agents needs to have appropriate sensitivity and selectivity so as to respond to the chemical warfare agents and to minimise false alarms. The principal route by which chemical warfare agents attack the body is through the respiratory tract although some agents such as mustard and some nerve agents are percutaneously active. The aim in designing an effective detector is to obtain sufficient specificity without reducing sensitivity to a level in which personnel would be exposed to a harmful concentration prior to the detector responding.

4. The British chemical agent detectors such as NAIAD and CAM are designed to be highly specific whilst having a sufficient sensitivity to ensure that those utilising such detectors receive a warning from the detector before they inhale a harmful concentration of chemical warfare agent. Although they like all other chemical warfare agent detectors can respond to substances other than chemical warfare agents, it is important to recognise that these other substances are very unlikely to be present on the battlefield in concentrations sufficient to produce an alarm. In practice, the use of more than one type of detector reduces the chance of possible false alarms whilst retaining an undiminished capability for the detection of chemical warfare agents.

5. Consequently, British Service personnel serving in Operation GRANBY donned their personal protective equipment when they were judged to be under a possible chemical warfare attack. This is known as the Immediate Action Drill and is designed to ensure that Service personnel are protected should they be subjected to an attack in which chemical weapons may be used. Likewise, if a chemical detector such as NAIAD or CAM alarms then full protective equipment is donned. The information relating to the possible attack is then passed to the next high level of command at which a judgement will be made as to whether chemical warfare agents have indeed been used in such an attack. Such a judgement would take into account whether other techniques for detection and monitoring of chemical warfare agents have indicated the presence of a chemical warfare agent or not. The equipment provided to the British Armed Forces to detect and monitor chemical warfare agents is highly effective and is second to none.

Letter from Graham S. Pearson to Mr. Peter Robinson, dated 25 January 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking when a copy of the report by Major John Watkinson, the Officer Commanding 21 EOD Squadron, was received by Major Parsons of M.O.1/MOD UK Army and Mr. P. Hearn of CBDE Porton Down; and when the memorandum written by Captain Michael Johnson, Commander of the US 54th Chemical Troop, dated 4 January 1994, was seen by MOD officials has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The report by 21st EOD Squadron was received in MOD in August 1991 and, in accordance with its recommendations, samples collected in Kuwait City were provided to CBDE Porton Down for analysis.

4. A subsequent note from CBDE Porton Down to the Ministry of Defence dated 23 August 1991, prior to the receipt of the samples, stated that the brown fumes associated with the material, the destruction of the NBC suit material and the burns produced on skin suggests that the material may be fuming nitric acid, a highly corrosive oxidising acid which may be used as a rocket propellant. The damage to the NBC suit material and the brown fumes showed that the material was not liquid mustard.

5. The CBDE analytical report dated 24 September 1991 showed that the samples had a definite yellow/brown colour compared to the original white of the resin and were labelled Sample 1 dated 10 August 1991 and Sample 3 dated 10 August 1991. Analytical results showed that there was a high concentration of nitrate in the sample and a pH that was extremely acidic. Extraction of the resin with dichloromethane and analysis by gas chromatography/mass spectrometry showed the presence of no material of CW interest. The samples were entirely consistent with the contents of the tank being nitric acid and there was no evidence of any CW agent being present.

6. There is no record of a copy of the memorandum by Captain Michael Johnson of the US Army having been received by MOD officials.

Letter from Graham S. Pearson to Mr. Peter Robinson, dated 25 January 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what assessment the MOD has made of the availability of the plague and anthrax vaccines, and what are their common applications has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the British Armed

Forces have the most effective protective measures possible against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare is assessed and the effectiveness of medical countermeasures evaluated.

3. As part of this work, the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment carry out a continuing assessment of the availability and effectiveness of vaccines. Plague and anthrax vaccines are available from a number of countries which include the following:

(a) Plague. This is available from Greer Laboratories in the United States of America and the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories in Australia.

(b) Anthrax. This is available from the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research at Porton Down and the Michigan Department of Public Health in the United States of America.

These vaccines are produced to protect individuals at risk from the respective diseases; these include persons working with these microorganisms in laboratories and the pharmaceutical industry or at risk from the natural occurrence of the disease.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if plague vaccine used during Operation Granby was obtained on a named-patient basis.

Mr. Soames: Details of the specific medical countermeasures employed by British forces against the potential biological warfare threat during Operation Granby remain classified. All vaccines administered to British forces in Operation Granby were offered on the basis of voluntary informed consent. Any vaccines without a United Kingdom product licence were licenced in their country of origin, fully tested in the United Kingdom and cleared for use.

Pyridostigmine Bromide

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if licence No. 4537/0003 for pyridostigmine bromide, 30mg, granted to the MOD by the Medicines Control Agency governs *(a)* by whom the drug is supplied and *(b)* the chemical make up of the drug.

Mr. Soames: Yes. The licence specifies the manufacturer of the active substance as Raschig AG, Germany, and of the finished product as Duphar BV, Holland. The active constituent of the product is listed as pyridostigmine bromide and the other constituents are: pregelatinised starch, maize starch, lactose, colloidal silicon dioxide, talc and magnesium stearate.

Atomic Energy Co-operation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information Her Majesty's Government have received as to the disposition of plutonium sent to the United States under the 1959 amendment to the Anglo-American mutual defence agreement on atomic energy co-operation of 1958, Cmnd 859; and whether all plutonium sent to the United States under this agreement since 1965 was transacted under the barter arrangement.

Mr. Freeman: The disposition of plutonium supplied to the United States under the 1958 agreement is a matter for the United States Government. However, the United States Government gave an assurance in 1964 that plutonium originating from United Kingdom civil reactors would not be used in their weapons programme.

Most plutonium supplied to the United States under the 1958 agreement has been transferred under barter arrangements. However, some plutonium has also been transferred under separate loan arrangements.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what costs are expected to be incurred through the Atomic Control Office in implementing the 10-year extension to the 1958 United States-United Kingdom mutual defence agreement on atomic energy matter, Cm 2686.

Mr. Freeman: The articles of the 1958 mutual defence agreement that were recently amended have little bearing on the work load of the atomic control office, London. The additional costs that will fall to this office as a result of the amendment will therefore be negligible.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out details of the nuclear materials accounting and central arrangements to which the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis) made reference in the *Official Report,* 15 December 1994, column *1237.*

Mr. Freeman: These arrangements involve bookkeeping and auditing systems, similar to those in the civil nuclear industry, to control and monitor movements and inventories of nuclear materials. For reasons of security, it is not our practice to reveal further details of such arrangements.

British Troops (Gorazde)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of British troops in the Bosnian enclave of Gorazde; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: British troops in Gorazde are making a very effective and highly valued contribution to UNPROFOR's efforts to stabilise the situation on the ground and to assist in the delivery of humanitarian aid to the enclave. One of their current priorities is to facilitate the implementation of the four month cessation of hostilities agreement which came into effect on 1 January 1995.

International Military Services Ltd.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what date the staff council was first elected at International Military Services Ltd.; and if it is his general policy to encourage such staff councils.

Mr. Freeman: The MOD's support for staff councils is demonstrated through the long-standing Whitley council arrangements which have existed in their present form since 1956.

The staff of International Military Services Ltd., who were not civil servants, were not covered by the MOD Whitley councils. As a private company, International Military Services made its own arrangements for staff representation. The Ministry of Defence played no part in these arrangements.

Nuclear Co-operation Agreement

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what joint actions are being taken in pursuit of the Anglo-French nuclear co-operation agreement.

Mr. Soames: There is no such agreement. We are, however, developing contacts on defence nuclear matters with France in a number of ways, including the

Franco-British joint commission on nuclear policy and doctrine. The work of the commission has shown an identity of approach between the UK and France on fundamental policy issues. The detail of this work is, of course, confidential between the two Governments.

Joint Services Command

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many acres of land are currently occupied by the Army Command and staff college at Camberley.

Mr. Soames: The staff college at Camberley occupies an enclave within the site of the Royal military academy, Sandhurst. The overall size of the site, including the married quarters, is some 883 acres. In addition, a training area serving the staff college and the academy occupies a further 1,176 acres.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer today from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Combined Cadet Force

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent in 1993–94 to support the Combined Cadet Force in schools; what schools received support; and what was the amount awarded to each school.

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries were caused to pupils taking part in Combined Cadet Force activities in each of the last five years.

Mr. Soames: Available records show that between January 1990 and December 1994 there were no deaths or serious injuries sustained by members of the Combined Cadet Force which were attributable to cadet activities.

Defence Export Services Organisation

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of running the Defence Export Services Organisation; and how many people were employed *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* overseas for each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is as follows:

Numbers employed by DESO:

1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
541	626	662	673	708
			[1]523	[1]542
			[2]150	[2]166

[1] UK based.
[2] Overseas.

Information relating to the breakdown between United Kingdom-based and overseas posts is not available prior to financial year 1993–94. The net cost of the organisation in 1993–94 was £16.02 million. Changes in accounting conventions make exact comparisons difficult with earlier years.

Equipment (Exports)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total value of exports of United Kingdom military equipment to *(a)* all countries and *(b)* developing countries for each of the last five years in (i) cash prices and (ii) constant prices.

Mr. Freeman: Details of the value of exports of defence equipment by geographic region are contained in table 1.1 of "UK Defence Statistics". A copy of the 1994 edition has been placed in the House Library. The figures are published at current prices. There is insufficient data on the prices of such goods to enable satisfactory estimates to be made of defence exports at constant prices.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what deliveries of United Kingdom manufactured arms to Nigeria have taken place since December 1993.

Mr. Freeman: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to publish details of individual exports.

United States Bases

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 19 January, what jurisdiction the Visiting Forces Act 1952 gives to American military personnel to take action against those entering bases to make a peaceful protest; to what extent the powers exceed those of the Ministry of Defence Police; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Visiting Forces Act 1952 does not give United States service personnel jurisdiction to take action against United Kingdom citizens. In accordance with article VII of the NATO status of forces agreement, however, the United States visiting forces are entitled to police premises made available to them in the United Kingdom and, with due regard to United Kingdom law, to take all appropriate measures to ensure the maintenance of order and security on such premises.

United States service personnel do not have more legal powers over United Kingdom citizens in this country than the Ministry of Defence police.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what was the sortie mission, operational height and actual height of the military jet aircraft that overflew the village of Clayton-with-Frickley in South Yorkshire at approximately 09.32 hours on 12 January; if the sortie transgressed the low flying transit area in that locality; what airfield the aircraft took off from; where it landed at the end of its sortie; at which squadron or unit it was based; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: A Tornado aircraft from the Standards Squadron at RAF Cottesmore overflew the village at approximately the time indicated. The aircraft, which was on a routine low flying training sortie; took off from and landed at RAF Cottesmore. We have no reason to believe the aircraft flew below the permitted height of 1000 ft within the low flying transit area.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 26 January 1995

DEFENCE

HMS Victorious

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the reasons for the failure of the launch of HMS Victorious Trident submarine at Barrow-in-Furness.

Mr. Soames: HMS Victorious' departure from Barrow-in-Furness, scheduled for Sunday 15 January, was delayed for two days due to bad weather. A combination of restricted visibility and heavy sea swell meant that the safe passage of the submarine through the shallow and extremely narrow channels at Barrow could not be assured. HMS Victorious was accepted at sea by the Royal Navy yesterday.

Trident

Mr. Temple-Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the cost of the Trident programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: The current estimate of the total project cost of the Trident programme is £11,682 million, if all expenditure, including payments already made, is brought up to current prices and a common exchange rate of £1 = $1.48, as assumed in the long-term costing of the defence programme. If payments already made are expressed at the prices and exchange rates actually incurred, the equivalent estimate is now £9,770 million. Expenditure on the Trident programme to 31 October 1994 represented some 78 per cent. of the overall hybrid estimate.

After allowing for the effects of inflation and exchange rate variations, the revised estimate of £11,682 million represents a real cost reduction of £211 million compared with that announced last year. The increase in cash terms is £51 million. The reduction in real terms since the original 1982 Trident II estimate, including the savings resulting from the decision to have United Kingdom missiles processed at the United States facility at Kings bay, Georgia, now stands at some £3.7 billion.

The proportion of the estimate for work undertaken in the United Kingdom has increased from 70 per cent. to 71 per cent., reflecting the effects of the change in exchange rate, price base and volume changes in the year.

I am pleased to confirm that HMS Vanguard entered operational service in December 1994, achieving the in-service date set when the decision to purchase Trident II was taken in 1982, and that the remainder of the Trident programme remains on schedule. I am, as in previous years, sending to the Chairmen of the Public Accounts Committee and of the Select Committee on Defence a more detailed report on the programme. I am also placing a copy of this report in the Library of the House.

Defence Agency

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about Defence Agency status for the defence dental services and the defence medical supply organisation.

Mr. Soames: Following my announcement in the House on 8 December, in which I confirmed the recommendations made by the "Front Line First" medical study, it has been decided that, in addition to the defence dental services, the defence medical supply organisation is also to be considered as a candidate for agency status under the next steps procedure. An entry to this effect will appear in the February 1995 market testing bulletin and I should welcome comments from interested parties. These should be sent by 10 March either to Air Vice-Marshal J. Mackey RAF, director defence dental services, Ministry of Defence, room 102 Lacon house, Theobalds road, London WC1X 8RY in respect of comments on the Defence Dental Care Agency; or to Mr. G.R. North, deputy director of medical supply, Ministry of Defence, room 134, Lacon house, Theobalds road, London WC1X 8RY in respect of the Defence Health Care Supplies Agency.

Support Vehicles

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about progress in encouraging private sector involvement in the financing, acquisition, management and operation of support vehicles for the armed forces.

Mr. Freeman: Very good progress has been made. A study team is considering a range of possibilities and is consulting widely in the private sector. Over 175 companies have expressed an interest. Yesterday my Department held a very successful briefing seminar for the private sector at Aldershot. The private sector has been asked for proposals, to include radical and innovative ideas, and we will be evaluating these in the coming weeks. We expect to be able to announce the selection of contractors for a number of pilot schemes by the end of this year.

Gulf War

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many British service personnel involved in the Gulf war were administered with the combination of vaccines for anthrax, plague and nerve agent pre-treatment sets;

(2) how many servicemen refused to be administered with drugs and vaccines during Operation Granby.

Mr. Soames: Details relating to biological warfare counter-measures available to British forces remain classified. The nerve agent pre-treatment set—NAPS—tablets were widely issued to British service personnel in areas and units judged to be under threat of chemical attack during Operation Granby. Taking NAPS is a personal responsibility and no information is available on the numbers of personnel, if any, who did not do so.

Junior Medical Officers (RAF)

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the course requirements for junior doctors entering the RAF as junior medical officers in 1989.

Mr. Soames: The course requirements for junior doctors entering the RAF as junior medical officers in 1989 were:

a. Officer training at RAF Cranwell.
b. Initial medical officer training (administration).
c. Initial medical officer training (aviation medicine).

Bullying

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps is he taking to counter bullying among members of the armed forces.

Mr. Soames: My Department takes a very serious view of bullying and it has been made clear throughout the services that such behaviour will not be tolerated.

Measures taken to counter bullying include the publication in July 1994 of the Navy's policy throughout the fleet to remind all ranks that there is an effective policy to deal with bullying. Officers and senior ratings were advised to be alert to the possibility of bullying, and victims were reminded of their rights of complaint.

The Army has banned initiation ceremonies and has established additional posts in its training organisations to allow officers and non-commissioned officers to devote more time to their supervisory role. In 1993, the Army published a discipline and standards paper which included instructions to counter bullying.

The Royal Air Force published a policy letter on bullying and initiation ceremonies in 1989, and similar letters were published in 1992 and 1994. The Royal Air Force produces orders to be read and signed annually by officers and non-commissioned officers which specifically cover bullying. The Royal Air Force's policy on bullying and initiation ceremonies is repeated in quarterly standing orders which all personnel are required to read.

Planned Air Displays

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration underlay the decision to post key members who have planned past RAF premier air displays at Royal Air Force Finningley to Royal Air Force Waddington for a planned air display there on 1 and 2 July; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Preliminary plans drawn up for the purposes of consultation show that, should the decision be taken to close RAF Finningley following formal consultation, the station would not be capable of mounting a major air show in 1995. As the planning period for the air show is lengthy and complex it was decided, after careful consideration, that the air show should, for this year at least, relocate to RAF Waddington to ensure its continuance in the event of the decision being taken to close RAF Finningley. Two experienced staff from RAF Finningley have transferred to RAF Waddington, which has little experience of mounting such a complex event, to assist in the organisation of this year's show.

Market Testing

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all of his Department's medical and health services which *(a)* have been or *(b)* are intended to be market tested; and if he will indicate the outcomes of market testing in those cases where the exercise has been completed.

Mr. Soames: At this stage a number of medical and health services are being considered for competition but none is yet completed. The Department is currently involved in garrison market tests which include health services at Catterick, Aldershot, Salisbury Plain and Colchester and of all primary and secondary health services in British forces, Germany, with the exception of the provision of primary medical and dental care at RAF main operating bases—RAF Bruggen and RAF Laarbruch—and certain other locations remote from the main garrisons. Operational Army medical units are also excluded from the exercise.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the timetable for market testing the services provided by the RAF hospital at Wegberg, Germany.

Mr. Soames: The Department is currently in the process of market testing the provision of health services in Germany, including those provided by the RAF hospital at Wegberg, and hopes to make an announcement on the outcome of this exercise by 31 July 1995.

Security

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement regarding the use of serving military personnel to provide security for private military, security and police exhibitions or conferences.

Mr. Soames: On occasion, service personnel may be provided to outside bodies or organisations on loan, to perform a variety of tasks. This is normally on the basis of full recovery of all the relevant costs involved. Service personnel are not normally provided for security duties at private military, security or police exhibitions and conferences.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the use of serving military personnel to provide security at the recent covert and operation procurement exhibition centre held at Sandown exhibition centre in November 1994; and what costs have been reimbursed by the exhibition organisers to his Department for security provided.

Mr. Soames: I am not aware that any serving military personnel were employed on security duties at the covert and operational procurement exhibition held at the Sandown exhibition centre in November 1994.

Electro-shock Devices

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision or training in the use of electro-shock devices is made in respect of *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Army, and *(c)* special forces; and what guidelines control the deployment and use of such devices.

Mr. Soames: None.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information his Department has in respect of the sale or arrangement of sale of any form of electro-shock weapon or equipment from the United Kingdom to a Gulf state in the last 13 years; and if he will supply details of such transactions.

Mr. Freeman: I am not aware that my Department has any such information.

Aurora Prototype Aircraft

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Aurora prototype aircraft of the United States air force are based at the Machrihanish air force base in Argyll; and for what period permission has been given for basing these aircraft in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: There are no United States air force prototype aircraft based at RAF Machrihanish and no authorisation has been given by Her Majesty's Government to the United States air force, or any other US body, to operate such aircraft within or from the United Kingdom.

Joint Services Command

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what basis he formed the views expressed in paragraph 10g of his consultation paper on the proposed joint services command and staff college about the respective merits of Camberley, Greenwich and Bracknell in respect of *(a)* local schools, *(b)* medical care, *(c)* provision for overseas students, *(d)* shopping and *(e)* other facilities.

Mr. Soames: The basis for paragraph 10g of the consultative document was consideration of the provision of domestic support to the families of students at the proposed joint services command and staff college. The availability of common facilities which can be used by a large proportion of the students' families would help in establishing a sense of community within both the college and its associated married quarters. This would be of particular benefit to the families of overseas students.

As explained in paragraph 10f of the consultative document, the married quarters serving Bracknell and Camberley are compact and relatively close to the colleges themselves and the extensive nearby facilities. By contrast, the married quarters serving Greenwich are dispersed and some distance from the college itself; the likelihood of families benefiting from common local facilities is therefore much lower.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the report from Building Design Partnership on the refurbishment costs and implications of works at Greenwich necessary to accommodate the proposed joint services command and staff college.

Mr. Soames: The Building Design Partnership option study report into the siting of a joint services command and staff college contains both information that is classified and which comprises advice to Ministers. It would therefore be inappropriate to place a copy in the Library of the House.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in undertaking the financial appraisal of options for the proposed joint services command and staff college, what assumption was made about the sale value of the Camberley site; and what figure has been included for this in the estimated costs of locating the college at Greenwich.

Mr. Soames: This information is commercially confidential.

Amport House

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the sale of Amport house.

Mr. Soames: We announced, as part of the defence costs study our intention to form a tri-service chaplains' school. A study is at present under way to determine the location of the school, and Amport house is one of the sites under consideration. No decisions have yet been made. If Amport house was not selected as the site for the school, and no alternative defence uses were identified for it, our intention would be to sell it on the open market in the normal way.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what actions and measures his Department has implemented in support of article 1 of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Soames: The nuclear non-proliferation treaty is the cornerstone of international efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. My Department fully complies with the terms of article 1 of the NPT and works closely with other Government Departments to enforce export licensing procedures. This includes contributing to the work of the Zangger committee and the nuclear suppliers group.

Firearms (Trade Missions)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information his Department has in respect of and in what ways it is supporting trade missions to Latin American countries in January and February; what is the involvement of such trade missions in the sale or arrangement for sale of items classified under section 5 (1) *(b)* of the Firearms Act 1968; and if he will list the items which are so classified.

Mr. Freeman: There are no Ministry of Defence supported trade missions visiting Latin America in January or February 1995.

Tugboat Rotesand

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about his Department's decision to engage the tugboat Rotesand for use at Devonport in Plymouth.

Mr. Freeman: The tug Rotesand was chartered to provide assured continuity of in-port services at Devonport during a period when two Devonport-based tugs of the Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service were deployed to Barrow-in-Furness to assist the departure of HMS Victorious. The Rotesand was chartered on the open market and was the cheapest suitable tug available. The charter was originally for one week from 10 January but this was extended to 27 January after severe weather prevented the timely return of the RMAS tugs to Devonport.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work has been undertaken by the tugboat Rotesand since its arrival at Plymouth; and how many times it has been used.

Mr. Freeman: The tug Rotesand assisted HMS Westminster into port on 12 January. For the rest of the charter period it provided emergency cover for the safety of vessels at Devonport.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated total cost to his Department of hiring the tugboat Rotesand for use at Devonport in Plymouth; and if he will provide a breakdown of the costs.

Mr. Freeman: The charter costs are commercially confidential.

Atomic Weapons Establishment, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has had with the chief executive of the Atomic Weapons Establishment concerning the diversification of AWE Cardiff into production outside nuclear warhead production; and what efforts have been made in this regard.

Mr. Freeman: There have been continuing discussions between my Department and the managing contractor about diversification of work at the AWE Cardiff site, and my Department remains prepared to consider proposals for alternative work there.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Service

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether the Government are yet in a position to respond to consultation on the White Paper, "The Civil Service, Continuity and Change", CM 2627, and to the fifth report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, Session 1993–94, on the role of the civil service, HC 27; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to introduce a code of ethics concerning the operation of the civil service.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government are publishing today a Command Paper, Cm 2748, taking forward the policies on the civil service set out in last July's White Paper "The Civil Service: Continuity and Change", Cm 2627. The command paper incorporates the Government's response to the fifth report of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee, "The Role of the Civil Service", HC(1992–94). It also takes account of other responses to the invitation to comment on the proposals in "Continuity and Change". Comments were received from 50 individuals and organisations. Copies of the responses where confidentiality was not requested have been placed in the Library of the House.

In "Continuity and Change", the Government re-affirmed their commitment to the maintenance of a permanent civil service, based on the values of integrity, political impartiality, objectivity, selection and promotion on merit and accountability through Ministers to Parliament. This commitment has been widely welcomed—and was equally emphasised by the Select Committee in its report. The Government also welcome the Select Committee's belief that

> "the commitment of the overwhelming majority of civil servants to the principle and practice of a politically impartial Civil Service is undiminished".

The Command Paper announces further measures to underpin these values.

The Government have accepted the Select Committee's recommendation for a new civil service code, to apply to all civil servants and summarising the constitutional framework within which civil servants work and the values they are expected to uphold. A draft code, suggesting the changes which the Government think necessary to the text proposed by the Select Committee, with an associated commentary, is published in the Command Paper as a basis for further consultation. The proposed code incorporates, as recommended by the Select Committee, a new independent line of appeal to the civil service commissioners in cases of alleged breaches of the code or issues of conscience which cannot be resolved through internal procedures.

The Government also intend to enhance the role of the civil service commissioners as guardians of the principle of selection on merit. They will be responsible for the interpretation of the principles of fair and open competition on merit for all civil service recruitment. The commissioners will be responsible for approving all appointments from outside the civil service to the new senior civil service; and the next first civil service commissioner is to be given a new role in monitoring senior internal appointments. Consequently he or she will not hold the post as a serving civil servant.

The Command Paper re-emphasises the Government's commitment to maintaining the civil service as a good employer, ensuring equality of opportunity, maintaining a predominantly career civil service, and to the training and development of all staff. It also confirms the Government's intention to proceed with the other approaches set out in "Continuity and Change" to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service, including the delegation of pay and grading below senior levels to Department, and the introduction of efficiency plans in place of the centrally-driven "Competing for Quality" programme; to establish the proposed new senior civil service; to carry out senior management reviews in all Departments to introduce new pay arrangements for the senior civil service, including permanent secretaries; and to introduce contracts for all senior civil servants.

The Government are also publishing today detailed responses to the "Review of Recruitment Responsibilities" and the "Review of Fast Stream Training" which were published in parallel with Cm 2627. Copies of the responses have been placed in the Library of the House.

The command paper charts a clear course for the civil service. The Government believe that Parliament, the public and particularly the civil service itself should be encouraged by the degree of agreement on the way forward, reflected in the very considerable sharing of views on key issues between the Government and the Select Committee, as well as by those who have given evidence to the Select Committee and have commented on the White Paper. There is wide recognition of the work of the civil service, the values it upholds and the progress it has made in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the services it provides. This offers an excellent foundation on which to move ahead.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them published periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. David Hunt: I am responsible for six agencies: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Central Office of Information, Chessington Computer Centre (Chessington), Civil Service College, Occupational Health Service and Recruitment and Assessment Services. The details requested concern mostly operational matters and I have asked the chief executives to reply directly.

HMSO and COI are individual departments as well as being agencies. They already had their own headquarters and were self-contained for support staff.

The other agencies are parts of the Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service and Science. All had their own headquarters buildings and were self contained for support services or very nearly so. Four additional support posts were created when they were launched as agencies. Since that time there have been further changes in the agencies to reflect levels of business and efficiency and productivity gains.

Within the Cabinet Office, excluding the agencies, there are now 25 fewer support staff than immediately prior to the launch of the first OPSS agency in 1989.

Letter from E. C. McCloy to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 26 January 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. Robert Hughes) has asked me to provide, for my Agency, the information requested in your Parliamentary Question to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster about certain costs which might have been incurred by his Executive Agencies.

Since its inception in 1986, the structure and organisation of the Civil Service Occupational Health Service (OHS) has undergone little change. Between 1986 and 1990, when OHS achieved Agency status, it functioned as a free-standing unit within the Cabinet Office (Office of the Minister for the Civil Service). In 1989, the Headquarters was transferred from London to our present offices in Edinburgh as part of the government's programme of dispersal of Civil Service jobs. No additional costs were incurred resulting from the change.

Since 1990 the only addition to our support staff numbers has been the equivalent of one Executive Officer post which was added to our strength to take over accommodation and general support duties which had previously been undertaken by the Cabinet Office.

There are two or three editions, in each year, of a journal called "Health at Work" which is aimed at promoting health and safety within the Civil Service. The cost of each edition is approximately £9,000. "Health at Work" replaced previous journals which had been published before we attained Agency status.

Our logo was designed in 1987 before we became an Agency and our headed stationery also dates from that time.

We have no executive cars or corporate clothing.

Letter from Michael D. Geddes to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

There are two areas of the question that apply to Recruitment and Assessment Services (RAS).

In 1991 RAS paid a one-off sum of £20,000 to produce a corporate image for the Agency. This included choosing a name, logo design and preparation of a design manual with specifications for future use, ie a house style.

To supplement the use of the logo, RAS uses corporate stationery for a regular newsletter (Radius), for marketing and for tender documentation. This has cost £11,000 over the period late 1993 to date.

Letter from R. N. Edwards to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

Chessington Computer Centre is an Agency of the Office of Public Service and Science. I have been asked to respond to you directly on the Parliamentary Question tabled on the costs of Agency. The costs were as follows:-

Headquarter Buildings—Nil, Chessington is wholly located at its single site in Surrey.

Support Staff—No additional support staff were added to the Chessington complement on becoming an Agency.

Periodical Journals—Chessington produces quarterly Newsletters to its customers. These were produced at a cost of £6261 in 1993/94, Chessington's first year as an Agency.

Executive Cars—Nil.

Logos—Chessington paid an amount of £5150 for professional consultancy and artwork in adopting a new logo as it became an Agency.

Corporate Clothing—Nil.

Cost of Specially designed Stationery—£7,500 in 1994/5. This included binders folders; headed stationery; compliment slips etc.

Letter from Stephen Hickey to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the expenditure incurred by the Civil Service College since it has been a Next Steps agency. I will cover the points in the order that you raised them:

Headquarter building

The College's main centre has been at Sunningdale Park since it was formed in 1971. No additional office accommodation has been created at Sunningdale because of the College becoming an agency. The current rent paid by the College totals £1.2 million per annum covering all the teaching, residential and office accommodation.

Support staff

Three additional support staff were employed as a result of the College taking on new roles when it became an agency. Other increases in staffing since 1989 have been a result of the College's continuing success at expanding its business.

Periodic journals

We do not publish any periodic journals.

Executive cars

We do not have any executive cars.

Logos

The College has commissioned no specially designed logos since it became an agency.

Corporate clothing

The College issues no corporate clothing.

Corporate stationery

The College expects to spend £75,000 this financial year on corporate stationery. This includes headed letter paper, envelopes, ring binders, document wallets and financial stationery. All of these would have been required as part of the College's normal business, whether or not, it was an agency.

Letter from Paul Freeman to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

I have been asked by The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to reply to your question concerning expenditure by Next Steps Agencies.

As well as being an Agency reporting to the Chancellor, HMSO is also a department in its own right and has been a Trading Fund since 1980. Assumption of Agency status in 1988 did not therefore represent a dramatic change.

HQ accommodation. HMSO has 2 Headquarters buildings in Norwich. A 40-year lease was obtained on Sovereign House in 1968 with an annual rental of £97,000. St Crispins, which was previously leased, was purchased for £6 million in 1986. This pre-dates Agency status.

Support staff. Support staff have reduced from 600 to 450 since HMSO became an Agency in 1988.

Periodicals. The only 'periodical' produced by HMSO is an in-house magazine for staff communications. This pre-dates Agency status, and currently costs around £24,000 per annum.

Cars. HMSO has one vehicle which serves both as an executive car and as a delivery vehicle for sensitive documents. It costs £10,000 per annum, and pre-dates Agency status.

Logo. HMSO has a simple logo which is designed and developed by our own design team many years ago. The cost, which was modest, is not readily available.

Corporate clothing. The only clothing purchased by HMSO is protective clothing for messengers and some reprographic staff. £5,000 was spent in 1994.

Stationery. Headed stationery has always been used by HMSO but the extraction of this detail from the overall printing and stationery budget is not possible.

Letter from Mike Devereau to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

You asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for various figures and costs associated with Next Steps agencies.

As these relate to operational matters I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Central Office of Information.

COI was established as an Executive Agency on 5 April 1990. However, it is a Department in its own right and its operations have never been conducted within any other department.

In answer to your specific questions:

COI has not acquired any new headquarters accommodation since its establishment as an Executive Agency; indeed, headquarters accommodation holdings have reduced by 1182.3 square metres (10.57%) between 1989/90 and 1993/94.

No new support staff have been required. Staff costs fell by 14.47% between 1989/90 and 1993/94 without any reduction in the span of activities performed.

COI publishes a house magazine "Inform", the primary function of which is staff communication. The current annual cost is £25,000.

COI has no executive cars.

The COI logo is updated from time to time. The last significant change was made in 1990 at a cost of £10,000.

Appropriate clothing for Receptionists and Porter/Messengers has been provided since the Department was set up in 1946. Annual cost is less than £1000.

As a Department COI has always had to provide its own stationery. Any necessary changes in design are introduced when new stocks are printed and additional costs are avoided.

In the four years since COI became an Executive agency it has achieved efficiency savings of £56.4m (18.1%).

I hope that this information meets your needs.

University Research

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what percentage of gross domestic product was devoted to the public funding of university research in *(a)* Britain, *(b)* the USA and *(c)* France from 1981 to 1992; and what are the corresponding figures for each country for annual percentage growth in real GDP.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The information requested is shown in the following table.

International comparisons of expenditure on higher education research are of questionable significance, because of the large structural differences in the make-up of this sector between countries.

	Government funding of higher education R and D			*Annual percentage growth in real GDP*		
	United Kingdom	*United States of America*	*France*	*United Kingdom*	*United States of America*	*France*
	Percentage of GDP			*Percentage change year on year*		
1981	0.26	0.31	0.31	1.7	–2.2	2.3
1982	0.26	0.31	0.32	3.8	3.6	0.7
1983	0.26	0.31	0.32	2.5	6.7	1.5
1984	0.26	0.31	0.33	3.5	3.1	1.8
1985	0.27	0.32	0.33	4.4	2.8	2.4
1986	0.27	0.34	0.32	4.7	3.1	2.2
1987	0.27	0.36	0.32	5.0	4.0	4.2
1988	0.26	0.36	0.32	2.2	2.7	3.8
1989	0.25	0.37	0.32	0.4	0.8	2.4
1990	0.25	0.37	0.33	–2.3	–1.1	0.7
1991	0.25	0.38	0.34	–0.4	2.5	1.4
1992	0.25	0.39	0.35	2.0	2.8	-0.8

Sources: OECD Main Science and Technology Indicators.
(Real GDP calculated using OECD implicit GDP price indices, 1985=100).

Decision Making

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has for increasing the openness of decision making *(a)* in the national health service and *(b)* generally in 1995.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has already consulted on a draft code of openness for the national health service, the final version of which will be published during 1995. One of the stated aims of the code is to provide people with an explanation of service changes in the NHS and give

them the opportunity to influence decisions on such changes.

The Government remain committed to the principles of transparency and openness laid down in the White Paper on open government. We are currently preparing a report for Parliament on Departments' experience of the first nine months of operation of the code of practice on access to Government information. This will help us to assess its impact.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Disabled People (Court Access)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department who is responsible for ensuring that court buildings are adequately accessible to disabled people.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor, through his officials, is responsible for ensuring that court buildings are accessible to disabled people. It is the Department's policy that the design of a court should enable disabled people to have access to and around the building appropriate to their functions there. Subject to resources and building constraints, every effort is made to improve access and facilities in existing courts.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Donald Anderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his estimate of the cost of training and retraining *(a)* justices of the peace and *(b)* members of the professional judiciary in respect of the provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The estimate of the cost of training justices of the peace and members of the professional judiciary in respect of the provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 was given in a written answer to the House on 27 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *658*, as approximately £250,000. As subsequent training was included in the general training of magistrates and judges, the cost cannot be separately identified.

PRIME MINISTER

British Association of Sheep Exporters

Mr. Morley: To ask the Prime Minister what meetings with the British Association of Sheep Exporters he has had since 1994.

The Prime Minister: None.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on documents made available in the United States of America following the ending of the Pan Am insurers' appeal to the Supreme Court in relation to the loss of the airliner over Lockerbie; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The document in question quotes a source relying on

"second and third party information"

and stating that the former Iranian interior minister paid $10 million to have the Lockerbie bombing carried out. Allegations to this effect were first made early in the investigation; they were examined at the time by the competent authorities, together with a great deal of other often contradictory material, but no evidence has been found to substantiate them. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate remains satisfied that the evidence supports the charges against the two accused and that there is no evidence to establish that other persons or nations were involved.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 26 January.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 26 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Straw: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *275*, if he will place in the Library a list of the offices of Government Departments and next steps agencies in the west country and Bristol.

The Prime Minister: A list of Government Departments and next steps agencies which have offices in the west country and Bristol has been placed in the Library of the House.

Regional Offices

Mr. Straw: To ask the Prime Minister how many Government Departments and agencies' have regional offices in each of the standard regions of England; and how many people are so employed in each region.

The Prime Minister: Twenty-seven Government Departments and 50 next steps agencies have offices in the economic planning regions of England.

Information on the number of civil service employed in each region, including their agencies, is contained in "Civil Service Statistics" 1994 edition, table 3, a copy of which is in the Library.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received concerning the impact of reduced activity by the Countryside Council for Wales on the commitment arising form the biodiversity convention under the Rio treaty; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have received two such representations. The Government remain committed to the convention on biological diversity signed in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992.

Channel Islands

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what discussions have taken place with the authorities on the Channel Islands regarding the 50th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany;

(2) if he will make arrangements as part of the 50th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany for memorials to be put up in the Channel Islands in memory of those who were deported and died as a result of the German occupation;

(3) if it is intended for him and the heads of Government invited for the 50th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany to pay homage in Alderney to the memory of those who were used as slave labour and died in the camps.

The Prime Minister: As internally self-governing dependencies of the Crown, the Channel Islands are themselves taking the lead in organising celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of their liberation from war-time occupation, on 9 and 10 May. I am pleased to say that, following discussions between the relevant authorities here and in the islands, HRH the Prince of Wales will represent Her Majesty the Queen at the celebrations, and units of our armed services will take part in them.

It is for the authorities and people of each island to decide on the setting up of memorials. In both Jersey and Guernsey there are already plaques commemorating those who died during the second world war, including deportees, and in Alderney there is a long-standing memorial dedicated to the memory of those prisoners who died in labour camps on the island, at which an inter-denominational service is held annually. The states of Jersey and Guernsey have each commissioned public memorials of the 50th anniversary of the liberation.

It would not be feasible for me and the heads of state or Government invited to the commemorations of the 50th anniversary of VE Day in London on 6 and 7 May to visit Alderney.

Nursery Education

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effect on his policy for the expansion of nursery education of the Government policy on the enactment of the Nursery Education (Assessment of Need) Bill of Session 1993–4; and to which provisions of the Bill Her Majesty's Government remains opposed.

The Prime Minister: There is no need for the provisions of the Nursery Education (Assessment of Need) Bill. We are already committed to providing, over time, a pre-school place for all four year-olds whose parents wish to take it up. We want to promote choice and diversity by building on the existing wide range of providers, including the private and voluntary sectors.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make it his policy not to authorise the detention of any asylum seeker who has entered the United Kingdom illegally but whose application for asylum has not been determined; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will instruct immigration officers that they do not have powers to compel an illegal entrant to submit to examination and to be detained for that purpose; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: These questions raise issues which are currently being considered by the Court of Appeal and the court's judgement will be given very careful consideration once it is received. In the meantime, it is not proposed to change our current general practice.

Director General of the Prison Service

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the contract of the Director General of the Prison Service comes up for renewal; what criteria will be used to decide whether his contract should be renewed; and who will take that decision.

Mr. Howard: The appointment of the Director General of the Prison Service was made for three years in the first instance from 6 January 1993, extendable to five years by agreement between him and the Department. It will be for me, on the advice of the permanent secretary, to take the decision on whether the director general should be offered an extension of his contract.

Mrs. Qureshian Bibi

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when, last year, the United Kingdom post in Islamabad requested a sponsor interview concerning the application by Mrs. Qureshian Bibi to enter the United Kingdom, GV100/25109; when a second request from the ECO in Islamabad for a sponsor interview was received; and when the sponsor is going to be interviewed.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The first request from the British High Commission in Islamabad for an interview with Mr. Rangzeb was received by the Home Office on 14 July 1994. There is no record of a further request having been received. The immigration service at Leeds Bradford airport will shortly contact Mr. Rangzeb to offer him an appointment for an interview on 5 February.

Emergency Calls (Response Times)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time taken for *(a)* the Metropolitan police and *(b)* the London Fire Brigade to arrive at the scene following an emergency 999 call.

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that during the period of three months from October to December 1994 the average time taken by the Metropolitan police to respond to a 999 call was 11 minutes 23 seconds.

In 1992, the latest year for which the information is available centrally, the average response time to fire incidents for the London fire brigade was six minutes. This information is based on response times for fires involving occupied buildings, casualties or rescues and certain other types of fire.

Electro-shock Equipment

Mr.Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what permission has been given at any time to the companies *(a)* CAZ and *(b)* International Procurement Services to hold or trade in any form of electro-shock equipment in the last 15 years.

Mr. Maclean: None.

Stop and Search

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the relationship between the number of stops and searches carried out by police services and the remuneration allocated to *(a)* police divisions/areas or *(b)* individual police officers.

Mr. Maclean: None whatsoever.

Criminal Offences

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the criminal offences that have been introduced by regulations or directives from the European Union in 1994.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Infanticide

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children were killed by their parents in each year since 1984.

Mr. Maclean: The following table shows the number of offences recorded as homicide in England and Wales, as at 5 August 1994, where children under the age of 16 years were killed by their parents:

Year	*Number*
1984	62
1985	72
1986	36
1987	55
1988	76
1989	44
1990	49
1991	68
1992	52
1993	50

Figures for 1994 are not yet available.

Secure Remands (Juveniles)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 13 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *566–67*, when he will reach a decision on defraying the costs of local authorities accommodating juveniles subject to court-ordered secure remands; and at what stage discussions have reached on this subject.

Mr. Maclean: This work is at an early stage. I have yet to embark on discussions with interested parties. I shall make a decision once the discussions have been concluded.

Parkhurst Prison

Mr. Hoyle : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who provided him with the information that members of the Prison Officers Association were instructed not to co-operate with the police inquiry at Her Majesty's prison, Parkhurst; and what evidence he has that they did not do so.

Mr. Howard: I received this information, and evidence that some members of the POA did not co-operate with the police inquiries into the escapes from Parkhurst on 3 January 1995, from the police.

Inquests (Legal Expenses)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what authority or vote appropriation Her Majesty's Government made available funds to assist or defray the legal expenses incurred by the relatives of the King's Cross and Clapham disasters at the relevant inquests; and if similar provisions could be made available to the relatives of the victims of the Marchioness disaster at the resumed inquest.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

The costs of legal representation for the relatives who attended the inquests into the King's Cross and Clapham disasters were met by London Transport and British Rail respectively. Generally, relatives' costs are not met in inquests or fatal accident inquiries. The proceedings are informal and are concerned with facts surrounding a death rather than issues such as civil or criminal liability. Legal representation is usually unnecessary. We therefore do not consider that it would be appropriate, or necessary, for the Government to underwrite the legal costs of the families' attending the inquest into the Marchioness disaster.

TREASURY

Royal Mint

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress is being made on the Royal Mint's review of the coinage.

Mr. Nelson: The Mint has consulted the general public and organisations representing people with special interests, for example, the blind and the elderly, as well as major coin users or handlers. The formal consultation period ended on 31 December 1994 and the analysis of the results is now underway. My right hon. and learned Friend expects to be able to make an announcement on the results of the review in the spring.

Personal Allowance

Ms. Rachel Squire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated cost of extending the additional personal allowance to married women with dependent children who have husbands who are mentally incapacitated or mentally infirm.

Sir George Young: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Inflation Target

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to reduce the

Government's inflation target of 1 to 4 per cent for the retail prices index excluding mortgage payments in RPIX;

(2) what is his target for the underlying rate of inflation, RPIX, after the current Parliament; and what plans he has to specify a narrow sub-range for this target.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Government's aim is to keep underlying inflation, as measured by the RPI excluding mortgage interest payments, in the range 1 to 4 per cent., and to bring it down in the lower half of this range by the end of the present Parliament.

The Government remain committed to keeping inflation permanently low.

The target for after the current Parliament will be announced in due course.

Bank of England (Meetings)

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the forward dates of his monthly monetary meeting with the Governor of the Bank of England.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The monthly monetary meetings I hold with the governor are generally held in the first week of each month, but the precise dates are only confirmed one month in advance in the monthly monetary report.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidelines are operated by his Department as regards the use of executive search agencies to fill vacancies within his Department and his Department's executive agencies; and in what circumstances his Department employs executive search agencies instead of relying fully on departmental resources to fill vacant posts.

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury refers to central guidance on the use of executive search agencies. Decisions on when to recruit and the method of recruitment are taken in the light of the overall staffing requirements of the Department.

National Lottery

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his assessment of the total net annual change in Government tax revenues as a consequence of the introduction of the national lottery.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The 12 per cent. duty rate was set so as to have no effect on tax revenues.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Rwanda Refugees

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure humanitarian aid is effectively delivered in the refugee camps in Rwanda and Zaire.

Mr. Baldry: We keep in close touch with non-governmental organisations and the United Nations agencies working in the refugee camps in neighbouring countries and the camps for internally displaced within Rwanda. An ODA assessment and monitoring mission visited the region last week.

Steps taken to improve effective delivery include targeted distribution of food aid to family units. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees plans a comprehensive registration exercise in early February.

Pergau Dam

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what means subcontracts were allocated on the Pergau dam project; and how many British firms benefited from the allocation of subcontracts on the project.

Mr. Baldry: Sub contracts were let by the main contractor, Kerjaya Balfour Beatty Cementation. A list of the main subcontractors, vendors, plant and spares suppliers and main material suppliers was presented to the Foreign Affairs Committee in connection with its inquiry into the Pergau project, Cm 271–11, pages 80 to 85. One hundred and eighty-one British firms were involved in the project.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Corporate Manslaughter Charges

Ms Walley: To ask the Attorney-General what proposals he has to review the decision by the Crown Prosecution Service not to pursue a charge of corporate manslaughter against Fewston Transport Ltd. and H. G. Pheasey.

The Attorney-General: The evidence in relation to an incident on 6 September 1993 involving a vehicle owned by Fewston Transport Ltd. was considered by the Crown Prosecution Service at the conclusion of the police investigation and again after the inquest taking account of the evidence given to the coroner. On both occasions the Crown Prosecution Service concluded that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute the company for manslaughter.

Herbert Graham Pheasey was a sole trader who owned a vehicle involved in an incident on 22 May 1992 as the result of which the driver, Robert Edward Marsden, was prosecuted for and convicted of causing death by reckless driving. The evidence did not justify proceedings for manslaughter against Herbert Graham Pheasey.

The two cases were not in any way connected.

The CPS is not aware of any material which would justify further reconsideration of either case.

Ms Walley: To ask the Attorney-General how many corporate manslaughter charges were brought against heavy goods vehicle operators in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service maintains no central records of proceedings in respect of specific offences. The information is recorded

on individual cases files, and a definitive answer could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. It is however the recollection of senior Crown prosecution lawyers that there have been no such cases.

ENVIRONMENT

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many parliamentary questions he has referred to chief executives of next steps agencies in each year since 1992.

Mr. Gummer: The information is as follows:

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Building Research Establishment	4	0	0	1
Planning Inspectorate	4	1	3	0
The Buying Agency	4	0	0	1
Ordnance Survey	4	2	2	1
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	4	0	0	0
Security Facilities Executives	—	—	0	0

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the occasions on which Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has informed his Department in each year since 1979 of the discovery of illicitly dumped nuclear materials, giving details of locations, quantities and types of materials involved.

Mr. Atkins: Approximately 900kgs of depleted uranium was discovered at Poplars farm, Chelveston, Northamptonshire in January this year. The inspectorate is carrying out an investigation of the circumstances.

A review of the inspectorate's records, covering the period 1979 to date, reveals no other incidents of illicitly dumped radioactive materials.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what records and maps are kept indicating *(a)* the radioactive inventory, *(b)* nature and *(c)* the exact location of low level radioactive wastes disposed of on authorised landfill sites; and to what extent this information is publicly available.

Mr. Atkins: Records of disposals are maintained by disposers in accordance with the conditions of authorisations granted under the provisions of the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. The quantities consigned for burial at those sites currently receiving such wastes are listed in the answer I gave to the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) on 25 January, *Official Report*, column *206*.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is planning to extend the chemical release inventory, which is maintained by the inspectorate and is the subject of published reports, to include details of radioactive disposals.

The exact location of each deposit within a landfill site is not significant in determining the radiological safety of this practice and it is not usual for such records to be kept.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the volume of low level radioactive waste disposed at *(a)* Milton landfill, Cambridge, *(b)* ICI Ltd., Cowpen Bewley Tip, Cleveland, *(c)* Vickers waste ponds, Walney island, Cumbria, *(d)* Rolls-Royce, Hilts quarry, Derbyshire, *(e)* Magnesium Elektron, Swinton, Manchester, *(f)* Cilgwyn quarry, Caernarfon, Gwynedd, *(g)* Braziers landfill, Hertfordshire, *(h)* SCM Chemicals, site tip, Humberside, *(i)* Clifton Marsh, Preston, Lancashire, *(j)* Sefton Meadows tip, Merseyside, *(k)* Beighton tip Sheffield, South Yorkshire, *(l)* Beddingham quarry, Sussex, *(m)* Ryton tip, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, *(n)* BNFL, Drigg, Cumbria, *(o)* BNFL Sellafield, Cumbria, and *(p)* Ulnes Walton in the last 12-month period for which figures are available.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 19 January 1995]:* The volume of low level radioactive waste disposed at the listed sites is as follows:

Site	*Volume M*[3]	*Period* [1]
Milton Landfill	83	1993
Cowpen Bewley	52	1993–94
Vickers	less than 1	1994
Hilts Quarry	37	1994
Magnesium Elektron	1,750	1994
Cilgwyn Quarry	less than 1	1993
Braziers landfill	15	1993
SCM Chemicals	0	1994
Clifton Marsh	0	1994
Sefton Meadows	0	1994
Beighton Tip	20	1994
Beddingham Quarry	4.5	1993
Ryton Tip	0	1994
BNFL Drigg	23,185	1993
BNFL Sellafield	0	1994
Ulnes Walton	0	1994

[1] These are calendar years, other than at Cowpen Bewley where the disposal figures are for the financial year.

Docklands Light Railway

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, what is the fare box ratio of the revenue costs of operating the docklands light railway and the appropriate level of public support and total costs per passenger mile for operating that railway in the last financial year.

Sir Paul Beresford: The ratio between the revenue costs and the farebox of the docklands light railway was 4.3:1 in the last financial year. The total cost per passenger mile was 78p, of which 18p was supported by revenue and 60p was covered by public subsidy.

Kirklees Council

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will outline the spending by Kirklees council on *(a)* education, *(b)* social services and *(c)* highways in relation to those functions' individual standard spending assessments in 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information is as follows:

Kirklees Council

£ million

	1993–94 (Outturn)		*1994–95 (budget estimate)*	
	SSA	*Expenditure*[1]	*SSA*	*Expenditure*[1]
Education	140.873	142.755	138.275	146.614
Personal social services	38.863	35.503	42.814	43.400
Highways maintenance	13.454	12.536	12.365	13.048

[1] Net Revenue Expenditure to compare with SSA

Surrey County Council

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list Surrey county council's *(a)* standard spending assessment and *(b)* actual expenditure on social services in each year since 1991–92; and what will be (i) the standard spending assessment and (ii) the budgeted expenditure for 1994–95.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information is as follows:

Surrey County Council

£ million

	Personal Social Services[1]	
	Standard spending assessment	*Expenditure*[2]
1991–92	71.410	[3]58.831
1992–93	78.371	[3]69.467
1993–94	82.152	[3]72.231
1994–95	94.880	[4]89.086

[1] Figures reflect the transfer of responsibilities for community care to local authorities in 1993–94 and 1994–95.
[2] Net Revenue Expenditure to compare with SSA.
[3] Outturn.
[4] Budget.

Merseyside Development Corporation

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what considerations underlay the decision of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), to give a detailed reply to the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) on 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *411–12*, on the subject of the Merseyside development corporation rather than to wait until his Department was able to issue a Treasury minute in response to the Committee.

Sir Paul Beresford: The question asked by the hon. Member for Wallasey referred to the position of the chairman and chief executive of the corporation. My reply addressed that issue, which was not raised in the conclusions or recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee report. It also referred to the action already taken to address shortcomings in financial management following the publication of the National Audit Office report in March 1994. Those actions are on the record and are summarised in paragraph 51 of the PAC report.

The Government's response to the PAC report will be made shortly in the normal way.

Northumberland County Council

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the level of local government expenditure in Northumberland county council in each year since 1988.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information is as follows. The figures are not adjusted for changes in local authority functions, of which the most significant were, in 1993–94, the loss of responsibility for further education and the addition of responsibility for community care.

Northumberland County Council expenditure[1]

£ million

1988–89	[2]140.44
1989–90	154.170
1990–91	161.481
1991–92	178.739
1992–93	190.553
1993–94	185.770
1994–95	191.127

[1] Total expenditure 1988–89 to 1989–90. Net revenue expenditure 1990–91 to 1994–95.
[2] Outturn expenditure 1988–89 to 1993–94; budgeted expenditure for 1994–95.

Dioxins

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he is taking to eradicate dioxin pollution in the Bolsover and north Derbyshire area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The industrial processes which have been identified as the most significant potential sources of dioxin production are now either subject to control under part I of the Environments Protection Act 1990 or are about to transfer to this control from earlier legislation. These processes are regulated either by the local authorities under the local authority air pollution control procedure or are controlled by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution using integrated pollution control. Both these regulatory regimes require the application of best available techniques not entailing excessive cost — BATNEEC—to prevent the discharge of dioxins and only where that is not practicable to minimise and render harmless the discharges. For the processes controlled by HMIP, work is already progressing well to require companies to achieve substantial reductions in discharges to all media. Where appropriate, process changes are being sought to eliminate the releases.

Reductions in the level of dioxin pollution already in the environment are being studied. Substantial reductions in the level of dioxin on plants in the Bolsover area have already been reported. It is expected that tighter emission controls on the industrial processes will allow this trend to continue. Dioxin already in the soil is subject to slow degradation by natural processes.

Business Rates

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the average percentage change in business rates in 1995–96 as a result of the recent revaluation of rateable values for *(a)* shops, *(b)* offices, *(c)* warehouses, *(d)* factories and *(e)* other premises in each region; and what is his assessment of change for all property types in each region.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested is given in the tables below which show estimated average changes in rates bills both before and after the effects of the Government's transitional arrangements are taken into account. They reflect the impact of the 1995 revaluation and also of the cessation of the previous transitional arrangements from which some ratepayers were still benefitting in 1994–95.

Estimated percentage change in rate bills: 1995–96 compared with 1994–95

(a) Shops

Region	Percentage change before transition	Percentage change after transition
South West	+20	+8
Rest of South East	+15	+6
East Anglia	+22	+8
North West	+39	+10
Northern	+33	+9
East Midlands	+30	+9
West Midlands	+39	+10
Yorkshire and Humberside	+34	+9
Inner London	+4	+3
Outer London	+18	+7
All	+22	+7

(b) Offices

Region	Percentage change before transition	Percentage change after transition
South West	+22	+7
Rest of South East	–6	+1
East Anglia	+19	+8
North West	+54	+10
Northern	+53	+11
East Midlands	+40	+11
West Midlands	+62	+12
Yorkshire and Humberside	+62	+11
Inner London	–56	–3
Outer London	+1	+2
All	–25	0

(c) Warehouses

Region	Percentage change before transition	Percentage change after transition
South West	+20	+8
Rest of South East	+8	+5
East Anglia	+19	+7
North West	+49	+11
Northern	+45	+11
East Midlands	+26	+9
West Midlands	+54	+12
Yorkshire and Humberside	+41	+11

(c) Warehouses

Region	Percentage change before transition	Percentage change after transition
Inner London	–6	+2
Outer London	+10	+5
All	+22	+7

(d) Factories

Region	Percentage change before transition	Percentage change after transition
South West	+12	+6
Rest of South East	+1	+3
East Anglia	+8	+5
North West	+32	+9
Northern	+29	+8
East Midlands	+22	+9
West Midlands	+39	+10
Yorkshire and Humberside	+29	+9
Inner London	–2	+2
Outer London	0	+3
All	+17	+6

(e) Others

Region	Percentage change before transition	Percentage change after transition
South West	+29	+7
Rest of South East	+20	+5
East Anglia	+26	+7
North West	+27	+7
Northern	+22	+6
East Midlands	+27	+7
West Midlands	+36	+9
Yorkshire and Humberside	+28	+7
Inner London	+13	+4
Outer London	+22	+7
All	+24	+6

(f) All properties

Region	Percentage change before transition	Percentage change after transition
South West	+22	+7
Rest of South East	+9	+4
East Anglia	+20	+7
North West	+37	+9
Northern	+30	+8
East Midlands	+27	+9
West Midlands	+42	+10
Yorkshire and Humberside	+34	+9
Inner London	–34	–1
Outer London	+12	+5
All	+9	+5

Source: Inland Revenue.

South Yorkshire Navigation

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) on how many occasions in the last 12 months freight traffic has been subject to delay on the

South Yorkshire navigation; and for what reasons such delays were experienced;

(2) what action is being taken to ensure that freight traffic can be carried on the South Yorkshire navigation without delays due to obstruction in the waterway, inoperable locks or lack of staff.

Mr. Atkins: The Sheffield and South Yorkshire navigation is in the undertaking of the British Waterways Board. These questions should be addressed to the board since they relate to management and operational matters for which the board is responsible.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines are operated by his Department as regards the use of executive search agencies to fill vacancies within his Department and his Department's executive agencies; and in what circumstances his Department employs executive search agencies instead of relying fully on departmental resources to fill vacant posts.

Sir Paul Beresford: Executive search agencies are appointed by competitive tender in accordance with the Department's rules on the engagement of consultants. They are used to assist the mandatory process of public open competition for the occasional recruitment to singleton specialist and senior posts. The agencies provide expert knowledge of the target market sector, and handle ancillary clerical tasks such as the procurement of advertising and the processing of applications, for which it would not be cost-effective to maintain stand-by resources in the Department.

Standard Spending Assessment, Nottinghamshire

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total standard spending assessment for Nottinghamshire county council for each year from 1992–93 to 1995–96; and, within the total, what was the standard spending assessment for *(a)* education, *(b)* social services, *(c)* police, *(d)* fire, *(e)* highway maintenance, *(f)* other services and *(g)* capital financing in each of these years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The figures requested are as follows. They have not been adjusted for changes of responsibility.

£ million

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*[1]1995–96*
Education	383.420	[2]342.430	343.437	347.054
Personal social services	93.884	95.941	107.583	120.920
Police	48.595	50.485	52.894	[3]—
Fire	20.482	21.087	21.612	20.848
Highway maintenance	36.575	33.168	33.109	33.344
Other services	36.979	36.095	38.449	41.271
Capital financing	32.630	32.517	29.683	26.893
Total SSA	652.566	611.723	626.766	590.331

[1] 1995-96 figures are those in the proposed local government finance settlement 1995-96, announced by the Secretary of State on 1 December 1994.

[2] Responsibility for most further education was transferred out of local government from 1 April 1993.

[3] Nottinghamshire police authority receives a police SSA of £54.380 million and a total SSA of £55.365 million.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, (1) pursuant to his answer of 12 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *436*, when he expects to reach a conclusion in his considerations as to whether further measures to reduce carbon dioxide emissions are necessary following the decision not to increase value added tax on domestic fuel to 17.5 per cent;

(2) what is his estimate of the effects on the Government's ability to meet its targets agreed to at the Rio summit on the environment of the decision to retain value added tax rate for domestic fuel at 8 per cent., rather than the previously planned rate of 17.5 per cent.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the answers which I gave to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) on 18 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *706*. We will conclude our work on this review as soon as possible.

EC Directives (Funding)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultation he has had with his opposite number in the European Union concerning the implications of reduced funding for the Countryside Council for Wales on United Kingdom compliance within Wales with the habitat and species directive and other timetabled European directives.

Mr. Atkins: None: there are no such implications.

Local Government Finance, Redbridge

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of state for the Environment what were the *(a)* standard spending assessment and *(b)* single regeneration budget bids from the London borough of Redbridge for 1995–96; what was the value of the settlement given; and how much Redbridge will receive.

Mr. Curry: The revenue support grant settlement for 1995–96 will be the subject of a report to the House. Under the proposals announced by the Secretary of State on 1 December 1994, the standard spending assessment for the London borough of Redbridge would be £176.167 million. Total external support would be £134.553 million, including £87.766 million revenue support grant and £46.786 million business rate income.

No final bids were received from the London borough of Redbridge for funding from the single regeneration budget.

Planning Applications

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to take design considerations into account when deciding whether or not to call in planning applications to be decided under section 77 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Mr. Gummer: My general approach is not to interfere with the jurisdiction of local planning authorities unless it is necessary to do so. I will therefore be very selective about calling in applications to determine myself and will,

in general, only take this step if planning issues of more than local importance are involved. Each case must be considered on its individual merits. An application for development which raises significant architectural and urban design issues is one example of the type of case which may be of more than local importance. Other examples include cases which, in my opinion, could have wide effects beyond their immediate locality, which give rise to substantial regional or national controversy which may conflict with national policy on important matters, and those where the interests of foreign Governments may be involved.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Exhibitions

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to "Liverpool: Architecture and Design" to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 6 February to Friday 10 February 1995.

Hall Keepers Lodge

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what changes occurred regarding the vehicle used by the Hall Keepers Lodge for collection purposes until the beginning of this year, what are the present financial arrangements for outside firms to undertake the work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: This is a matter for the Serjeant at Arms. I have asked him to write to my hon. Friend.

EDUCATION

Standard Spending Assessment Settlements

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she had made of the effect of the 1995–96 standard spending assessment settlement (1) on the number of teachers employed in England; and (2) on class sizes in England.

Mr. Robin Squire: The effect of the settlement on the number of teachers and on class sizes will depend on decisions yet to be made by individual LEAs and schools, and on the cost of the teachers' pay award.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many independent sector schools have had pupils under the assisted places scheme in each financial year since 1980.

Mr. Robin Squire: The number of independent schools participating in the assisted places scheme for each academic year since the scheme's inception in 1981 is given in the following table:

Assisted places scheme

Academic year	*Number of participating schools*
1981–82	220
1982–83	220
1983–84	223
1984–85	226
1985–86	226
1986–87	226
1987–88	226
1989–90	278
1990–91	295
1991–92	295
1992–93	295
1993–94	295

The figures relate to England only

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many independent sector schools have had *(a)* more than 5 per cent., *(b)* more than 10 per cent., *(c)* more than 15 per cent., *(d)* more than 20 per cent. or *(e)* more than 25 per cent. of their school roll made up of pupils covered by the assisted places scheme in each financial year since the establishment of the scheme.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is not available for each financial year since the establishment of the scheme and could be derived only at disproportionate cost. Information is available in respect of the academic year 1993–94; the number of schools in each category is *(a)* 238, *(b)* 166, *(c)* 116, *(d)* 75 and *(e)* 43. In addition there are 57 schools with less than 5 per cent. assisted pupils.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which independent sector schools charged *(a)* the highest and *(b)* the lowest fees to assisted places scheme pupils on the financial year 1993–94.

Mr. Robin Squire: The school which charged the highest fee in academic year 1993–94 was Charterhouse, in respect of its sixth form assisted pupils. The annual fee was £9,348. Salesian college, Farnborough charged the lowest fee at £2,283 per year.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps she has taken to reduce the costs of operating the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Robin Squire: We are committed to providing 35,000 available places in England and Wales and will continue to support this excellent scheme within the resources which can be made available for it. Assisted pupils achieve outstanding results in public examinations and the scheme is good value for money. We must, of course, manage the available resources prudently and have taken steps over the past few years to restrain fee increases for assisted pupils at participating schools.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement about the level of parental contributions to the fees of pupils in the assisted places scheme in the next academic year.

Mr. Robin Squire: Remission of tuition fees under the assisted places scheme is dependent on the level of fees at participating schools and the amount parents can afford

to contribute. Subject to parliamentary approval, the parental contribution scales will be adjusted upwards for the school year 1995–96 as set out in the table. Where the relevant income for the appropriate financial year does not exceed £9,572, the tuition fees will be wholly remitted.

	Percentage		
Part of relevant income to which percentage applies	*One assisted pupil*	*Each of two assisted pupils*	*Each of three assisted pupils*
That part which exceeds £9,406 but does not exceed £10,228	9	6.75	5.25
That part (if any) which exceeds £10,228 but does not exceed £11,063	12	9	7
That part (if any) which exceeds £11,063 but does not exceed £12,720	15	11.25	8.75
That part (if any) which exceeds £12,720 but does not exceed £15,271	21	15.75	12.25
(over) That part (if any) which exceeds £15,271 but does not exceed £18,599	24	18	14
That part (if any) which exceeds £18,599	33	24.75	19.25

Student Grants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many people aged 29 to 50 years and over 50 years are in receipt of *(a)* a student maintenance grant and *(b)* a mature student allowance.

Mr. Boswell: Data on the ages of students in receipt of maintenance grants or older students' allowances are not collected centrally.

Public Sector Schools

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the average amount of money which her Department spent on educating a student at a school within the public sector during the financial year 1993–94.

Mr. Boswell: Each local authority is responsible for setting its own budget and deciding its priorities between and within services, including education, from funds distributed by the Department of the Environment through the standard spending assessment system.

The average spending per pupil by LEAs in England in LEA-maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools is estimated to be £1,972 in 1993–94.

Equivalent information on grant-maintained schools is mainly the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the FAS to reply separately to the hon. Member.

Independent Schools

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *233*, how many independent schools were operating in England in each year since 1990, excluding city technology colleges.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information available is given in the following table for January of each calendar year:

Year	*Number of independent schools*
1990	2,280
1991	2,280
1992	2,256
1993	2,247

The figures relate to England only.

Schools, Nottinghamshire

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the capital bid for 1995–96 from the George Spender school, Ravensdale middle school and Greenwood Dale school, Nottinghamshire; for what purpose the bids—grant maintained—were made in each case; and what capital allocation has been agreed.

Mr. Robin Squire: These matters are mainly the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the agency to write to the hon. Member.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what guidelines are operated by her Department as regards the use of executive search agencies to fill vacancies within her Department and her Department's executive agencies; and in what circumstances her Department employs executive search agencies instead of relying fully on departmental resources to fill vacant posts.

Mr. Boswell: An executive search agency might be used to fill a key vacancy in the Department or the Teachers' Pensions Agency, which is the only executive agency administered by this Department. The decision in each case would be based on need and value for money.

Secondary Schools

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* local education authority maintained and *(b)* grant-maintained secondary schools in each local authority have fewer pupils than their standard number; and in how many the number of pupils is equal to or greater than the standard number.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is not collected by the Department.

Schools, Wolverhampton

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of a state secondary place in Wolverhampton local education authority controlled schools in 1993–94; and what is the estimated cost in 1994–95.

Mr. Robin Squire: Provisional outturn figures returned by Wolverhampton LEA show net institutional spending per secondary pupil of £2,300 in 1993–94. The authority has given an estimate of its net expenditure for 1994–95 in a return published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. This amounts to an estimated cost per pupil of £2,531.

Non-state Schools

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of children between the ages of five and 16 years were educated in non-state schools in 1993–94; and what is her estimate of the percentage in 1994–95.

Mr. Robin Squire: In England in January 1994, 6.5 per cent. of pupils aged five to 16 were being taught in non-maintained schools. The projection for January 1995 is 6.3 per cent.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Lord President of the Council what was the total cost of the 10 most expensive parliamentary questions in the past 15 years for which calculations have been made; which hon. Members asked the questions; and what considerations led him to waive the normal rule regarding disproportionate cost.

Mr. Newton: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Judgment about the application of the rule are for individual Ministers.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994, of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Newton: The details are as follows:

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Total	16	14	16	23
Grade 3	—	—	—	—
Grade 7	1	1	1	2
EO	2	2	2	3
AO	—	—	—	—
AA	1	1	1	1

SOCIAL SECURITY

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and, of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Total number of women	51,102	49,138	55,234	56,752
Grade 3	[1]6	[1]4	[1]3	[1]3
Grade 7	88	91	141	142
Executive officer	11,996	11,579	12,858	13,271
Administrative officer	25,610	24,899	29,286	30,398
Administrative assistant	8,098	7,608	7,821	7,510

Note: Permanent non-industrial staff on 1 April each year expressed as full-time equivalents.

Part-time staff are counted as half-units and totals are rounded to whole units.

[1] The figures in the table do not include the following numbers of female grade 3 staff who were on loan to other Departments: 1 in 1991; 2 in 1992; 2 in 1993 and 2 in 1994.

Electronic Cards

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans exist for the distribution of electronic cards to benefit claimants as replacements for the present order books; what research has preceded such plans or is at present under way; and what rights of access will be granted to holders of such cards to the information contained on these.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Government have already announced plans to automate post offices and introduce a benefit payment card to replace order books. These plans were based on a feasibility study by the Benefits Agency and Post Office Counters Ltd. who are now developing detailed proposals with five potential suppliers. We will require the new system to be acceptable to customers, including elderly and disabled people, and consultation with their representatives is planned for the coming year. The system will be subject to the right of access provisions of the Data Protection Act.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Byers : To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the average time for the Child Support Agency to complete first line reviews in the last year for which information is available; and what was the longest time that such a review took;

(2) what was the average time for the Child Support Agency to complete submissions to appeal tribunals in the last year for which information is available; and what was the longest time for such a submission to be made.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter to Mr. Stephen Byers from Ann Chant, dated 26 January 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the average times taken by the Child Support Agency to complete first line reviews and submissions to appeal tribunals.

The Agency does not keep information on the average time taken to complete a Section 18 review or a submission to an appeal tribunal. There is no business requirement for the Agency to keep information on the longest time taken to complete either a Section 18 review or a submission to an appeals tribunal. The information which is available is contained in the tables below.

Time taken to complete Section 18 review: August—2 December 1994

Time taken	*Cases reviewed*	*Per cent.*
0–3 months	805	20.5
3–6 months	985	25.1
More than 6 months	2,134	54.4

Time taken to complete appeal submissions: August—2 December 1994

Time taken	*Submission completed*	*Per cent.*
0–3 months	104	8.5
3–6 months	397	32.5
More than 6 months	721	59

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out *(a)* the number of letters from hon. Members which received a full reply (i) in 14 days, (ii) between 15 days and 28 days and (iii) in more than 28 days from the Child Support Agency and *(b)* the target set by the Child Support Agency for the time to respond to letters from hon. Members since the appointment of the current chief executive.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Derek Fatchett, dated 26 January 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the time taken and the target set to reply to letters sent to me by Members of Parliament.

The information is not available in the form you request. The Agency aims to reply to letters from Members of Parliament within 20 working days, in line with the Department of Social Security target. Whilst I recognize that this target has not always been met procedural changes have been introduced and I hope that Members will have noticed an improvement in both the quality and speed of the replies sent to them over recent months.

Average clearance times between September and November 1994 are shown in the table:

Percentage

	1–20 days	*21–40 days*	*over 40 days*
September	14	55	31
October	26	44	30
November	53	37	10

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many cases were cleared by the Child Support Agency in the first half of 1994–95 *(a)* without maintenance assessments and *(b)* with an assessment; and what are the reasons for this;

(2) what was the total number of the Child Support Agency's uncleared cases at 30 September 1994; and if this information could be added to the Child Support Agency's monthly statistical information.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 26 January 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary for Social Security about cases cleared by the Child Support Agency.

A total of 338,642 maintenance assessment cases were cleared between April and September 1994, of which 152,482 resulted in a maintenance assessment and 186,160 were other clearances. Cases may be cleared without a maintenance assessment being completed for a variety of reasons. There is no business requirement for the Agency to record the specific reason for clearance in each individual case. Analysis of cases falling into this category suggests, however, that the majority are a result of the parent with care ceasing to receive benefit and not proceeding with a private application; good cause not to co-operate being accepted; or the case becoming ineligible for consideration by the Agency as a result of a change in circumstances.

The total number of cases in which a maintenance application had been received, but a maintenance assessment had not yet been completed at 30 September 1994 was 474,000; this figure includes cases progressing normally through the system. By the end of November 1994, the figure had fallen to 444,000.

The statistical information made available on a monthly basis is under review. I hope this is of help.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the most recent review he has carried out on the system for paying *(a)* deposits and *(b)* rents for prospective and actual tenants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: Help with returnable deposits for accommodation was excluded from the social fund in 1988 because of the abuse of such payments under the old supplementary benefits single payments scheme. Help with rent in advance may be available as a social fund loan. Each application is assessed on its merits to see if payment can be made. We have no plans to reintroduce a statutory key money scheme. Under the access to local authority and housing association tenancies proposals, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is considering encouraging local authorities to make greater use of rent guarantee schemes.

Disability Injuries Committee

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the remit of the Government's interdepartmental committee on disability injuries; what information it has published; and if it accepts representations from the public.

Mr. Hague: The inter-departmental group on disability provides a forum for officials from Government Departments to co-ordinate work on policy and operational issues affecting disabled people.

Sub-groups involving officials and representation of voluntary organisations have been set up to consider particular issues.

The group itself has not received representation from the public or published information. Representations should be made to the relevant Minister, who will ensure that they are given appropriate consideration.

Severe Hardship Payments

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications were made by 16 and 17-year-olds for severe hardship payments in each month since January 1994; and what is the number which were successful.

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the table.

Applications for severe hardship payments January to October 1994

Month	*Number of applications*	*Successful applications*
January	13,870	12,348
February	12,707	11,190
March	14,154	12,518
April	10,209	8,892
May	12,777	10,953
June	11,483	9,587
July	11,995	9,731
August	11,352	9,322
September	9,994	8,268
October	8,739	7,149

Source: Severe Hardship Claims Unit database.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidelines are operated by his Department as regards the use of executive search agencies to fill vacancies within his Department and his Department's executive agencies; and in what circumstances his Department employs executive search agencies instead of relying fully on Departmental resources to fill vacant posts.

Mr. Hague: Executive search agencies are employed where their expertise can add value to the recruitment of certain senior or specialist staff.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what considerations led to the decision not to operate the assisted places scheme in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: The assisted places scheme in England and Wales enables children to attend independent schools. In Northern Ireland there is no significant independent schools sector.

Equine Infectious Anaemia

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of equine infectious anaemia there have been in each year since 1985.

Mr. Ancram: There have been no cases of equine infectious anaemia in Northern Ireland.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the absenteeism rate for *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Compensation Agency, *(c)* the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (Northern Ireland), *(d)* the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency, *(e)* the Northern Ireland Child Support Agency, *(f)* the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland, *(g)* the Rate Collection Agency, *(h)* the Social Security Agency (Northern (Ireland), *(i)* the Training and Employment Agency (Northern Ireland) and *(j)* the Valuation and Lands Agency in each year since 1991;

(2) what was the absenteeism rate for the Valuation and Lands Agency in each year since 1991.

Sir John Wheeler: The absenteeism rates are not fully available in all Departments in the format requested. However, available information is as follows:

(a) NI Departments and the Northern Ireland office:

Departments
(All figures based on a seven day week)

Per cent.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Education				
Non-industrial	3.6	3.29	3.75	3.93
Industrial	—	—	—	—

Per cent.

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Environment: (including: Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency, Ordnance Survey of NI and Rate Collection Agency)				
Non-industrial	n/a	n/a	n/a	[1]5.1
Industrial	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economic Development: (including Training and Employment Agency)				
Non-industrial and industrial	n/a	3.07	3.06	[1]5.93

[1] = Five-day week.
n/a = Figures not available and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Per cent.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Finance and Personnel: (including Valuation and Lands Agency)				
Non-industrial	n/a	n/a	[1]4.84 (April to December 1993)	[1]4.74
Industrial	—	—	—	—
Health and Social Services:				
Non-industrial	3.2	2.8	4.62	4.32
Industrial	—	—	—	—

[1] = Five-day week.
n/a = Figures not available and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Per cent.

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Agriculture:				
Non-industrial	4.3	4.0	4.2	[1]5.3
Industrial	[1]7.3	[1]6.1	[1]6.6	[1]7.7

[1] = Five-day week.

Northern Ireland Office
(All figures based on a seven-day week)

Per cent.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
HCS	n/a	4.55	6.2	n/a
NICS	4.5	4.4	5.3	5.6
(b) Compensation Agency: (established April 1992)	—	5.1	3.8	5.4

n/a = Figures not available and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Per cent.

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
(c) Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (NI): (established August 1993)	—	—	—	[1]6.8
(d) Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency: (established April 1992)	—	—	n/a	[1]4.7
(e) NI Child Support Agency: (established April 1993)	—	—	—	4.51
(f) Ordnance Survey of NI: (established April 1992)	—	—	n/a	[1]5.6
(g) Rate Collection Agency: (established April 1991)	—	n/a	n/a	[1]6.4

[1] = five-day week n/a = Figures not available and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Per cent.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
(h) Social Security Agency (NI): (established July 1991	5.8	6.3	6.78	8.33

Per cent.

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Training and employment Agency (NI): (established April 1990)	n/a	n/a	n/a	[1]7.25

[1] = Five-day week.
n/a = Figures not available and could be provided only at disporportionate costs.

Per cent.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
(j) Valuation and Land Agency: (established April 1993)	—	—	n/a	4.9

n/a = Figures not available and could be provided only at disporportionate costs.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of sheep scab there were in each year since 1990 and in each month for 1994.

Mr. Ancram: The number of cases of sheep scab in Northern Ireland since 1990 is:

Year	*Cases*
1990	36
1991	46
1992	59
1993	48
1994	71

The number of cases of sheep scab in Northern Ireland in each month for 1994 is:

	Number
January	14
February	10
March	14
April	3
May	7
June	5
July	nil
August	2
September	3
October	3
November	7
December	3
Total	71

Abortions

Ms Mowlem: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many abortions were performed by each health and social services board in Northern Ireland in the past five years; and what were the age categories of the women.

Mr. Moss: While the Abortion Act 1967 does not extend to Northern Ireland, therapeutic abortions can be carried out in Northern Ireland hospitals on strictly medical grounds. The number of such terminations cannot be identified separately in the information collected centrally on obstetric and gynaecological procedures.

Ms Mowlem: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the number of women travelling from Northern Ireland to Great Britain for abortions during the past five years aged *(a)* under 19 years, *(b)* between 19 and 25 years and *(c)* 25 years or over.

Mr. Moss: The information is not collected in the form requested. The table shows the number of legal abortions performed on Northern Ireland residents in England, Wales and Scotland between 1989 and 1993 by available age bands.

	England and Wales			*Scotland*		
	Under 20	*20 to under 25*	*25 and over*	*Under 19*	*19 to under 25*	*25 and over*
1989	419	639	758	—	1	2
1990	416	671	768	1	1	2
1991	367	632	776	—	1	1
		20 to under 35	*35 and over*			
1992	376	1,230	188	—	3	1
1993	303	1,148	178	—	—	1

Notes:
1. Information for 1993 is the latest available centrally, and is provisional.
2. From 1992 information from England and Wales is available only for the under 20, 20 to under 35 and 35 and over age band.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Sir John Wheeler: The information is as follows:

(i) Home civil service

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Total	93	109	113	110
Grade 7	2	4	5	4
Grade 3	0	0	0	0
Executive officer	12	13	16	19
Administrative officer	15	14	12	10
Administrative assistant	3	7	7	8

(ii) Northern Ireland civil servants, non-industrial

	1991	1992	1993	1994
Total	12,175	12,554	12,871	13,119
Grade 7	73	81	100	124
Grade 3	1	1	1	2
Executive officer I	1,082	1,102	1,176	1,166
Executive officer II	2,041	2,106	2,167	2,198
Administrative officer	5,390	5,513	5,614	5,794
Administrative assistant	2,706	2,797	2,780	2,780

NB:
Part-time staff are included (by head count)

Travellers

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provision is made for the health needs of travellers in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Moss: Travelling people are entitled to the full range of health and personal social services on the same basis as the rest of the community in Northern Ireland. Health and social services boards are required to identify groups with particular needs arising from their particular location, level of deprivation or lifestyle, and to ensure that services are targeted accordingly.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidelines are operated by his Department as regards the use of executive search agencies to fill vacancies within his Department and his Department's executive agencies; and in what circumstances his Department employs executive search agencies instead of relying fully on departmental resources to fill vacant posts.

Sir John Wheeler: Recruitment to the Northern Ireland civil service and to the Northern Ireland Office is regulated by the Civil Service Commissioners to ensure selection on the basis of merit in fair and open competition. When filling vacancies at the higher appointment levels, where candidates with the relevant combination of skills and experience may be in short supply or may not be attracted by advertisement, the use of executive search agencies may be considered to supplement the pool of applicants. All candidates receive equal treatment at interview irrespective of the source of their application and selection is made on merit.

Club Licensing

Mr. Cunliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the review of the licensing arrangements in Northern Ireland in respect of registered bona fide clubs will be completed; and if he will make it his policy to consult the Working Men's Club Institution and other umbrella organisations before publication.

Mr. Moss: The review of the legislation on registered clubs has been completed and I have today announced the main changes which I propose to make. A copy of my statement has been placed in the Library. In due course I shall publish for consultation draft legislation containing the Government's full proposals for amending the law. At that stage, I shall welcome comments from a wide range of interests, including organisations representing registered clubs.

Prison Cells

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the daily timetable for locking and unlocking cells for each Northern Ireland prison.

Sir John Wheeler: The information is as follows:

There is no uniform daily timetable for locking and unlocking cells in prisons in Northern Ireland. Variations take account of a variety of factors.

Belfast

	Time
Unlock	0800
Lock	1230
Unlock	1400
Lock	1630
Unlock	1700
Lock	2030

Maghaberry
Erne, Lagan and Mourne Houses

	Time
Unlock	0810
Lock	1630
Unlock	1730
Lock	2030

Selected prisoners in the latter stages of their sentence in Bann House are not routinely locked in their cells.

Magilligan

	Time
Unlock	0800
Lock	1630
Unlock	1730
Lock	2030

Selected prisoners in Foyleview, a low security facility, are not routinely locked in their rooms.

Maze

Long-term and remand prisoners are not routinely locked in their cells. This follows a recommendation from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons that access to sanitation should be available at all times.

The morning unlock time for the small number of short-term sentenced prisoners who service the prison varies according to their work commitments. They are not routinely locked during the day. Evening lock up is at 2030 hours.

Young offenders' centre

	Time
Unlock	0810
Lock	1230
Unlock	1400
Lock	1630
Unlock	1730
Lock	2000

A small member of selected special privilege inmates are not routinely locked in their room.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Commission on the Status of Women

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries are currently members of the UN Commission on the Status of Women; how countries have achieved membership; and what is the position of the United Kingdom in respect of membership criteria.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Membership of the UN Commission on the Status of Women is by election on a regional basis by the UN Economic and Social Council. The United Kingdom will seek election in 1996. The current members are:

African States (13 seats): Algeria, Angola, Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Namibia, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Zambia

Asian States (11 seats): China, Cyprus, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Thailand

Eastern European States (4 seats): Belarus, Bulgaria, Russian Federation, Slovakia

Latin American and Caribbean States (9 seats): Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela.

Western European and Other States (8 seats): Australia, Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Greece, Portugal, Spain

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs to what extent the United Kingdom will be represented at the meeting in March of the Commission on the Status of Women when the draft platform for action for the fourth world conference on women in Beijing in September 1995 is discussed; which Government Departments will be represented and by whom; who will lead the delegation; and if the delegation will include non-governmental organisation representatives.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Although not a member of the UN Commission on the Status of Women at the moment, the United Kingdom will play an active role as observers at the meeting of the commission in March and at the parallel drafting group for the platform for action for the fourth world conference on women. The United Kingdom will be represented by officials from the Department of Employment, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Overseas Development Administration, who will work closely with NGOs.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when joint discussions have been held with the European Union member states on the draft platform for action for the 1995 fourth world conference on women in Beijing; and which states were represented.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There have been no discussions with our European Union partners about the platform for action for the fourth world conference on women because the draft has not yet been circulated by the conference secretariat.

Lockerbie

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he was informed of a paper produced by a United States air force intelligence unit in February 1991 relating to the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We first learned of the report from a press inquiry on 23 January 1995. The allegation contained in the paper was first made at an early stage in the investigation and has been reflected in books about the Lockerbie diaster. It was examined at the time by the competent authorities, as part of their investigation, but no evidence has been found to substantiate it. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate remains satisfied that the evidence supports the charges against the two accused and that there is no evidence to establish that other persons or nations were involved.

Mutual Defence Agreement

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, *Official Report*, 30 November 1994, column *710*, what further developments have taken place in regard to the proposed extension of the 1958 United Kingdom/United States mutual defence agreement.

Mr. David Davis: The 1994 amendment to the 1958 United Kingdom/United States mutual defence agreement was discussed during the debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill on 15 December. On 23 December there was an exchange of notes in Washington and the 1994 amendment entered into force.

Bermuda

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *745*, if the Governor of Bermuda is accountable to him for matters relating to policing in Bermuda.

Mr. Baldry: Section 62 of the Bermuda constitution states that:

"The Governor, acting in his discretion, shall be responsible for the conduct subject to the provisions of this Constitution and any other law of any business of the Government, including the administration of any department of government, with respect to the following matters:

(a) external affairs;

(b) defence, including the armed forces;

(c) internal security;

(d) the police."

These 'reserve' powers of the Governor have been the subject of considerable delegation. Under (d) the following matters have been delegated to the Minister of Home Affairs:

Establishment matters; Finance; General Organisation; Training; Recruitment Policy; Community Relations and Equipment.

In those areas of policing for which the Governor retains responsibility he is of course accountable to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *745*, if he will make a statement on the relationship between the Governor of Bermuda, the Government of Bermuda, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and himself in relation to the administration of their colony.

Mr. Baldry: The relationship between HMG and Bermuda is governed by the constitution of that territory.

The FCO, as the Government Department responsible for co-ordinating policy towards the dependent territories, liaises with Bermudian Government departments through the governor. Under the constitution, the governor, in his discretion, has special responsibility for certain aspects of government which have not yet been delegated to a Bermudian Minister, for example external affairs, defence, internal security, and certain matters relating to the police. All other aspects of government are dealt with by the elected Government of Bermuda.

The governor is accountable to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, who in turn is ultimately responsible to Parliament for the good government of Bermuda.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many terrorist offences have occurred in Bermuda in each of the last three years.

Mr. Baldry: None.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *744*, what allowances are payable to the new expatriate Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police in Bermuda; what is their value; if they would be payable to a Bermudian appointee; and what funding Her Majesty's Government are providing for the posts.

Mr. Baldry: There are no allowances payable to the expatriate commissioner and deputy commissioner of police which would not be payable to a Bermudian appointee. Her Majesty's Government provides no funds towards either post.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *744*, how long the expatriate Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police in Bermuda will be required to remain in post; and if he will name them; and indicate from which United Kingdom police force they came.

Mr. Baldry: Three and two years respectively. Mr. Coxall, assistant chief commissioner of the City of London police, and Mr. Mylod deputy chief constable of Hampshire have been appointed as commissioner and deputy commissioner.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the crime statistics in Bermuda for each of the past five years.

Mr. Baldry: The statistics which are readily available are for the five years up to and including 1993. These are:

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Crimes:					
Against the person	409	466	428	474	483
Against property	3,558	4,291	4,515	3,936	5,216
Others, including drugs	1,173	861	714	792	625

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *744*, what training Her Majesty's Government are providing for Bermudian police officers with a view to their being appointed in future to the posts of commissioner and deputy commissioner of police.

Mr. Baldry: The commissioner of police will address the training requirements of the Bermuda police when he takes up his appointment. Officers at all levels of the Bermuda police force regularly attend police training courses in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who paid for the report compiled by HM Inspector-General of the Dependent Territories constabulary; if the report is a private document; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The report was paid for jointly by the FCO and the Government of Bermuda. It was compiled for the Government of Bermuda and is confidential to that Government.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the principal achievements of his recent visits to *(a)* Bangladesh and *(b)* India; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's visit to Bangladesh and India enabled him to judge personally the practical value of the United Kingdom's two largest bilateral aid programmes. In Bangladesh he urged the importance of political stability for foreign investors. In both countries he met the Prime Minister and gave high level support to the process of economic reform, notably in a well received speech at the centenary of the Confederation of Indian Industries in Calcutta. He also discussed the future direction of the massively successful Indo-British partnership initiative.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidelines are operated by his Department as regards the use of executive search agencies to fill vacancies within his Department and his Department's executive agencies; and in what circumstances his Department employs executive search agencies instead of relying fully on departmental resources to fill vacant posts.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 15 December, *Official Report*, column *760*. My Department's executive agencies make no use of executive search agencies, so there are no guidelines. Should my Department or an executive agency under its control decide to use an executive search agency, it would follow the guidelines set out in "Guidance on Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment".

Nigeria

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom Government will put pressure on the Government of Nigeria to release all prisoners of conscience.

Mr. Baldry: With our European Union partners we have consistently deplored all abuses of human rights, including the frequent use of detention without trial. We look to the Nigerian Government to respect all their international human rights obligations.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Nigerian Government concerning the trial of Mr. Ken Saro-Wiwa.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* With our European partners we have consistently urged the Nigerian authorities to release political detainees, or ensure fair judicial process. Mr. Saro-Wiwa's trial started on 16 January, and we and our EU partners are following developments closely.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to Shell International concerning the trial of Mr. Ken Saro-Wiwa in Nigeria.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* No such representations have been made.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Uranium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of *(a)* the low enriched uranium, *(b)* the highly enriched uranium and *(c)* the natural uranium imported into and exported from the European Union in each year since 1982, came into and out of the United Kingdom annually since 1982.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information, where available, is given in the table.

United Kingdom share by value of European Union extra-EU trade in uranium
Share of European Union extra-EU imports

Per cent.

Year	*Low enriched uranium*	*Highly enriched uranium*	*Natural uranium*
1988	8.2	n/a	n/a
1989	7.7	n/a	n/a
1990	8.5	n/a	n/a
1991	27.3	16.8	n/a
1992	37.8	n/a	n/a
1993	28.1	n/a	3.3

Share of European Union extra-EU exports

Per cent.

Year	*Low enriched uranium*	*Highly enriched uranium*	*Natural uranium*
1988	n/a	n/a	n/a
1989	n/a	n/a	n/a
1990	n/a	n/a	n/a
1991	n/a	n/a	n/a
1992	n/a	n/a	n/a
1993	15.8	98.1	49.1

n/a not available: data is confidential.
Source: EuroStat Comext database.

Manufacturing

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of gross domestic product manufacturing currently represents; and what was the figure in 1979.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information is available from the Central Statistical Office's "United Kingdom National Accounts"—the "CSO Blue Book". A copy of the "CSO Blue Book" is available in the Library of the House.

British Coal Enterprise

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from the west midlands regional forum of local authorities about the continued existence of British Coal Enterprise after March; and what plans his Department has to continue the financial contribution to job creation which British Coal Enterprise has made.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy has received several representations from and on behalf of the west midlands regional forum of local authorities about British Coal Enterprise.

The Government and British Coal are continuing to explore options for the range of services provided by BCE. No final decisions have been taken about its future.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met representatives of British Coal Enterprise to discuss their record and future plans.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My ministerial colleagues and I meet representatives from British Coal Enterprise as necessary to discuss a variety of issues.

Engineering Steel Prices

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the average cost per tonne of engineering steel produced at the Sidenor works in Spain and the Klockner works in Germany during the last two years.

Mr. Eggar: The Government do not have access to this type of commercially sensitive detailed information about individual companies, and therefore is not able to provide a meaningful estimate of production costs at these plants.

Lyon Instant Coffee Factory, Greenford

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what powers he has to intervene in respect of the proposed closure of Lyons instant coffee factory in Greenford by Kraft, Jacobs and Suchard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The closure is most unfortunate and we have every sympathy for the work force involved. However, manning levels are a matter for the commercial judgment of the company and it would be counter-productive for the Government to try to interfere in normal commercial processes. There are a range of facilities available to help redundant workers find new jobs, retain or set up businesses of their own.

Competitiveness White Paper

Mr. Patrick Nicholls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he intends to update the White Paper, "Competitiveness, Helping Business to Win".

Mr. Heseltine: As part of its commitment to the continuous improvement of the United Kingdom's competitiveness, the Government plan to publish a second White Paper on competitiveness this summer. This will report on progress over the last year, extend the analysis of the UK's competitiveness and bring forward new initiatives to help business to win.

Green Minister

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will outline the main activities of the green Minister in his Department, in his role as green Minister, during 1994.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has designated me as the green Minister for the Department. During 1994, I and my predecessor as green Minister have continued to ensure that environmental considerations are integrated into the strategy and policies of the Department. Specific environmental initiatives taken during the year will continue to feature in the Department's report on its expenditure plans.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answers 25 January 1995]:* I refer to my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's answer of 25 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *197*.

HEALTH

Hepatitis C

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has available to determine the effectiveness, duration and commencement of United Kingdom screening for hepatitis C compared with European Union countries and the United States.

Mr. Sackville: Routine testing of all blood donations for antibodies to the hepatitis C virus was introduced in September 1991 when the expert committee advised that sufficiently reliable tests, including confirmatory tests were available. In considering their advice the expert committee took into account the experiences of other countries, including EU countries and the United States.

Mental Handicap Hospitals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many long-stay mental handicap hospitals in England are still open.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) on 27 October 1994 at column *821*.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of remaining residents in long-stay mental hospitals in England.

Mr. Bowis: It is estimated that at 31 March 1994 there were 11,500 people with mental handicap needs and with a length of stay of one year or more, in national health service hospitals.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many long-stay mental handicap hospitals do not yet have an agreed closure plan;

(2) what plans she has to close the remaining long-stay mental handicap hospitals;

(3) how many long-stay mental handicap hospitals have closed;

(4) what are the closure dates of the remaining long-stay mental handicap hospitals.

Mr. Bowis: Under Departmental guidance HSG(92)42, copies of which are in the Library, health authorities should work with matching social services departments in planning the transfer of residents and the resources to support them to the community by a mutually agreed date. No deadlines have been set but the aim is to close the old long-stay mental handicap hospitals as soon as practicable. No central record is kept of proposed and actual closure dates.

Secure Hospital Beds

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made with the provision of the additional 550 medium secure hospital beds which the Government plan to have in place by 1996; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: There were no medium secure places by 1979 in response to the Glancy report recommendations which were published in 1974.

The number of purpose-built national health service medium secure places has increased from 602 in January 1992 to 712 at the end of December 1994.

A further 446 places currently being developed are due to open by December 1996, and will take the total to over 1,150. We have allocated £47 million in centrally-funded capital to support this development, and additional places are being funded through the main NHS capital programme.

Blood

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what volume of blood donated was used within the NHS, annually, from 1989 to the present day.

Mr. Sackville: The last year for which complete information is available centrally about the number and usage of blood donations is 1993. Complete information is not available centrally for earlier years.

In 1993 there were a total of 2,312,000 donations of whole blood and 120,000 plasmapheresis donations.

An individual donation may be put to a number of uses as a number of components may be harvested from it. In 1993 the figures for the use of donations were:

Whole blood—106,000 of which 97.9 per cent. was NHS usage;

Red Cell Components—1,959,000 of which 99.5 per cent. was NHS usage;

Platelets—842,000 of which 99.3 per cent. was NHS usage;

Fresh Frozen Plasma—266,000;

In addition some 486,000 litres of plasma were recovered from whole blood donations and 60,000 litres of plasma from plasmapheresis donations.

Patients Charter

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it a mandatory requirement for all health authorities and national health service trusts to inform patients if treatment is not being provided on economic grounds.

Mr. Malone: The patient's charter already sets out the right of all patients to receive health care on the basis of their clinical need, not on their ability to pay, their lifestyle, or any other factor. Health authorities are responsible for purchasing health care to meet the needs of their local population.

Suicide Statistics

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has ben the suicide rate for (i) each local health authority, (ii) each regional health authority and (iii) nationally among *(a)* young men, *(b)* young women, *(c)* all men, *(d)* all women and *(e)* the population as a whole for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Bowis: This information will be placed in the Library.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the number of terminally or very seriously ill people who commit suicide with or without assistance from others.

Mr. Sackville: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys routinely collects information relating to deaths registered in England and Wales for which there is a statutory requirement to do so. For each death it is possible for the certifying registered medical practitioner to record on the death certificate

"Other significant conditions CONTRIBUTING TO THE DEATH but not related to the disease or condition causing it".

Analysis of this information could, if present, provide an indication of the presence of terminal illness or very serious illness. The information, however, would be unlikely to be complete, difficult to interpret, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

A death known and recorded as having been assisted by a person or persons unknown would not be recorded as a suicide.

Mundesley Hospital

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regulations govern the sale of the Mundesley hospital.

Mr. Sackville: Regional health authorities manage the disposal of surplus property by virtue of regulation 3(1) of the Functions Regulations, SI 1991/554, subject to the Health Authorities Land Transactions Directions 1989. These directions require RHAs to dispose of land in accordance with property transactions in the NHS, part of the "Estatecode" issued by the Department.

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the effect on the hospital of the vandalism committed between June and December 1994.

Mr. Sackville: As this information is not available centrally, my hon. Friend may wish to contact Sir Stuart Burgess, chairman of Anglia and Oxford regional health authority, for details.

Consultant Rheumatologists

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant rheumatologists were practising in each health authority area in each year since 1986.

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table:

Whole-time equivalents of consultant rheumatologists by region as at 30 September 1986–1993

Region	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Northern	15	15	15	16	16	16	18	17
Yorkshire	7	7	7	7	8	9	10	12
Trent	16	17	17	18	18	18	18	18
East Anglia	10	10	10	11	10	9	11	7
North west Thames	21	22	20	20	21	24	19	17
North east Thames	30	23	28	23	30	28	31	27
South east Thames	27	24	24	26	28	28	27	27
South west Thames	15	15	15	15	17	19	13	18
Wessex	20	21	20	20	18	17	21	21
Oxford	12	11	13	14	14	13	13	12
South Western	5	6	8	8	8	9	7	7
West Midlands	12	10	11	11	13	13	12	14
Mersey	4	5	4	4	5	8	6	6
North Western	17	15	16	18	19	16	15	16
SHAs	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
England Total	210	200	210	210	230	230	220	220

Note:

1. Figures for 1990 and 1991 are estimates.
2. Regional figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number; England figures to the nearest 10. Regional figures may not sum to the England totals because of rounding.

Physiotherapists

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to introduce legislation to protect the patients of physiotherapists in the private sector.

Mr. Bowis: In order to practise within the national health service or local authorities physiotherapists must be registered under the provisions of the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960.

The Government are considering what action may be needed in the light of concerns about the activities of unregistered practitioners.

Recovered Memories

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the "Recovered Memories" report by the British Psychological Society, a copy of which has been sent to her.

Mr. Bowis: We have received a copy of this report and we welcome its publication by the British Psychological Society, as we accept that psychologists, both as scientists and clinical practitioners, can make an important contribution to the understanding of human memory phenomena. Although strong arguments have been made for and against "false memory", there is a dearth of clear evidence and work which examines these matters is helpful.

Regulatory Bodies

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about the composition of regulatory bodies for health care professionals.

Mr. Malone: Information relating to the composition of regulatory bodies for health care professionals will be placed in the Library.

Smoking

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the impact of a total ban on cigarette advertising on *(a)* the prevalence of smoking amongst the population as a whole and *(b)* the prevalence of smoking among the 11 to 15-year-old age group.

Mr. Sackville: In 1992 the Department of Health reviewed all the available evidence on the effect of tobacco advertising on tobacco consumption. The findings were published as a discussion document. "Effect of Tobacco Advertising on Tobacco Consumption", copies of which are available in the Library. The Government concluded on the basis of the evidence reviewed that a ban on tobacco advertising in the United Kingdom would not have a major impact in reducing levels of smoking.

The Department of Health review did not identify any studies which seek to quantify the effect of a ban on the prevalence of smoking amongst children aged between 11 and 15. The report "Why Children Start Smoking" Office of Population Censuses and Surveys 1990—identified a number of risk factors in this age group associated with starting to smoke. The report concluded that

"greater awareness of cigarette advertising is associated with a slightly increased likelihood of starting to smoke in the future. However, the effect appears to be small in comparison with some of the other influences on children such as the example set by parents and siblings".

Consultants

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will undertake an inquiry to establish the extent to which NHS consultants are not fulfilling their NHS contracts.

Mr. Malone: No. National health service employers are responsible for ensuring that individual NHS consultants are fulfilling their contractual obligations.

Uniform Complaints Procedure

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she intends to introduce legislation to implement the findings of the Wilson committee in respect of a uniform complaints procedure; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: We welcomed the publication of "Being Heard", the report of the Wilson committee, and support its central recommendation for a simpler, speedier national health service complaints system. Over 600 responses were received to the consultation exercise on the report, raising some complex issues. We are carefully considering our response to the report in the light of this and will make an announcement as soon as our present considerations are complete.

Hospitals (Safety)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to review safety in hospitals to ensure the proper protection of patients and staff; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Government place great importance on the creation of a safe and secure environment in hospitals as part of quality health care. Specific arrangements for the safety of patients and staff in hospitals, whether in relation to health and safety requirements or security, are a matter for local national health service employers. Guidance on both of these areas has been made available to hospitals by the NHS Executive ((EL(93)66) and (HSG(94)51)), copies of which are available in the Library.

Disabled People (Access to Health Centres)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is responsible for ensuring that health centres are adequately accessible to disabled people.

Mr. Sackville: Under part M of the Building Regulations 1991, local authority building control officers are responsible for ensuring that health centres and other public buildings are adequately accessible to disabled people.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines are operated by her Department as regards the use of executive search agencies to fill vacancies within her Department and her Department's executive agencies; and in what circumstances her Department employs executive search agencies instead of relying fully on departmental resources to fill vacant posts.

Mr. Sackville: There are no central guidelines on the use of executive search agencies in the Department of Health. The Department and its agencies use such agencies only when internal advertising and inter-departmental advertising are unlikely to produce the right number or type of candidates.

Mentally Ill People (Registers)

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities have not yet established registers of mentally ill people in the community and how many names have now been entered on those registers which have been published.

Mr. Bowis: The latest reports indicate that all districts have established supervision registers. The National Health Service Executive is taking action to ensure that reviews of all patients are completed so that registers are fully implemented as soon as possible. Information on the numbers of mentally ill people placed on supervision registers is not yet available centrally.

Continuing and Respite Care

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place copies of responses to her consultation on the draft guidance concerning NHS continuing and respite care in the Library; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Copies of the replies which were sent in response to our invitation for comments on "NHS responsibilities for meeting long term health care needs" will be placed in the Library.

NHS Charges

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated total value of charges levied on NHS patients for *(a)* dental treatment, *(b)* ophthalmic treatment, *(c)* hospital treatment, *(d)* hospital facilities, including television and telephone, *(e)* car parking at hospitals and *(f)* other items.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* The general dental services charge income, net of refunds, in 1993–94 was £367 million. People who are entitled to a national health service sight test do not pay anything towards its cost. People not entitled to an NHS sight test pay for a private test, and all purchases of optical appliances are private transactions.

For information on private patient income for hospital treatment I refer the right hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State gave her on 13 January at columns *267–68* and on 20 January at column *766*. Information on NHS 'charged' patients—that is, overseas visitors not exempt from charges for NHS hospital treatment—are given in tables 1 and 2. Figures for NHS trusts are not centrally available.

The income generated by amenity beds in each year from 1979 to 1993–94 is given in table 3. Figures for NHS trusts are omitted since these cannot be separately identified. Information on the net income for patient television hire and other non-medical services is not available centrally.

The information requested on car parking charges is not collected centrally.

There are no figures available centrally for any other items.

Table 1: NHS charged income (overseas visitors) regional health authorities

Region	*1991–92 £000s*	*1992–93 £000s*	*1993–94 £000s (provisional)*
Northern	168	100	75
Yorkshire	106	67	28
Trent	143	45	7
East Anglian	130	180	26
North west Thames	722	963	645
North east Thames	178	141	200
South east Thames	312	416	115
South west Thames	180	248	79
Wessex	113	145	145
Oxford	319	334	455
South western	148	42	16
West Midlands	189	153	89
Mersey	74	8	0
North western	74	121	171

Source:
Receipts and payments returns of health authorities (England).

Table 2: NHS charged income (overseas visitors) London postgraduate teaching hospitals

Special health authority	*1991–92 £000s*	*1992–93 £000s*	*1993–94 £000 (provisional)*
Hospital for Sick Children	0	0	0
National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery	0	0	0
Moorfields Eye Hospital	0	0	0
The Bethlem Royal and Maudsley Hospital	0	24	56
The Royal Brompton National Heart and Lung Hospital	0	·0	0
The Royal Marsden Hospital	1	0.7	92
Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's Hospitals	25	26	15
The Eastman Dental Hospital	0	0	0

Source:
Receipts and payments returns of health authorities (England).

Table 3: Income generated from amenity beds

Year	*Amenity bed income £000*
1979–80	224
1980–81	239
1981-82	241
1982-83	369
1983–84	389
1984–85	345
1985-86	409
1986–87	454
1987–88	621

Table 3: Income generated from amenity beds

Year	Amenity bed income £000
1988–89	764
1989–90	1,013
1990-91	1,260
1991-92	2,022
1992–93	1,776
1993–94[1]	1,227

Source:
Annual accounts and receipts and payments returns for regional health authorities, district health authorities and London postgraduate special health authorities.
Notes:
The 1991–92, 1992-93 and 1993–94 figures are taken from the receipts and payments returns and are not therefore comparable with those of earlier years.
[1] 1993–94 figures are provisional

Specialty Statistics

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give for each financial year since 1989–90 the numbers of *(a)* hospital spells and *(b)* finished consultant episodes in NHS hospitals in England recorded in the hospital episode system for (i) acute specialties, (ii) geriatrics, (iii) mental illness, (iv) mental handicap, (v) maternity, (vi) well babies and (vii) all specialties.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* The number of finished consultant episodes in Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) for each financial year 1988–89 to 1992–93 is given in the annual publication "Hospital Episode Statistics, England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Previously quoted estimates of hospital spells have now been superseded by emerging new information and revised figures will be available in due course.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 9 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *401*, on NHS expenditure on health care for non-NHS providers, if she will provide comparable information on a regional basis.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 19 January 1995]:* The total expenditure, by region, in the last three years by district health authorities, regional health authorities, national health service trusts and general practitioner fundholders on the purchase of healthcare from non-NHS providers will be placed in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Arts Education

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what initiatives he has undertaken in arts education in areas of priority treatment.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office provides financial assistance to 22 urban programme projects, the broad aims of which include developing interest in the arts and culture. The estimated cost in the current financial year is £1.65 million. The projects cover eligible areas throughout Scotland.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many full-time equivalent arts teachers there are in secondary schools; and how many there were in 1985.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There were 1,368 FTE art teachers in education authority secondary schools in September 1992, the latest year available. Information is not available for 1985; the estimated FTE figure for 1984 is 1,660.

Dairy Farmers

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the approximate average net profit for dairy farmers in each year since 1985.

Sir Hector Monro: Information on incomes of full-time dairy farms and other farm types is collected in the Scottish farm accounts scheme and published each year in "Farm Incomes in Scotland" and "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom". The latest editions of these publications show incomes for 1991–92 and 1992–93. Incomes for 1993–94 will be published in "Farm Incomes in Scotland" in February.

Longer-term trends in income are given in both publications by means of an index series back to 1986–87, the earliest year for which data are available on a consistent basis.

Both publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

Heart Transplants

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *573*, when he expects to be able to provide the information for the number of heart transplants in November and December 1994.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Two heart transplants were carried out in November and three in December 1994.

Dental Services

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received since October 1990 from Scottish health boards in relation to the pay structure for dentists and the de-registration of patients.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No specific representations on these points have been received from health boards. However, all health boards submitted views on the Government's proposals for changes to dentists' remuneration and the provision of NHS general dental services, which were published in the recent consultation document "Improving NHS Dentistry". Ministers are now considering the way forward in the light of all views received.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been spent in each of the last five years on the provision of dental services in each health board area in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Scotland: expenditure on general dental services by health board

Health board	[1]1989–90 £	1990–91 £	1991–92 £	1992–93 £	1993–94 £
Argyll and Clyde	6,290,569	10,802,044	12,890,396	12,411,748	11,917,843
Ayrshire and Arran	5,310,984	9,713,742	11,055,246	10,258,789	9,932,647
Borders	1,130,419	2,140,213	2,558,491	2,685,779	2,688,599
Dumfries and Galloway	1,675,012	3,096,774	3,676,321	3,403,027	3,083,698
Fife	3,995,958	7,163,997	9,427,329	8,527,073	8,778,454
Forth Valley	3,405,517	6,146,760	7,434,756	7,600,139	7,350,682
Grampian	5,667,864	9,787,472	11,880,510	12,737,186	12,379,006
Greater Glasgow	14,820,897	24,687,323	29,297,575	30,173,664	28,749,945
Highland	2,447,005	4,437,021	6,148,825	5,425,063	5,071,681
Lanarkshire	7,063,075	11,973,160	14,023,907	13,287,843	12,892,180
Lothian	10,149,229	17,772,247	21,779,982	22,413,356	22,107,244
Orkney	107,078	167,944	215,526	272,306	268,380
Shetland	151,191	266,018	303,321	340,094	422,639
Tayside	5,414,768	9,949,846	11,651,600	11,698,422	11,754,764
Western Isles	242,736	365,206	483,725	509,997	512,629
Total	[1]67,872,302	118,469,767	142,827,510	141,744,486	137,910,391

Note:
Information taken from the annual accounts of the 15 Scottish health boards.
[1] Owing to accounting changes in 1990–91, the 1989–90 figures show net expenditure, i.e., total expenditure less patient charges collected by dentists. From 1990–91 figures show gross expenditure, without deducting patient charges.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many dental patients within Scotland received private medical treatment in each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No information is available on private treatment.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many dentists were on each health board's dental list; and how many dentists joined each health board's dental lists and how many dentists withdrew from each health board's dental list in each of the last five financial years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Table 1 shows the number of individual principal dentists on health board lists for each of the last five financial years. Table 2 shows the number of new list numbers allocated and list numbers cancelled for the most recent two years. It is not possible to identify from these figures the number of individual dentists joining and withdrawing from lists as dentists already on a list may acquire additional list numbers, and dentists who surrender one number may hold other numbers.

Table 1: Dentists on health board dental list in Scotland

Health board	[1]March 1990	[1]March 1991	[2]1991–92	[2]1992–93	[2]1993–94
Argyll and Clyde	134	142	190	211	205
Ayrshire and Arran	111	120	139	134	139
Borders	33	31	38	38	45
Dumfries and Galloway	39	39	44	45	47
Fife	101	103	128	129	141
Forth Valley	76	82	90	94	102
Grampian	134	138	148	161	178
Greater Glasgow	327	338	391	417	428
Highland	64	67	71	77	78
Lanarkshire	138	144	182	189	193
Lothian	281	271	298	312	333
Orkney	3	3	5	4	4
Shetland	7	7	5	6	7
Tayside	141	144	164	166	169
Western Isles	13	12	10	13	16
Scotland	1,602	1,641	1,733	1,745	1,792

[1] For the 1990 and 1991 data the figures show the number of dentists on health board list at 31 March. Dentists contracted to more than one health board are counted only in one health board.
[2] For 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94 the figures show the total number of dentists that practised during the financial year in each of the health boards. The data counts some dentists more than once, and so the total number of dentists shown in Scotland for these three years is less than the sum for the health boards.

Table 2: Number of dental list number[1] commencements and withdrawals per health board in Scotland

Health board	Financial year 1992–93[2] Commencements	1992–93[2] Withdrawals	1993–94 Commencements	1993–94 Withdrawals
Argyll and Clyde	41	16	28	30
Ayrshire and Arran	13	4	21	17
Borders	0	0	12	1

Table 2: Number of dental list number[3] commencements and withdrawals per health board in Scotland

Health board	Financial year 1992–93[4] Commencements	1992–93[4] Withdrawals	1993–94 Commencements	1993–94 Withdrawals
Dumfries and Galloway	11	4	9	4
Fife	14	2	33	19
Forth Valley	12	6	22	15
Grampian	43	16	48	42
Greater Glasgow	63	19	79	70
Highland	15	5	16	12
Lanarkshire	18	14	22	16
Lothian	50	29	63	44
Orkney	0	0	1	0
Shetland	2	0	1	0
Tayside	25	14	40	33
Western Isles	3	3	4	3
Scotland	310	132	339	306

[3] A dentist may hold one or more list numbers. The table shows a count of the list numbers that commenced in the given period, not dentists.
[4] Information on a comparable basis cannot be provided for previous years.

Residential and Nursing Homes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many *(a)* residential and *(b)* nursing homes were operating for (i) each health board and (ii) each regional council area in Scotland in the latest year for which figures are available;

(2) how many *(a)* residential homes have been closed down in each regional council area and *(b)* nursing homes have been closed down within each health board area because of the enforcement of the current regulations on the operation of these facilities in each of the last five financial years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information on the number of residential care homes as at 31 March 1994, is as follows:

Region	Local authority homes	Private and voluntary Homes[1]	Total
Borders	11	40	51
Central	17	29	46
Dumfries and Galloway	13	31	44
Fife	44	35	79
Grampian	47	76	123
Highland	21	68	89
Lothian	40	265	305
Strathclyde	124	324	448
Tayside	44	107	151
Orkney	3	3	6
Shetland	4	6	10
Western Isles	17	4	21
Scotland	385	988	1,373

[1] Only includes private and voluntary homes registered with the local authority.

With regard to nursing homes, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 27 October 1994, *Official Report*, columns *729–30.*

Information on the number of residential care homes closed is only available for the last three years. The table below shows the total number of closures. Information on the reasons for these closures is not collected centrally.

Number of closures of registered private and voluntary residential care homes

Region	1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992	1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993	1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994
Borders	—	4	—
Central	—	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	1
Fife	1	—	1
Grampian	1	—	1
Highland	4	—	—
Lothian	9	—	1
Strathclyde	6	8	4
Tayside	6	3	3
Orkney	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—
West Isles	—	—	—
Scotland	27	15	11

With regard to nursing homes, this information is not held centrally. This is a matter for individual health boards as registering authorities who have the power under section 2 of the Nursing Homes Registration (Scotland) Act 1938, as amended, to cancel registration at any time if they consider that standards are not being maintained.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the guidelines which currently exist for the operation of nursing and residential homes; and what representations he has received from regional councils and health boards seeking changes to the current regulations.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: With regard to nursing homes, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 27 October 1994, *Official Report*, columns *728-79.*

The Scottish Office guidance on the registration and inspection of residential care establishments has been included in circulars issued to local authorities following the implementation of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, the Registered Establishments (Scotland) Act 1987 and the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. Those matters have been discussed at meetings with representatives of regional councils and are among the issues presently being considered by officials.

Fishing Industry

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons are currently employed in the sea fishing industry; what were the numbers in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1980 and *(c)* 1990; and how many of the jobs are (i) on fishing vessels and (ii) ashore.

Sir Hector Monro: The latest available information is published in table 2.6 of "UK Sea Fisheries Statistics 1993", a copy of which is available in the Library. Figures for Scotland for 1993 reflect changes to the collection of information on vessels and fishermen following the requirement to license vessels of less than 10 m in length. Information on the level of employment ashore is not available.

Incomes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average national household income in 1993–94 and 1994–95 for *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland.

Mr. Stewart: Information derived from the family expenditure survey, covering a sample of households, shows that average gross weekly household income in 1993 in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland was, respectively, £334, £359, £306, and £326. Data for 1993 are the latest available.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for the financial year 1994–95 for each independent sector school in Scotland in descending order the proportions of their school rolls covered by the assisted places scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Statistical information on the assisted places scheme is collected in respect of each school session and not by reference to financial years. The information provided is in respect of the autumn term of school session 1994–95:

Number of assisted place pupils as a percentage of the total school roll (at autumn term 1994–95)

School	*Per cent.*
Kilquhanity House School, Castle Douglas	48
Keil School, Dumbarton	31
Morrison's Academy, Crieff	24
The Park School, Glasgow	24
Rudolf Steiner School, Edinburgh	22
Kilgraston School, Bridge of Earn	20
St. Denis and Cranley School, Edinburgh	18
Laurel Bank School, Glasgow	18
High School of Dundee	17
Merchiston Castle School, Edinburgh	17
George Heriots School, Edinburgh	17
Glenalmond College, Perth	17
Kelvinside Academy, Glasgow	15
Rannoch School, Perthshire	15
St. Aloysius College, Glasgow	15
Wellington School, Ayr	14
Crawfordton House School, Thornhill, Dumfries	13
George Watson's College, Edinburgh	12
St. Leonard's School, St. Andrews	11
St. Margaret's School, Edinburgh	11
Daniel Stewart's and Melville College and the Mary Erskine School, Edinburgh	11
Lomond School, Helensburgh	11
Fernhill School, Glasgow	9
Craigholme School, Glasgow	9
Loretto School, Musselburgh, Midlothian	9
Glasgow Academy	9
Butterstone School, Perthshire	9
Aberlour House School, Banffshire	8
Hutcheson's Grammer School, Glasgow	8
Fettes College, Edinburgh	8
Gordonstoun School, Morayshire	7
Belmont House School, Glasgow	6
Dollar Academy	6
Edinburgh Academy	6
St. Columba's School, Kilmacolm	6
Clifton Hall School, Midlothian	5
Lathallan School, Montrose	5
Croftinloan Preparatory School, Pitlochry	5
St. Margaret's School, Aberdeen	5
High School of Glasgow	5
Albyn School, Aberdeen	5
Craigclowan Preparatory School, Perth	4
St. Mary's School, Melrose	4
Beaconhurst School, Bridge of Allan	4
Ardvreck School, Crieff	3
St. George's School, Edinburgh	3
New Park School, St. Andrews	3
Belhaven Hill School, Dunbar	3
Cargilfield School, Edinburgh	2
Drumley House School, Ayr	2
Hamilton College	2
Park Lodge School, Helensburgh	[1]—
Strathallan School, Perth	[2]—
Robert Gordon's College, Aberdeen	[2]—

[1] No assisted pupils on 1994–95.
[2] Autumn term claim not yet submitted by the school.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pupils were covered by the assisted places scheme; how many independent schools were covered by the scheme; and how many schools were participating in the scheme in each financial year since the introduction of the scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Statistical information on the assisted places scheme is collected in respect of each school session and not by reference to financial years.

The table provides the information requested for each school session since 1981–82 when the scheme commenced:

School session	*Number of assisted pupils*	*Number of independent schools covered by the scheme*	*Number of independent schools participating in the scheme*
1981–82	790	39	39
1982–83	1,450	41	41
1983–84	1,900	42	42
1984–85	2,265	42	42
1985–86	2,620	42	42
1986–87	2,626	41	41
1987–88	2,680	41	41
1988–89	2,695	41	41
1989–90	2,841	59	59
1990–91	2,861	[1]58	59
1991–92	2,911	58	58
1992–93	[3]3,032	58	58
1993–94	[3]3,058	[1]54	55
1994–95	[2 3]2,854	[1]54	55

[1] One participating school had no assisted pupils in these sessions.
[2] Two schools yet to submit first term claims/statistics.
[3] Provisional figures.

Rural Policy

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on rural policy in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: It is now almost three years since the publication of the Scottish Office rural framework, which outlined a new approach to the development of rural policy in Scotland. It emphasised our commitment to ensuring that the needs of our rural communities are met in a way which fully reflects their distinctive and diverse character. Co–ordination of action by Government Departments, agencies, the private and voluntary sectors and local authorities has been achieved through the mechanism of the rural focus group.

It is now an appropriate moment to review our rural policies and the machinery we have in place for delivering them and I intend to report the outcome of that review in a White Paper on rural Scotland, to be published in the autumn.

"Progress in Partnership"

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his proposals for urban regeneration policy in Scotland following consideration of the response to the consultation paper "Progress in Partnership."

Mr. Lang: I am pleased to announce today the outcome of the review of urban regeneration policy in Scotland. The consultation paper attracted a good response and I am grateful to the many organisations and individuals which offered their views. We have studied the responses carefully and they have been influential in shaping our proposals. I have placed in the Library of the House a copy of the paper. "Programme for Partnership", which is being published today by the Scottish Office and which sets out our key proposals. I shall also send individual copies to all hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies.

Regeneration has to be comprehensive, tackling the economic, physical and social problems of disadvantaged urban areas. Each area needs a co–ordinated strategy and a partnership of public and private sectors and local communities.

We plan to encourage the formation of city/district wide partnerships in areas with significant concentrations of deprivation. They will involve, as key partners, the local authorities, Scottish Homes and the local enterprise companies as well as other public sector agencies and representatives of the private and voluntary sectors. These partnerships will be invited both to produce regeneration strategies at city/district level and to develop more localised proposals for priority areas.

About two–thirds of urban programme resources will, in future, be allocated to "Priority Partnership Areas" designed by the Scottish Office following discussions with city/district partnerships. The remainder of urban programme resources will be available to support regeneration activity in other eligible disadvantaged areas. In both cases, allocations will take account of need and the quality of proposals submitted. The Scottish Office will no longer be involved in assessing and approving individual urban programme project applications. These decisions will be made locally.

We plan shortly to consult those bodies chiefly involved in implementation on a range of matters, including the timetable for introducing the new arrangements and a number of detailed issues concerning the operation of the urban programme, and will be circulating a consultation document to them.

The Government are firmly committed to promoting greater private sector involvement in urban regeneration. We therefore propose to establish a working group to examine current private sector involvement in regeneration, identify any factors constraining this involvement and report back with recommendations. The membership of this group, which will draw in leading representatives of key private sector interests and their counterparts from relevant public authorities and agencies, will be announced shortly.

Publications

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total cost of his Department's publications on health matters in the financial year 1993–94.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* The total cost to the Scottish Home and Health Department for publications on health matters in the financial year 1993–94 was £317,500.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Crop Development

15. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how he is encouraging the development of viable crops for industry and energy.

Mr. Jack: We have set up an alternative crops unit within the Ministry, and sharply increased research and development funding in this area. We have also been consulting widely on how to help develop these new markets.

Farm Council

16. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the EU Farm Council about the need to reform the common agricultural policy regimes for wine, olive oil, fruit and vegetables.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have led the campaign for reform, not only in these sectors, but more widely. I have set up a policy group to look into the CAP which is meeting this afternoon.

Organic Food

17. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on support for organic food production.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government are providing help to the organic sector through aid to help conversion from conventional farming; through a substantial research and development programme; and by support for the work of the independent United Kingdom register of organic food standards.

Animal Welfare

18. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he proposes to minimise the trauma to animals raised for slaughter.

Mrs. Browning: There is already much legislation and guidance to protect, during rearing, transit and at the slaughterhouse, the welfare of animals raised for slaughter.

19. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to improve standards in the transportation of farm animals.

Mrs. Browning: We have issued a proposal to supplement our own comprehensive domestic legislation with a code of practice, and are pressing for EU legislation which matches our own high domestic standards.

25. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the welfare of animals in transit.

Mrs. Browning: Animals in transit have the protection of the Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1994, which came into effect this week. This re-makes its 1992 predecessor, with the addition of tighter controls and tougher sanctions in relation to journey plans.

The order implements the provisions of Community directive 91/628, and sets down strict national standards on feeding and watering in transit, including for exported animals, as permitted by the directive pending EC agreement on these aspects.

We are continuing to press for tough and enforceable measures at Community level, and will supplement our national provisions with a code of practice, which we have circulated in draft for comment.

Spanish Fisherman

20. **Mr. Sykes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the exclusion of Spanish fishermen from the North sea, agreed in 1986, will continue unaffected following the agreement at December's Fisheries Council.

Mr. Jack: Yes. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 18 January, *Official Report*, column *543*.

Forestry

21. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met members of forestry trade unions to discuss the future of the Forestry Commission in England.

Mr. Waldegrave: Representatives of the forestry trade unions regularly meet the Forestry Commission's senior staff discuss a range of issues; they have not sought a meeting with me.

Common Agricultural Policy

22. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress he has made in ensuring the effective implementation of EU general agreement on tariffs and trade obligations in relation to the CAP.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Agriculture Council from 12 to 15 December agreed changes in all the basic CAP commodity regulations needed to honour the EU's new commitments under the GATT agriculture agreement, which was ratified by the EU on 30 December. Implementation will generally begin from 1 July 1995, the start of most of the commodity marketing years. The Council's agreement means that management committees should now be able to take timely decisions on precisely how the GATT requirements are to be respected in each sector within the flexible framework laid down by the Council.

Speciality Food

23. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in promoting Britain's speciality food products.

Mrs. Browning: We continue to provide help for this dynamic and growing sector of the food industry through Food From Britain which actively supports over 20 county or regional marketing groups and administers the Government funded scheme of grants. My right hon. Friend will be seeing at first hand an excellent example of successful group activity when he opens the third show of "Taste of the West" in March.

Farm Incomes

24. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the level farm incomes in 1994.

Mr. Waldegrave: In accordance with the practice of recent years, estimates of farm incomes in 1994 will be published on 31 January.

Dairy Industry

26. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will next meet the President of the National Farmers Union to discuss the dairy sector of the industry.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend the Minister regularly meets representatives of all sides of the agriculture industry, including the President of the National Farmers Union, to discuss issues of importance to them.

Food Industry

27. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps have been taken to encourage deregulation in the food industry.

Mrs. Browning: Since we published our food law deregulation programme in September 1993 we have made important progress. Proposals to update and simplify general food hygiene rules have been drawn up as part of the implementation of the EC general food hygiene directive. We have held preliminary consultations on various food composition regulations and will be following these up shortly with firm proposals. Now that directives on food additives have been agreed in Brussels, we expect to be able to consolidate our regulations in this area. We are consulting on updated and revised food labelling regulations and we are reviewing options for the simplification and co-ordination of various vertical food hygiene directives with a view to discussing our ideas in Brussels.

Countryside Preservation

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that the Government are working in partnership with farmers to conserve the countryside.

Mrs. Browning: Farmers have a vital role to play as stewards of the countryside and we work in partnership with them in all our expanding range of environmental schemes.

Animal Exports

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many live farm animals were exported in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: Data for 1994 are not yet available. Published figures for 1993 and 1979 are given in the table below. Data for 1993 are provisional, and are thought to under-record the true level of exports.

Numbers of farm animals exported

	1993	*1979*
Cattle	391,130	506,491
Sheep	662,846	445,438
Goats	136	483
Pigs	151,149	41,171
Poultry	20,450,736	9,386,293

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

British Pig Breeders Association

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will be supporting the British Pig Breeders Association's application for European Union capital grants to facilitate structural change; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The British Pig Breeders Association is seeking grant aid towards the cost of replacing sow stalls and tethers. Such expenditure would not necessarily attract reimbursement under EC regulation 2328/91, on the improvement of agricultural structures, and any other reimbursement would only be at the rate of 25 per cent. of the eligible national contribution. We are maintaining a tight control over public expenditure and we are not able to meet all demands placed upon the taxpayer by organisations such as the British Pig Breeders Association. The Government carefully considered the costs of the stall and tether ban in 1991 and our view remains that the eight-year transitional period will keep industry costs to an accommodatable level.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them published periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. Waldegrave: These are matters which are delegated to agency chief executives and I have asked them to reply.

When functions were transferred from the department to the agencies, so was the necessary funding. Expenditure and staffing in the core Ministry was accordingly reduced. There have been various accommodation changes within the agencies which will overall result in savings.

All agencies have to meet performance targets which encompass cost recovery and efficiency gains or savings; these are reviewed each year. Achievement against these targets are summarised in the "Next Steps Review 1994", Cm 2750.

Letter from Martin J. Savage to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 26 January 1995:

In Dr. Walsh's absence, she has asked me to reply on her behalf. We thank you for the questions (PQ 402) in which you asked the Minister of Agriculture for information about each of the Next Steps Agencies within his department. This reply refers to ADAS.

Headquarters buildings

ADAS acquired its own Headquarters building at Kidlington, Oxfordshire in 1992 at an annual rent of £228,893. However, by 1 April 1996, ADAS expects to have relinquished accommodation in central London and elsewhere in England and Wales at an annual saving of approximately £3.5 million.

Support staff

There are no support staff which have been required which were previously not required when our operations were within MAFF. In fact, at the start of the agency there were 546 permanent full-time equivalent support staff and this has now reduced to 364. Thus there has been a reduction of approximately 33 per cent.

Periodical journals

Only four periodical journals have been published with a circulation of 72,000 copies at a cost of £215,760.

Executive cars

There is only one executive car which is used by the Chief Executive. This is at an approximate annual cost of £7,800.

Logos

At the start of the agency there was a relaunch of ADAS as an executive agency. This resulted in the creation of a new logo, its development and field-testing of the new identity. The total cost was approximately £15,000.

Corporate clothing

Before agency status, protective clothing for field and laboratory work was provided for staff. Following the change to agency status, new badges for these items were provided at a nominal cost. As old clothing was replaced new items bearing the corporate logo machined-on were introduced.

Pre-agency, all staff were provided with ties bearing the previous logo; these were replaced at the establishment of the agency. Female staff were provided with brooches bearing the corporate identity. This was at a total cost of £13,000.

Specially designed and printed corporate stationery

Prior to agency status, stationery was available at each office bearing the individual address and the corporate logo. Following the move to agency status this was replaced but the new stationery was generally introduced as the old was used. ADAS was able to purchase new stationery (including the design and artwork) for a total of 96 different offices at a total cost of £35,500 which was equivalent to £370 per office.

I hope that these details provide the answers you require.

Letter from C. J. Lawson to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 26 January 1995:

PQ11 18 January 1995

In the absence of the Chief Executive on business, I have been asked by the Minister to reply on behalf of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate to your questions about Next Steps Agencies in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The information you requested is as follows:

Headquarters building

The Directorate has not acquired its own headquarters buildings since becoming as an Agency on 2 April 1990. It occupies the same site at the Central Veterinary Laboratory, Addlestone as it did before Agency status.

Support staff

Since 1990 there has been an increase of four in the number of support staff required, three dealing with information technology and one with finance.

Publications

Excluding the Annual Report and Accounts, the Directorate publishes only one periodical journal, the Medicines Act Veterinary Information Service (MAVIS) quarterly newsletter. This was first issued in May 1992 to improve both the quality of service provided to our customers and the transparency of the licensing process for veterinary medicines. Approximately 6,000 copies are issued each quarter to holders of marketing authorisations, veterinary surgeons, interested organisations and individuals. The cost of publication in 1994 was £23,288.79.

Executive cars

The Directorate does not have any executive cars.

Logos

Details of the costs incurred in the design of the Directorate logo are held in our archive store, and it has not been possible to access these in the time available. I will write with the information required as soon as possible.

Corporate clothing

The Directorate does not have any corporate clothing.

Corporate stationery

The Directorate had its own stationery before Agency status was achieved. As stocks ran out, it was replaced at no additional cost by stationery indicating that the Directorate was an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Letter from A. M. Kerr to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 26 January 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), to your Question seeking details of various corporate and related cost aspects of the Next Steps agencies in his Department (MAFF).

The Directorate has not acquired its own headquarters buildings as a consequence of obtaining executive agency status. However, the agency has since been relocated along with some other parts of MAFF from buildings in central London and the South East to a MAFF office complex in York. PSD's share of the rental for the York office complex is estimated to be around £550,000 per annum.

The only published periodical journal that the agency has responsibility for is The Pesticides Register. This is produced jointly with the Health and Safety Executive each month and provides a listing of UK pesticide approvals and other official announcements on pesticides. It is available as an HMSO priced publication and the production costs are met by HMSO and recovered through the annual subscription charge of £55 and sales of individual issues costing £4.50 each.

The Directorate has its own specially designed logo. This was drawn up at the time of the agency launch on 1 April 1993 following an in-house competition and therefore no design costs were incurred. As far as corporate stationery is concerned, an initial set-up supply was obtained at a cost of £680.33. Apart from the need to obtain a new supply as a consequence of the change of address following relocation to the York site, the only stationery costs incurred by the Directorate have arisen from the general need to replenish used stocks and as such do not constitute any additional cost to the normal operational requirements of the organisation.

Finally, the Directorate has not required any additional support staff to that which was required when its operations were part of the core Department, nor has it purchased any executive cars or corporate clothing.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 26 January 1995:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question covering the various running cost issues of the Ministry's agencies in so far as the Central Veterinary Laboratory (CVL) is concerned.

Perhaps I could deal with the issues you raise in the order they appear in your Question. CVL has not acquired a new Headquarters building and remains on the site it occupied at Weybridge when it became an Agency in April 1990.

As you will note the Agency has been in existence for nearly five years now. In that time there have been a number of changes both in central MAFF and at the Agency and it is therefore not possible to draw meaningful comparisons between support staff prior to the creation of the Agency and after. This is particularly the case since CVL now carries out some functions such as marketing and business development not previously undertaken by the Ministry.

CVL does not publish periodical journals nor does it have a fleet of or any single executive cars.

As a separate part of the Department even prior to Agency status, CVL had its own logo. We updated this two years ago at a cost of £503.70. Given we have always had a logo our stationery could not be regarded as specially designed and change was effected as old stocks ran down.

Finally, we do not use any corporate clothing at CVL.

Letter from P. I. Stanley to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 26 January 1995:

Information About HQ Buildings, Support Staff, Periodic Journals, Executive Cars, Logos, Corporate Clothing and Stationery for the CSL Agency

The Central Science Laboratory (CSL) was first launched as a Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) executive agency on 1 April 1992. Two years later CSL was re-launched as an enlarged Agency following the merger of the original Agency with the Food Science Laboratories at Norwich and Aberdeen.

In your question you asked specifically for information on several items, and taking each one in turn:

— prior to gaining Agency status CSL occupied several sites and had its headquarters building at Slough. This continues to be the case and so I can confirm that the Agency has not acquired any new headquarters building;

—since gaining Agency status it has been necessary for CSL to create its own support functions. However the cost has been met from funding that already existed as a result of posts being transferred from the Department along with the operations;

—the Agency has not produced any periodical journals;

—the Agency does not provide executive cars but does operate a leased cars scheme under Departmental rules, which, in order to obtain best value for money, is based upon minimum official mileage and is open to all staff;

—creation of the CSL logo resulted from an internal staff competition at a cost of a £50 award to the winning entrant;

—corporate clothing has not been introduced by the Agency;

—as a discrete part of the Department, prior to Agency status, CSL had its own bespoke stationery. This was replaced with new stationery bearing the Agency logo as stocks ran out.

Sea Fishing Industry

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people are currently employed in the sea fishing industry; what were the numbers in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1980 and *(c)* 1990; and how

many of the jobs were (i) on fishing vessels and (ii) ashore.

Mr. Jack: The latest available information is published in table 2.6 of "UK Sea Fisheries Statistics 1993", a copy of which is in the Library. No separate information is available on the number of United Kingdom onshore jobs from sea fishing.

Bananas

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is his assessment of the accuracy of the estimate of the proportion of the benefit of the EU banana policy which accrues to banana producers; and if he will identify where the rest of the benefit goes;

(2) what estimate he has made of the additional costs of banana purchases to United Kingdom consumers in consequence of the EU banana policy; and what estimate he has made of the impact on the consumer prices in other EC nations;

(3) when he received the World bank report on the operation of the EU banana policy; and if he will make a statement outlining his view of their conclusions and also the power available to the United Kingdom Government to take any initiative on efficiency of use of Community funds and the prices charged to the general public;

(4) what impact the general agreement on tariffs and trade will have on the banana scheme of the EEC.

Mr. Jack: The EU schedule drawn up and deposited under the terms of the GATT agriculture agreement sets out the tariffs which will apply to imports within and above the EU tariff quota for bananas together with the size of the tariff quota. Also incorporated in the EU schedule is the text of the framework agreement negotiated between the EU and Colombia, Costa Rica, Venezuela and Nicaragua in the closing stages of the Uruguay round. This grants specific shares of the tariff quota to these suppliers. Under the terms of the agreement they have agreed not to bring any further challenges to the EU regime in the GATT/WTO.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidelines are operated by his Department as regards the use of executive search agencies to fill vacancies within his Department and his Department's executive agencies; and in what circumstances his Department employs executive search agencies instead of relying fully on departmental resources to fill vacant posts.

Mr. Jack: All recruitment in my Department and its executive agencies is undertaken in accordance with the Minister's rules applying to departmental recruitment as set out in the civil service order in council of 1991. Executive search agencies are only used for more senior appointments where it is difficult to attract a good field through advertising alone. I can confirm that an executive search agency has been used on only one occasion in 1994.

Goat Producers

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what financial assistance is available to goat producers.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* In the United Kingdom there are no premia payable specifically to goat producers under either the sheep annual premium scheme or the hill livestock compensatory allowances scheme. Nor are there any specific measures of assistance available to goat farmers under the farm and conservation grant scheme. However, provided that they meet the eligibility criteria, they would qualify for grant under the farm and conservation grant scheme. Grants are available towards the costs of conservation measures, such as repair or reinstatement of traditional buildings, hedges, stone walls and banks and the provision of shelter belts, to established agricultural businesses.

Goat producers may also be eligible for grant under the marketing and development scheme and in relation to goat milk and meat products, the EC processing and marketing grant scheme.

New Zealand Flatworms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies he has carried out into the areas where the New Zealand flatworm has been found; if it is increasing in numbers and areas affected; what assessment he has made of its impact on native earthworms and soil structure; what measures are available to control its spread; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: The Ministry of Agriculture has commissioned a research project to look into the questions posed by the hon. Member in England and Wales. The results of that project will be known shortly and it would therefore be inappropriate to comment at this stage.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training, Leeds

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the percentage of those who progressed to *(a)* full-time work, *(b)* part-time work, *(c)* self-employment, *(d)* further education and training and *(e)* unemployment from the youth training schemes of the Leeds training and enterprise council in 1992–93; and what are the latest available figures for 1994.

Mr. Paice: The information is not available in the format requested. The following table shows information on outcomes from youth training in the Leeds training and enterprise council area.

Per cent.

	1992–93	*1994*
Full-time work, part-time work, and self-employment	34	39
Further education and training	8	6
Unemployment	10	14
Found voluntary work or destination not known	48	41

Source: Leeds TEC follow-up survey.

Disability Symbol

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list employers now using the disability symbol.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. John Heppell, dated 26 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question requesting a list of employers now using the disability symbol.

May I refer you to the National List of Disability Symbol Users, copies of which are available in the Library.

The published list is updated approximately every six months and a revised list is currently in preparation. Copies will be sent to the Library when they become available.

I hope this is helpful.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 16 December, *Official Report*, column *818*, which posts were filled as a result of the employment of executive search agencies; which executive search agencies were involved in this exercise; and what were the values of the individual contracts involved.

Miss Widdecombe: St. James's Management Recruitment was used to fill the post of head of financial services branch and head of the accountancy profession for the Employment Department group. Price Waterhouse is being used to fill the post of permanent secretary of the ED Group. Details of the individual contracts concerned are confidential.

Unemployment

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current *(a)* unemployment rate and *(b)* number of persons unemployed among black people (i) under 25 years of age and (ii) in total, giving the figures by gender.

Mr. Oppenheim: The following table gives the latest information available from the labour force survey:

ILO Unemployed people from the black ethnic group
Summer 1994 (not seasonally adjusted)
Great Britain

	All persons	*Men*	*Women*
ILO unemployment rate (Per cent.)	26	31	19
Numbers unemployed (thousands)	103	69	35
Of which aged 16-14			
ILO unemployment rate (per cent.)	42	53	[1]—
Numbers unemployed (thousands)	27	18	[1]—

[1]Estimate below 10,000, therefore not shown.
Source: LFS.

Spares Depot, Bromley-by-Bow

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will request the Health and Safety Commission to assess the effects of the current level of service to the public of the spares depot at Bromley-by-Bow as part of his referral of matters of safety related to the reorganisation of British Gas to the Health and Safety Commission.

Mr. Oppenheim: No. This is not a safety matter. The siting of spares depots and the level of stocks held are purely commercial decisions. Nevertheless, British Gas is obliged to conform to all health and safety legislation, including that relating to gas safety.

Jobcentres (Overseas Jobs)

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his Department's policy on vetting overseas jobs advertised in jobcentres; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The existing instructions in the Employment Service are that vacancies notified to jobcentres for jobs abroad must be vetted by the ES's overseas placing unit before they can be made available to jobseekers.

The overseas placing unit carries out a number of checks including an examination of the contract of employment to be as sure as possible that jobseekers will not be put at risk by taking such employment.

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs currently advertised in jobcentres involve work in *(a)* the European Union and *(b)* other countries.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. John Hutton, dated 26 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about how many jobs currently advertised in Jobcentres involve work in either the European Union or other countries.

We have at present 154 vacancies in Jobcentres for work outside the UK; 105 for work within the European Union and 49 outside it.

I hope this is helpful.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidelines are operated by his Department as regards the use of executive search agencies to fill vacancies within his Department and his Department's executive agencies; and in what circumstances his Department employs executive search agencies instead of relying fully on departmental resources to fill vacant posts.

Miss Widdecombe: Once a decision has been made to fill a senior vacancy by open competition the decision whether to use an executive search agency is taken on a case-by-case basis, depending on the nature of the post, the type of person being sought and whether advertisement alone would produce a satisfactory field of candidates.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what criteria his Department employs for assessing the effectiveness of a TEC's equal opportunities action plan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: The training and enterprise councils are contractually required to have an equal opportunities strategy which must include a statement and a plan of implementation and assessment. TECs are assessed according to their action plans for each identified target

group; the provision and funding for each group; and the TECs' partners in delivering the provision.

TECs are being helped by the Department and the TEC advisory group on equal opportunities to develop their equal opportunities strategy. The effectiveness of the strategy will be a requirement for TECs to receive a three-year operating licence.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *619*, regarding creditors of the South Thames training and enterprise council, how many providers of training and business support programmes within the area covered by the South Thames TEC have not been issued with letters of comfort; and for what reasons.

Mr. Paice: The only providers of training and business services, contracted with South Thames training and enterprise council to deliver initiatives funded by the Department, which have not been issued with letters of comfort, are providers of employer investment in people services. I understand from the receiver that there are 33 employer investment in people providers contracted to South Thames TEC. The Department's main aim is to secure the continuation of training for individuals and therefore providers of such programmes have received assurance about funding. The employer investment in people programme is directed towards organisations and has not therefore been covered by a letter of comfort.

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of training and enterprise councils has produced a mandatory action plan in accordance with the TEC's operating agreement clause 8; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: All training and enterprise councils in England have plans for implementing their equal opportunities strategy. The Department is working closely with TECs to ensure that those plans are up to date and effective.

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his policy to ensure that all TECs produce an action plan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: Each training and enterprise council is required to implement and assess and equal opportunities strategy in order to receive an agreement with the Department.

They are monitored by Employment Department officials to ensure compliance.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *619*, how many employees of the South Thames TEC are to be made redundant by 1 February; what proposals there are to make further redundancies by *(a)* 1 March and *(b)* 1 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: I understand from the receiver that 34 employees of South Thames training and enterprise council have so far been made redundant. I further understand from the receiver that six employees of Routeways, a wholly owned subsidiary of South Thames TEC, have been made redundant and that another 18 Routeways employees are to be made redundant on or around 31 January. Any further redundancies are a matter for the receiver.

Training

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) of 2 December, 1994 *Official Report*, columns *913–32*, if he will provide estimates of *(a)* Government expenditure or planned expenditure on training in cash terms, *(b)* Government expenditure or planned expenditure on training in 1994–95 prices, *(c)* claimant count unemployment, *(d)* long-term unemployment over one year, *(e)* real expenditure on training per unemployed person and *(f)* real expenditure on training per long-term unemployed person for each year from 1978–79 to 1997–98.

Mr. Paice: I have recently written to the hon. Member and placed a copy of my reply in the Library.

TRANSPORT

Westminster Underground Station

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provision has been made for access for people with disabilities to Westminster underground station, London *(a)* during its rebuilding and *(b)* on its completion.

Mr. Norris: The existing Westminster underground station makes no special provision for people with disabilities. I understand that London Underground Limited is endeavouring to ensure that the current standard of access to the station is maintained throughout the period of the rebuilding. When the rebuilding is completed, the station will feature lift access from street level to both Jubilee line platforms and at both District and Circle line platforms.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines are operated by his Department as regards the use of executive search agencies to fill vacancies within his Department and his Department's executive agencies; and in what circumstances his Department employs executive search agencies instead of relying fully on Departmental resources to fill vacant posts.

Mr. Norris: The guidelines followed when using executive search agencies to fill vacancies are those issued by the Office of Public Service and Science in its publication, "Executive Searchlight". Executive search agencies are employed where it is considered by the Department that a wider field of applicants is required for a particular post than might be attracted by an advertisement alone.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that the proposals contained in the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill will not preclude an appropriate connection between CTRL and Crossrail being built by the private sector at some future stage.

Mr. Watts: The proposals in the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill do not preclude a connection between the rail

link and Crossrail being provided at some point in the future.

Driving Licences

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he decided to hold the photographs on driving licences in digital form; and when Parliament was first informed of the decision.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Sir K. Carlisle) stated in reply to a question by the hon. Member on 9 June 1992, *Official Report*, column *115*, that digitalised photographs of drivers will eventually form part of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's driver record.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the chapters of the study, referred to in the document "Photographs on Driving Licences", which relate to his Department's study into the main privacy issues; and if the study will be accessible to individuals using procedures established to meet the requirements of the code of practice on access to Government information.

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to his question on 25 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *474*.

Oxygenated Fuels

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase the use of oxygenated fuels.

Dr. Mawhinney: The environmental case for oxygenated petrol is not yet clear. The research on emissions, fuels and engine technologies—the EPEFE programme—which is being undertaken by the European oil and motor industries in conjunction with the European Commission, is looking extensively into the potential environmental benefits of future vehicle and fuel technology, including the effect of oxygenates. The results are due later this year. I believe that initiatives on fuel composition should be taken in that context.

Aircraft Safety

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the responsibility of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other agencies in respect of (i) the issuing of licences for aircraft operators and (ii) satisfying themselves of the safety and air worthiness of aircraft operated by air freight operators; and if he will outline the procedures and regulations involved.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* Under article 6 of the Air Navigation Order 1989, operators of United Kingdom registered aircraft must hold a valid Air Operator's Certificate, issued by the Civil Aviation Authority certifying that aircraft operated by the holder are operated safely.

For an aircraft operated by an European Economic Area airline, the UK recognises an air operator's certificate issued by the country of registration and no further permit is required.

For an aircraft operated by non-EEA airline, under article 88 of the Air Navigation Order 1989 a permit must be obtained from the Secretary of State for Transport for the carriage of passengers or cargo to or from the United Kingdom. In support of an application, an operator must supply evidence that:

a. the national authority of the state of registry of the aircraft considers that the operating company is operationally competent to undertake the type of flight concerned. This is normally in the form of an air operator's certificate.

b. the aircraft to be operated is considered by the national authority of the State of registry of the aircraft to be airworthy.

c. the operating company has entered into adequate insurance arrangements in respect of the aircraft to be operated.

d. the aircraft to be used complies with noise compliance standards.

e. Aerodrome operating minima have been provided and approved by the Civil Aviation Authority.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how often airworthiness checks on aircraft operated by air freight operators are carried out.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* A United Kingdom aircraft is not permitted to fly unless there is a valid certificate of airworthiness in force issued by the Civil Aviation Authority. This requires that the aircraft is maintained by the operator in accordance with a maintenance schedule approved by the CAA. This schedule specifies when maintenance reviews should be carried out.

As part of its monitoring and regulations of UK operators, the CAA checks the airworthiness of aircraft and maintenance schedules on a random basis throughout the year. All UK aircraft are checked in depth at least every three years when their certificates of airworthiness are renewed. Prior to each day's flying, and prior to each flight, all UK aircraft are checked by the commander to ensure that they are fit for flight.

For other aircraft, the frequency of checks depends on the policy adopted by the administration in the country of registration. The CAA also inspects foreign-registered aircraft when in the UK and when requested by the Department if there is any concern about the safety standards of a particular aircraft.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many inspections of aircraft have been carried out over the last five years at Coventry airport; how many licences were refused; what were the reasons for any refusals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: This information is not readily available. As part of its responsibilities the Civil Aviation Authority carries out regular inspections of all United Kingdom operators as well as inspecting UK airports and aerodromes. The Department has asked the CAA to carry out two inspections of foreign aircraft at Coventry. The first on 11 January 1995 was on a Nigerian registered Boeing 707 aircraft owned by ADC Airlines of Nigeria. My Department is currently discussing the CAA's findings with the Nigerian authorities. No further applications by ADC Airlines will be considered until these discussions have been completed. The second was on a Russian aircraft operated by Atlant Soyuz on 23 January 1995. My Department is awaiting a report from the CAA.

Airports (Noise Nuisance)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the criteria for grants in respect of noise nuisance to people living

near airports, with particular reference to *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* Birmingham.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* My right hon. Friend may lay down criteria for noise insulation grants for airports designated for the purposes of section 79 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982. The only airports so designated are Heathrow and Gatwick. At other airports, provision of noise insulation is at the discretion of the local airport management or may be the subject of planning conditions.

There have been various noise insulation schemes at Birmingham, but none at Coventry.

The boundary of the present scheme at Birmingham, which has been implemented in phases, was published in 1991. It is based on 66 Leq—16-hour—daytime aircraft noise exposure contour. The scheme provides grants for noise insulation to specified standards in up to three habitable rooms. The grants are subject to a cost limit of £1,600 plus VAT per dwelling and are paid by the operator of the airport.

Coventry Airport

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to announce the findings of the final report into the crash at Coventry airport.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* After the formal investigation is complete, probably this year.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations his Department received about the issue of licences for landing and taking off of freight operators from Coventry airport, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* Three hon. Members have written to Ministers about the licensing procedures for flights by freight operators from Coventry airport. No letters from the public have been received on this subject. Two telephone calls have been received on the general issue of livestock flights.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce his findings regarding the issuing of the licences for air freight quotas at Coventry airport and the airworthiness of the aircraft.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* There is no air freight quota licensing system in this country. However, under article 88 of the Air Navigation Order 1989 and non EEA airline operating a public transport flight for the carriage of passengers or cargo to or from the United Kingdom must obtain a permit from the Secretary of State for Transport. My right hon. Friend has ordered an investigation into certain flights from Coventry airport last year and this is expected to be concluded soon. The question of further action will be decided once the outcome of the investigation has been considered.

In addition, the air accidents investigation branch of this Department is carrying out a formal investigation into the crash on 21 December under the Civil Aviation (Investigation of Air Accidents) Regulation 1989. The AAIB will examine all issues having a bearing on this accident, including the airworthiness of the aircraft. A special bulletin detailing the initial facts established by the investigation was issued on 6 January 1995. It is expected that the final report will be published later this year.

Roads Programme

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to carry out an economic impact assessment of the roads programme and to include a measure of employment effects when assessing the local impact of new roads.

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to the hon. Member for Truro, (Mr. Taylor) on 23 January at column *54* and on 24 January at column *98*.

Railways (Operating Subsidies)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the annual operating subsidy given by each of the member states of the European Union to their railways, expressed *(a)* in pound sterling and *(b)* as a percentage of total operating costs for the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Watts: The information is not available in the form requested.

Queen Elizabeth II

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has called for an investigation into why the Queen Elizabeth II was allowed to sail from Southampton to New York in December 1994 but was delayed from proceeding on its journey to the Caribbean; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: No. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, while satisfied that proper standard procedures were followed, has asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to consider this case as part of his review of the agency's survey and inspection instructions.

Consultants

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the consultants, *(b)* the tasks for which they were employed and *(c)* the payments made to them from the budget of his Department in (i) 1992–93 and (ii) 1993–94.

Mr. Norris: I will write to the hon. Member with details.

Vehicle Inspections

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many full-time vehicle examiners were employed by the Vehicle Inspectorate on *(a)* 1 April for each year since 1989 and *(b)* at present;

(2) how many full-time traffic examiners were employed by the Vehicle Inspectorate on *(a)* 1 April for each year since 1989 and *(b)* at present;

(3) how many heavy goods vehicles were examined by *(a)* traffic examiners and *(b)* vehicle examiners by traffic area in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and how many received *(a)* prohibition or *(b)* defect notices.

Mr. Norris: These are operational matters for the Vehicle Inspectorate Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Ms Joan Walley, dated 25 January 1995:

Number of Vehicle Examiners and Traffic Examiners

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your 2 questions concerning the number of full-time Vehicle Examiners and Traffic Examiners employed by the Vehicle Inspectorate on a) 1 April for each year since 1989 and b) at present.

The numbers of full-time Vehicle Examiners and Traffic Examiners employed by the Vehicle Inspectorate on 1 April for each year since 1989 and at present are provided in the attached table.

Numbers of Vehicle and Traffic Examiners employed by the Vehicle Inspectorate

Operating division	*Staff discipline*	*April 1990*	*April 1991*	*April 1992*	*April 1993*	*April 1994*	*December 1994*
Enforcement	Vehicle examiners	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	244	241
	Traffic examiners	[2]—	160	175	170	168	158
Testing	Vehicle examiners	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	180	138
Vehicle inspectorate total	Vehicle examiners	474	477	465	436	424	379
	Traffic examiners	[2]—	160	175	170	168	158

Notes:
[1] The separate Testing and Enforcement Divisions were not formed until November 1993.
[2] Traffic Examiners were not part of the Vehicle Inspectorate in 1990.
[1] Traffic examiner grades are not employed on vehicle testing work.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mrs. Joan Walley MP, dated 25 January 1995:

Heavy Goods Vehicles Examinations: Prohibition and Defect Notices.

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the number of heavy goods vehicles examined by *(a)* traffic examiners and *(b)* vehicle examiners by Traffic Area in each of the last 5 years for which figures are available; and how many received *(a)* prohibition notices or *(b)* defect notices.

The attached 5 tables show the total number of heavy goods vehicles examined by Vehicle and Traffic Examiners in each of the last 5 years in each Traffic Area, together with the number of vehicles issued with Prohibitions and, where the information is available, Defect Notices.

The number of examinations provided in the tables for Vehicle Examiners cover all roadworthiness inspections apart from those done in connection with accidents or mechanical defect investigations. The prohibitions for these examinations are all for roadworthiness defects. The Traffic Examiner checks concentrate on other legal requirements, not roadworthiness. The prohibitions for this work would all have been issued to vehicles weighed and found to be overloaded.

Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) examined and prohibited by vehicle Examiners; and HGVs examined and prohibited by Traffic Examiners in 1989–90

Traffic area	*HGVs examined by VEs*	*Number receiving prohibitions*	*Number receiving defect notices*	*HGVs examined by TEs*	*Number receiving prohibitions*
North Eastern	19,509	1,902	not available	48,777	1,075
North Western	22,468	4,880	not available	42,465	1,073
West Midland	11,212	1,113	not available	23,570	1,270
Eastern	27,285	2,642	not available	41,220	1,425
South Wales	5,994	1,316	not available	21,678	220
Western	12,103	1,467	not available	20,203	1,161
South Eastern	12,153	1,483	not available	37,495	1,640
Metropolitan	10,207	1,719	not available	36,392	901
Scottish	21,125	2,527	not available	42,593	637

Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) examined and prohibited by Vehicle Examiners; and HGVs examined and prohibited by Traffic Examiners in 1990–91

Traffic area	*HGVs examined by VEs*	*Number receiving prohibitions*	*Number receiving defect notices*	*HGVs examined by TEs*	*Number receiving prohibitions*
North Eastern	27,069	2,937	not available	35,158	1,530
North Western	24,189	2,840	not available	38,443	830
West Midland	11,160	1,040	not available	22,240	651
Eastern	30,198	2,633	not available	31,541	1,096
South Wales	5,755	1,296	not available	20,399	109
Western	16,134	1,988	not available	21,894	1,131
South Eastern	15,559	1,912	not available	33,184	946
Metropolitan	14,601	2,022	not available	33,198	901
Scottish	22,637	3,176	not available	45,083	753

Note: The Metropolitan and South Eastern Traffic Areas were merged from 1990–91.

Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) examined and prohibited by Vehicle Examiners; and HGVs examined and prohibited by Traffic Examiners in 1991–92

Traffic area	HGVs examined by VEs	Number receiving prohibitions	Number receiving defect notices	HGVs examined by TEs	Number receiving prohibitions
North Eastern	27,829	3,080	not available	52,809	1,515
North Western	30,623	3,547	not available	39,233	947
West Midland	15,344	1,756	not available	20,938	870
Eastern	39,818	4,328	not available	29,918	967
South Wales	7,015	1,313	not available	16,618	306
Western	17,582	2,382	not available	30,688	1,102
South Eastern and Metropolitan	15,768	1,781	not available	39,044	1,584
Scottish	17,748	2,438	not available	37,498	694

Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) examined and prohibited by Vehicle Examiners; and HGVs examined and prohibited by Traffic Examiners in 1992–93

Traffic area	HGVs examined by VEs	Number receiving prohibitions	Number receiving defect notices	HGVs examined by TEs	Number receiving prohibitions
North Eastern	31,249	2,878	3,738	49,742	976
North Western	36,889	3,902	7,376	40,944	737
West Midland	16,881	1,501	not available	17,239	806
Eastern	37,644	4,110	3,280	52,476	954
South Wales	8,003	1,206	not available	23,456	244
Western	21,687	2,932	1,454	35,370	899
South Eastern and Metropolitan	24,416	2,746	1,713	43,142	1,211
Scottish	19,706	2,806	478	32,756	1,160

Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) examined and prohibited by Vehicle Examiners; and HGVs examined and prohibited by Traffic Examiners in 1993–94

Traffic area	HGVs examined by VEs	Number receiving prohibitions	Number receiving defect notices	HGVs examined by TEs	Number receiving prohibitions
North Eastern	26,463	3,155	2,763	40,466	987
North Western	34,087	3,634	7,233	31,811	736
West Midland	21,296	1,897	809	19,212	436
Eastern	28,673	3,356	2,894	42,194	639
South Wales	11,372	1,324	383	10,647	444
Western	24,666	3,299	1,625	26,215	714
South Eastern and Metropolitan	20,934	2,380	1,980	36,641	668
Scottish	24,695	3,215	278	30,193	624

Kingskerswell Bypass

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to expedite the start of the A380 Kingskerswell bypass; and when he expects work to commence.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 17 January 1995]:* This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 26 January 1995:

I am writing in response to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Transport about progress on the A380 Kingskerswell Bypass scheme.

This scheme carries Priority 1 status following last year's Review of the Roads Programme. We are currently re-assessing the scheme's traffic effects in the light of the Government's recent response to the SACTRA Report. However, we will press ahead with this work as quickly as possible, with a view to publishing detailed proposals in the form of draft Orders by the summer.

It is still too early to say when the scheme may enter construction. Future progress will depend largely on the successful completion of the statutory planning procedures (which will almost certainly include a public inquiry) and the continuing availability of funds.

WALES

Milk Quota

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what proposals he has to establish a milk quota pool for young entrants to farming; and if he will make a statement.

(2) what proposals he has to monitor the movement of milk quota within, out of and into Wales, and make the relevant information publicly available; and if he will make a statement;

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultation he has had with the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales concerning the reduction in support for the Wales Environment Education Committee;

(2) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales concerning the commencement of the Plynlymon Elenydd experiment;

(3) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales regarding the achievement of the United Kingdom action plan under the Government's obligations under the biodiversity treaty in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* subsequent years;

(4) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales concerning the commencement of the heritage coast principle extension test; and if he will make a statement;

(5) what consultation he has had with the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales concerning the reduction of support for *(a)* the year of the coast programme, *(b)* the makers of Wales and *(c)* earth science trails projects;

(6) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales concerning the commencement of the Carneddau commons management experiment;

(7) what consultation he has had with the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales regarding the achievement of the obligations under the European Union habitats and species directive;

(8) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales concerning the reduced support for the national nature reserve and biodiversity for the layman interpretation programmes.

Mr. Redwood: I met the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales on 10 and 24 January 1995 to discuss a very wide range of issues concerning the council's functions. I will publish the conclusions in due course.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from the Countryside Council for Wales concerning changes in legislation pending in relation to the administration of the *(a)* Tir Cymen and *(b)* hedgerow renovation schemes; what increase in staffing his Department will require to administer such schemes; and if he will give an estimate of the date of publication of any amended statutory provision enabling a corresponding transfer of responsibilities.

Mr. Redwood: I have received no such representations from the Countryside Council for Wales. The necessary statutory provision which would enable the Tir Cymen and hedgerow renovation schemes to be transferred to the Welsh Office and the countryside stewardship scheme in England to be transferred from the Countryside Commission to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is in clause 80 of the Environment Bill which had its First Reading in another place on 1 December 1994. But no decisions have yet been made on whether the Welsh schemes should be transferred, or on the staffing increase which my Department would require.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those sites of special scientific interest in national parks which are to be transferred for management purposes to local authorities; and if he will list all those sites of special scientific interest subject to international designation or classified as particularly fragile, intended to be excluded from any such transfer.

Mr. Redwood: No decisions have yet been made regarding the functions of the Countryside Council for Wales.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultation he has had with the local authority associations in Wales in relation to the transfer of powers, duties and resources from the Countryside Council for Wales to the local authorities for *(a)* public rights of way, *(b)* local landscape and nature conservation schemes, *(c)* country parks, *(d)* publications on sites of conservation interest, *(e)* oversight and monitoring of small sites of special scientific interest and *(f)* other miscellaneous duties and powers; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consultations he has had with the nature conservation voluntary bodies concerning transfers of functions, duties and resources for the management of national nature reserves; what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales in relation to the competence and capacity of voluntary bodies to undertake such work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have not consulted local authority associations or others on these matters as discussions are still taking place with the Countryside Council for Wales. If I decide that the CCW should play less of a direct role in any of these activities, I will ensure that interested parties are consulted.

Coal Mining (Illness)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will placed in the Library a copy of the survey conducted by general practitioners in West Glamorgan in 1988 on the links between opencast coal mining and illness.

Mr. Richards: No. The report is the property of the authors, Dr. N. M. Temple and his partners. Dr. Temple is now a trainee registrar in public health medicine and can be contacted at Powys health authority, the Laurels, Bronllys, Brecon, Powys.

A copy of a report of September 1988, commissioned by the Welsh Office and undertaken by Dr. P. C. Elwood, commenting on Dr. Temple's report, has been placed in the Library of the House.

NHS Suppliers (Payment)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the Welsh Health Consumer Services Authority concerning delayed payments to suppliers to the Welsh NHS; what information he has on the number of suppliers who have put a stop on supplies to the Welsh Health Consumer Services Authority because of payment delays; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consultations he has had with the Welsh NHS trust hospitals and health authorities' directly managed hospitals concerning the delayed payments by purchases for hospital treatment, and delayed payments for supplies to the Welsh Health Consumer Services Authority.

Mr. Redwood: Meetings between the Welsh Office and representatives of NHS trusts and health authorities are held regularly to consider a wide range of issues. These have included the Government's requirement that all NHS organisations settle bills promptly. Appropriate guidance has been issued and I expect it to be followed.

New Zealand Flatworm

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what studies he has carried out into the numbers of areas in Wales where the New Zealand flatworm has been found; if it is increasing in numbers and areas affected;

and what assessment he has made of its impact on native earthworm and soil structure.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines are operated by his Department as regards the use of executive search agencies to fill vacancies within his Department and his Department's executive agencies; and in what circumstances his Department employs executive search agencies instead of relying fully on departmental resources to fill vacant posts.

Mr. Redwood: My Department does not use executive search agencies to fill vacancies in the Department or its executive agencies. It would consider doing so if this offered a cost-effective means of recruitment and was consistent with the principles of fair and open competition.

Patients

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many patients from each health authority were referred to Rookwood hospital, Cardiff, for assessment and for rehabilitation following severe head injury in each year since 1988;

(2) how many Welsh patients in a coma or persistent vegetative state have been discharged to a private nursing home without the health authority accepting the costs, in each year since 1988, giving the figures for each health authority;

(3) how many Welsh patients with severe head injuries, following neurosurgery, were discharged for assessment and for rehabilitation to *(a)* a recognised specialist assessment/rehabilitation centre, *(b)* a district general hospital, *(c)* an independent nursing home and *(d)* their home in each year since 1988.

Mr. Richards: This information is not available centrally.

Sea Fishing

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are currently employed in the sea fishing industry; what were the numbers in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1980 and *(c)* 1990; and how many of the jobs were (i) on fishing vessels and (ii) ashore.

Mr. Richards: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Training Contracts

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposal he has to ensure that the Welsh training and enterprise councils swiftly conclude their contracts for the next financial year with AST Training.

Mr. Richards: The negotiation of contracts between Welsh TECs and training providers such as AST Training is a matter for the parties to such contracts not my Department.

Head Injuries (Rehabilitation)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information has been made available to general practitioners in Wales about the availability of assessments and rehabilitation for patients with severe head injuries; on what date this was given; and in what form it was issued.

Mr. Richards: Only in a limited number of cases would general practitioners make such referrals. However, the Welsh Office has issued a series of protocols and technical documents which cover the type of care people with such injuries should receive. The protocol on "Physical Disability and Discomfort" was sent to family health services authorities in November 1991 and he protocol on "Injuries" in June 1992.

Students

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each county in Wales and for Wales as a whole for the last three available years the number of full-time students in *(a)* further education, *(b)* higher education and *(c)* further and higher education in total, indicating the percentage of women in each case.

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* Information on the number of full-time students on further and higher education courses at publicly-funded institutions in Wales for the academic years 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94, is the latest available year, are shown in the following table.

Full-time students at publicly funded institutions in Wales [1]

	1991–92		*1992–93*		*1993–94*[2]	
	Total	*Per cent. female*	*Total*	*Per cent. female*	*Total*	*Per cent. female*
Further education courses[3]						
Clwyd	4,441	55.5	4,957	51.5	6,054	50.3
Dyfed	3,210	56.0	3,344	55.7	3,757	54.1
Gwent	5,122	52.0	5,601	50.4	5,967	49.7
Gwynedd	1,975	55.4	2,292	53.2	2,609	52.4
Mid Glamorgan	4,635	54.8	5,185	53.9	5,609	52.6
Powys	1,033	58.7	974	54.8	970	58.0
South Glamorgan	3,566	54.6	3,535	53.5	4,570	50.8
West Glamorgan	5,758	50.2	5,928	50.8	5,921	51.1
Wales	29,740	53.8	31,816	52.5	35,453	51.6

Full-time students at publicly funded institutions in Wales [1]

	1991–92		1992–93		1993–94 [2]	
	Total	Per cent. female	Total	Per cent. female	Total	Per cent. female
Higher education courses						
Clwyd	1,916	49.9	2,196	49.3	2,247	51.0
Dyfed	6,775	51.8	7,783	53.1	8,949	53.1
Gwent	1,769	51.7	2,109	52.2	2,584	51.7
Gwynedd	4,762	51.6	5,500	52.9	5,952	54.1
Mid Glamorgan	6,006	34.3	8,110	37.9	9,799	39.0
Powys [4]	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	14,634	51.1	17,015	52.7	18,818	53.2
West Glamorgan	8,716	47.9	9,610	49.6	10,395	50.3
Wales	44,578	48.4	52,323	49.7	58,744	50.2
Further and higher education courses						
Clwyd	6,357	53.8	7,153	50.9	8,301	50.5
Dyfed	9,985	53.1	11,127	53.8	12,706	53.4
Gwent	6,891	51.9	7,710	50.9	8,551	50.3
Gwynedd	6,737	52.7	7,792	53.0	8,561	53.6
Mid Glamorgan	10,641	43.3	13,295	44.1	15,404	43.9
Powys	1,033	58.7	974	54.8	970	58.0
South Glamorgan	18,200	51.8	20,550	52.9	23,388	52.8
West Glamorgan	14,474	48.9	15,538	50.1	16,316	50.6
Wales	74,318	50.5	84,139	50.8	94,197	50.7

[1] Full-time includes Full-time year, Sandwich and Short full-time courses. Data for the University of Wales are at December, the non-university data are at November. Students are recorded in the County in which the institution they attend is located.
[2] Data are provisional pending publication.
[3] Numbers include Coleg Harlech from 1992–93 and sixth form colleges from 1993–94 but exclude link students.
[4] There are no higher education institutions in Powys.

Prescribing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the percentage figures for *(a)* brand name and *(b)* generic prescribing for (i) general practitioner fundholders and (ii) non general practitioner fundholders in each family health service authority in Wales for each of the past three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Redwood *[pursuant to his reply, 23 January 1995, c. 66]:* The following information was omitted from the original table:

	October 1992	October 1993	October 1994
Dyfed Fundholders	50.87	52.74	51.62
FHSA	43.07	45.03	48.01
Gwent Fundholders	43.15	43.83	46.65
FHSA	39.89	42.53	45.55
Gwynedd Fundholders	n\a	54.61	46.28
FHSA	36.68	40.53	43.70
Mid Glamorgan Fundholders	52.55	53.14	58.19
FHSA	42.21	44.19	46.13
Powys Fundholders	20.21	44.71	45.36
FHSA	39.63	42.23	44.51
South Glamorgan Fundholders	44.00	58.53	50.16
FHSA	43.97	45.86	48.28
West Glamorgan Fundholders	41.86	47.95	52.11
FHSA	40.72	44.13	47.49

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Financial Statements

Mr. Flynn: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners if the Church Commissioners will consider publishing quarterly financial statements in accordance with the "Bulletin Review of Interim Financial Information" issued by the Auditing Practices Board.

Mr. Alison: All listed companies, in which the public may buy or sell shares, are required by the council of the stock exchange to publish interim financial information every six months. The purpose of the APB bulletin is to provide auditors with guidance as to the methodology and scope of audit work in relation to such six monthly information. It contains no reference to, or definition of, quarterly financial statements.

The commissioners are an exempt charity and do not believe that the publication of quarterly audited information at a considerable cost would be either justifiable or appropriate.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 25 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *197*.

Tourist Board Grants

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the level of grant given *(a)* to the English tourist board and *(b)* to each of the regional tourist boards in the last five years.

Mr. Dorrell: *(a)* The grant in aid allocated to the tourist boards in the last five years was:

£ millions

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
BTA	27.5	29.2	30.9	32.2	33.2
ETB	14.9	15.1	16.2	13.9	11.3
Totals	42.4	44.3	47.1	46.1	44.5

(b) The English tourist board made grant allocations to the regional tourist boards as follows:

£ millions

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	[1]*1994–95*
Cumbria	590,000	551,000	690,000	596,000	—
East Anglia	531,000	531,000	591,000	510,000	—
East Midlands	493,000	587,000	613,000	565,000	—
Heart of England	691,000	667,000	600,000	595,000	—
London	806,000	884,000	950,000	748,000	—
Northumbria	441,000	479,000	505,000	484,000	—
North West	541,000	537,000	617,000	606,000	—
South East	588,000	638,000	635,000	696,000	—
Southern	622,000	567,000	726,000	636,000	—
Thames and Chilterns	413,000	449,000	167,000	[2]—	—
West Country	890,000	830,000	747,000	1,147,000	—
Yorkshire and Humberside	760,000	676,000	710,000	621,000	—
TOTAL	7,366,000	7,396,000	7,551,000	7,204,000	6,999,800

Notes:

[1] Figure for 1994–95 is total only, since RTBs have until 31 March 1995 to complete the draw down of funds from ETB.

[2] Thames and Chilterns tourist board went into liquidation midway through 1992.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 27 January 1995

TRANSPORT

Departmental Employees

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Norris: The Department's personnel information system records the following information on women employees by year and grade:

	Grade 7	*Grade 3*	*Executive Officer*	*Administrative Officer*	*Administrative Assistant*
1991	58	0	994	2,510	2,911
1992	63	0	1,034	2,531	2,753
1993	68	1	1,007	2,445	2,543
1994	71	4	902	2,448	2,562

Note:
Part-time employees are included in the above and are counted on the same basis as full-time staff.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the classes of vehicle currently exempt from vehicle excise duty for which vehicle excise duty will become payable from 1 July; and if he will give the amount of vehicle excise duty that will be payable in each class.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is as follows:

Current exempt class	*Proposed class (and vehicles within it)*	*Proposed duty*
Special vehicles		
Road roller	—road rollers:	£135 (under 3.5 tonnes) £150 (over 3.5 tonnes)
Special concessionary		
Electric	—electric:	£35
Gritter	—gritter:	
Snowplough	—snowplough:	
Vehicles used for short journeys between private land	—6 miles a week vehicles:	[1]£15–£5,000
Road construction	—road construction:	[1]£135–£5,000
Street cleansing	—street cleansing:	
Street lighting	—street lighting:	

[1] No increase of more than £1,000 on first relicensing on or after 1st July 1995.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what amount of vehicle excise duty will be payable from 1 July by agricultural tractors *(a)* used solely by farmers on their own land and *(b)* which use public roads for less than six miles per week to travel from one field to another.

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

(a) Nil.

(b) £35.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what amount of vehicle excise duty is *(a)* payable on agricultural tractors in Northern Ireland at present and *(b)* will be payable after 1 July; and what exemptions there are from this duty.

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

(a) £35, but "nil" for those used on public roads for less than 6 miles per week when moving between different parts of privately-owned land, and those used solely on private land.

(b) £35. The only exemptions from this duty will be for agricultural tractors used solely on private land.

English Road Network (Expenditure)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the expenditure on the English road network by central Government for each year from 1979 to 1994 in 1994 prices.

Mr. Watts: The information requested is available only on a financial year basis. In 1993–94 prices, based on the GDP deflator, expenditure on trunk roads in England was as follows:

	£ million
1979–80	1,095
1980–81	1,083
1981–82	1,184
1982–83	1,293
1983–84	1,190
1984–85	1,279
1985–86	1,236
1986–87	1,270
1987–88	1,341
1988–89	1,315
1989–90	1,647
1990–91	2,031
1991–92	1,977
1992–93	2,015
1993–94	2,044

Recruitment

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to his Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Mr. Norris: During 1994, my Department spent £521,644 recruiting 182 staff to my Department and its executive agencies.

Lockerbie

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what basis financial assistance was given to the relations of British nationals in respect of proceedings arising from the Lockerbie air disaster.

Mr. Norris: My Department agreed to meet the costs of legal representation for the British relatives of victims of the Lockerbie disaster at the fatal accident inquiry into the disaster.

As the then Secretary of State explained to the House on 5 July 1990, this offer reflected the exceptional nature of the disaster—a crime perpetrated by international terrorists which resulted in the destruction of a large passenger aircraft in British airspace. There were therefore very special reasons for departing from the practice that relatives' costs are not met in fatal accident inquiries or inquests.

Coastguard Service

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what the hourly rate of pay for auxiliary coastguards in each financial year since 1984–85;

(2) how many *(a)* full-time coastguards and *(b)* auxiliary coastguards, excluding rescue centre staff, were in post on 1 April 1984 and each year since;

(3) what was the total payment made to auxiliary coastguards for *(a)* all training, *(b)* training excluding rescue centres and *(c)* patrols in 1984–85 and each year since;

(4) what were the total budgets excluding rescue centres, for *(a)* each region, *(b)* each district and *(c)* each sector for (i) full-time coastguards and (ii) auxiliary coastguards in 1984–85 and each year since;

(5) what was the total number of paid hours for (i) patrol work and (ii) training, excluding rescue centres, in *(a)* each region, *(b)* each district and *(c)* each sector by auxiliary coastguards in 1984–85 and each financial year since then;

(6) how many *(a)* full-time coastguards and *(b)* auxiliary coastguards were in post in 1 April 1984 and each year since;

(7) what was the total number of unpaid hours worked by auxiliary coastguards for *(a)* training on coast rescues, *(b)* training in rescue centres and *(c)* patrols in each region, each district and each sector in 1984–85 and each year since;

(8) what was the total coastguard budget in each year from 1984–85 to date at November 1994 prices; and what is the planned budget for 1995–96.

(9) how many sectors in each coastguard district have exhausted their planned budget for the year for *(a)* auxiliary coastguard training for rescue centres, *(b)* auxiliary coastguard training on coast rescue and *(c)* patrols.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* These are operational matters for the Coastguard agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 27 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions as these questions deal with operational matters, for which I have responsibility as Chief Executive.

PQ 609/94/95. No sectors have exhausted their planned budgets for *(a)* auxiliary coastguard training for rescue centres and *(b)* auxiliary coastguard training on coast rescue. Among the 91 sectors four sectors have exhausted their planned budgets for *(c)* patrols.

The information requested in PQ 611/94/95 is only available from 1990 and is detailed in the following table:

	Number of full-time Coastguards in post	*Number of auxiliary Coastguards*
1 April 1990	484	[1]—
1 April 1991	480	4,353
1 April 1992	474	4,061
1 April 1993	477	3,823
1 April 1994	473	3,454

[1] Figures not available.

The information requested in PQ 604/94/95 is only available from 1993:

	Number of full-time Coastguards in post (excluding rescue centre staff)	*Number of auxiliary Coastguards (excluding rescue centre staff)*
1 April 1993	130	3,426
1 April 1994	125	3,077

The information requested in PQ 610/94/95 is only readily available from 1990–91:

Year	*Total HM Coastguard budget (at November 1994 prices) £*
1990–91	18,376,804
1991–92	19,562,144
1992–93	19,415,817
1993–94	20,449,937
1994–95	[1]19,144,129
1995–96	[2]—

[1] HMCG portion of The Coastguard Agency's budget of £24,882 million.

[2] Not yet decided by The Coastguard Agency Management Board but estimate provision of £25,596 million is being sought for the Agency as a whole.

The information requested in PQ 608/94/95 is detailed in the following table:

	Hourly rate of allowance for Auxiliary Coastguards		*Hourly rate of allowance for Auxiliary in Charge*	
	0600–2000	*2000–0600*	*0600–2000*	*2000–0600*
1 April 1984–1 April 1985	1.86	2.10	2.32	2.62
1 April 1985–1 April 1986	1.94	2.19	2.42	2.74
1 April 1986–1 April 1987	2.05	2.32	2.57	2.90
1 April 1987–1 April 1989	2.17	2.45	2.71	3.06
1 April 1989–1 December 1991	2.26	2.55	2.83	3.20
1 December 1991–now	2.60	2.93	3.25	3.68

The information requested in PQs 603/94/95, 605/94/95, 612/94/95 and 613/94/95 is not available in the format requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

London Underground

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list for each London Underground line and for each four-week period between 1 January and 31 December 1994, the number of fire and smoke incidents, and the proportion that were *(a)* category A, *(b)* category B and *(c)* category C;

(2) if he will list for each London Underground line and for each four-week period between 1 January and 31 December 1994, the number and length of station closures *(a)* exceeding 20 minutes during usual period for passenger travel, *(b)* exceeding one hour during usual period for passenger travel, *(c)* exceeding one day and *(d)* exceeding one week that were attributable to (i) staff shortages or (ii) security alerts;

(3) if he will list for each London Underground line and for each four-week period between 1 January and 31 December 1994, the number and length of *(a)* attributable station closures, and *(b)* non-attributable station closures (i) exceeding 20 minutes during usual period for rush hour travel, (ii) exceeding one hour during usual period for passenger travel, (iii) exceeding one day, (iv) exceeding one week and (v) exceeding one month; and which stations closed during the period have yet to be re-opened;

(4) if he will list for each London Underground line and for each four-week period between 1 January and 31 December 1994, the number of incidents, including cancellations, which resulted in a headway of more than 20 minutes; and how many of these were *(a)* attributable and *(b)* non-attributable;

(5) if he will list for each London Underground line and for each four-week period between 1 January and 31 December 1994, the number of incidents, including cancellations, which resulted in a headway of more than 20 minutes, and the number of these attributable to *(a)* train breakdown, *(b)* signal failure, *(c)* track/points failure, *(d)* power failure, *(e)* derailment or collision, *(f)* adverse weather conditions (including leaves on the line) and *(g)* security alerts;

(6) what has been the number of *(a)* assaults and *(b)* robberies on each London Underground station in (i) 1993 and (ii) 1994;

(7) if he will list for each London Underground line and for each four-week period between 1 January and 31 December 1994, the number and percentage of escalators out of service;

(8) if he will list for each London Underground line the number of *(a)* crimes of violence, *(b)* robberies and *(c)* other offences for each four week period between 1 January and 31 December 1994.

Mr. Norris: These are operational matters for London Underground.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary Lord Chancellor's Department if he will set out for each of the next step agencies in his Department whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost of annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them publish periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor is responsible for three agencies: Her Majesty's Land Registry, the Public Record Office and the Public Trust Office.

The agencies operate within the framework of demanding quality standards and tight controls of costs and other financial targets as set out in the White Paper, "The Civil Service: Continuity and Change", Cm 2627. Their expenditure is subject to audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

HM Land Registry and the Public Record Office were separate Government Departments in their own right before becoming executive agencies reporting to the Lord Chancellor. The Public Trust Office was, and remains, a self-contained and separately accommodated unit within the Lord Chancellor's Department. Agency status has not led to any additional expenditure on accommodation at the Public Trust Office. The office makes a separate bid for funding and has always had to plan to meet all its expenditure from fee income. The establishment of executive agencies has, therefore, had no impact on the overall expenditure of the Lord Chancellor's Department.

A record of the performance of individual agencies in improving efficiency and effectiveness in Government is summarised in "Next Steps Review 1994", Cm 2750.

As the right hon. Member's question concerns specific operational matters, on which the chief executives of the three agencies are best placed to provide answers, I have accordingly asked the chief executives to reply direct.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 23 January 1995:

Parliamentary Question: Expenditure by the Next Steps Agencies

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply to your question about Next Step issues. The answers to the various points are given below:

1. The Public Record Office is a separate government department under the Lord Chancellor and has had its own headquarters building for over 150 years.

2. No additional support staff were required when the office became an Executive Agency.

3. The only periodical journal that we published is our Readers Bulletin, at a cost of £4,000 per annum.

4. The Public Record Office has no executive cars.

5. The Public Record Office had a logo specially designed at a cost of £850.

6. The Public Record Office has no corporate clothing.

7. All office stationery is printed in-house. There is no extra cost for printing new corporate stationery.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 26 January 1995:

Parliamentary Question No. 95/181: Expenditure by Executive Agencies

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department to reply to your recent question concerning specific expenditure items by Executive Agencies.

HM Land Registry was established in 1862, and has continued since, as a self financing, separate government department directly accountable to the Lord Chancellor. Its move to Executive Agency status in July 1990 did not, as a consequence, involve it in any significant expenditure. I can answer your specific questions as follows:

(a) The Land Registry's Headquarters building was acquired in 1913 and paid for under the Land Registry (New Buildings) Act 1990 at no cost to the Exchequer;

(b) Its Headquarters staff has reduced since the launch of the Agency in 1990;

(c) The only periodical journal produced by the Registry is its internal staff magazine, introduced in 1986;

(d) The Registry has no executive cars;

(e) The corporate logo was introduced in 1989 following a staff competition at a cost of £800;

(f) The Registry does not have corporate clothing;

(g) The incorporation of the logo into corporate stationery was achieved at no extra cost.

I do hope that this answers the points raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary, of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your parliamentary question, listed on 19 January 1995, regarding the cost of establishing Next Step Agencies.

The Public Trust Office has not acquired any additional accommodation as a result of becoming an Agency.

Four extra support posts have been created but the additional cost has been met from within the PTO's existing budget allocation from efficiency savings. The creation of these posts in areas such as corporate planning will further contribute to the efficiency of the Office.

The cost of designing and printing the Framework Document, Corporate and Business Plans in 1994 (the first year of Agency) was £10,980. The Corporate and Business Plans will be published annually together with an annual report. The numbers of these documents required for 1995 is currently being researched and the cost is not expected to exceed £5000.

The Public Trust Office does not have any executive cars or corporate clothing and has not changed its logo.

Existing stocks of stationery were used before fresh supplies were ordered with a New Agency heading. The cost of altering the headings was negligible and not separately costed.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the absenteeism rate for *(a)* the Public Record Office and *(b)* the Public Trust Office each year since 1991.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executives of the two agencies are best placed to provide an answer. I have accordingly asked the chief executives to reply direct.

Letter from Julia Lomas to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 23 January 1995:

Absenteeism at the Public Trust Office

The Parliamentary Secretary for the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to part (b) of your question listed on 19 January which referred to the "absenteeism rate for the Public Trust Office each year since 1991".

The most recent figures available are as follows:

Year	*Number of sick days taken*	*Staff in post*	*Average sick days per person*
1993	10,443	571	18.29
1994	8,930	561	15.92

Note:
Prior to 1993 separate statistics for the Public Trust Office were not maintained.

Letter from Duncan Simpson to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 25 January 1995:

Parliamentary Question: Absenteeism Rate in the Public Record Office since 1991.

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply to your question about absenteeism rates in the Public Record Office since 1991.

The Public Record Office has interpreted the data using the 'lost time rate' calculation, which is the standard calculation used in public and private sector organisations for measuring sick absence.

Lost time rate is calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Number of working days in period} \times 100\%}{\text{Number of working days available}}$$

The figures for the Public Record Office are therefore:

Year	*Percentage*
1991	5.43
1992	5.04
1993	4.79
1994	4.78

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the absenteeism rate for *(a)* his Department and *(b)* Her Majesty's Land Registry in each year since 1991.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The average number of working days lost as a result of sick absence for each member of staff within *(a)* the Lord Chancellor's Department for the years since 1991 is as follows:

	Days lost
1991	10.4
1992	10.11
1993	11.8
1994	'

' No details available yet.

(b) HM Land Registry is a separate executive agency and this question has been passed to the chief executive for reply.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 26 January 1995:

Parliamentary Question No. 95/183: Absenteeism Rate in the Land Registry

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary for the Lord Chancellor's Department to reply to your recent question concerning the absenteeism rate in HM Land Registry since 1991. I can provide the following information:

	Per cent.
1991	5.2
1992	4.8
1993	4.5
1994	4.5

I do hope that this answers the point raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Civil Enforcement Agents

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will announce proposals for a review of the organisation and management of civil enforcement agents, following public

consultation in 1992; and if he will make a statement on how these proposals will affect sheriffs.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The public consultation exercise in 1992 raised a wide range of difficult issues, to which the Lord Chancellor continues to give consideration. I am not in a position to say when an announcement will be made or how future proposals will affect sheriffs.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Details of the number of women employed in the years 1991–1994 at the relevant grades are set out in the table.

Number of women employed in the Lord Chancellor's Department for years 1991–1994 at selected grades

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Grade 3	0	0	0	1
Grade 7	45	51	64	78
EO	1,242	1,342	1,441	1,442
AO	3,454	3,608	3,741	3,644
AA	2,187	2,205	2,151	2,054

Note:
(i) The figures given are all at 1st April of each year, (ii) they include grade and grade equivalents and (iii) part-time staff are accounted for on a headcount basis.

Custody Statistics

Mr. Straw: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the number and percentage of defendants remanded in custody for either way offences who were dealt with within the 70-day limit laid down by the Prosecution of Offences (Custody Time Limit) Regulations 1987; and what was the number and percentage of defendants remanded in custody for indictable offences who were dealt with within the 70-day limit between first appearance and committal laid down by the regulations for each year since the regulations came into force.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Information about the number and percentage of defendants remanded in custody who were dealt with within the 70-day limit is not collected centrally in the form requested. This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost and effort.

HEALTH

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the members of the Medicines Control Agency, their professional employment, and the details of individual entries in their members' register of interests.

Mr. Sackville: The Medicines Control Agency is an executive agency of the Department of Health. Its staff are civil servants and are therefore subject to the civil service requirements in relation to personal interests.

Septrin

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action she is taking in respect of the use of Septrin in the United Kingdom;

(2) what plans she has to remove Septrin from the market; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We have no plans to remove Septrin from the market. There is no new safety issue with Septrin and recent data support the view that serious adverse effects associated with it are rare. Changing clinical practice, however, favours single rather than combination antibiotic therapy and the Medicines Control Agency is considering whether the licence for Septrin should reflect this.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support she will give to litigants against the Wellcome group in respect of claims for damage caused by Septrin; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: It is not the Department's policy to become involved in individual claims for compensation. This is a matter for individuals themselves to pursue with the companies concerned, if necessary through the courts.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many persons have been identified as blood donor carriers of hepatitis C under current screening methods; and what advice and counselling they receive.

Mr. Sackville: One in 2,000 donors were found to be positive for hepatitis C when screening was introduced in 1991. In the National Blood Service, any donor found to be positive for any infective agent is offered counselling by trained specialist medical staff. In the case of counselling for hepatitis C, national guidelines have been established and are in use at all transfusion centres.

Consultants

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list *(a)* the consultants, *(b)* the tasks for which they were employed and *(c)* the payments made to them from the budget of her Department in (i) 1992–93 and (ii) 1993–94.

Mr. Sackville: The Department spent £18,398,000 for 1992–93 and £15,933,037 for 1993–94 from running costs on consultancy. Information on national health service consultancy expenditure is not available centrally.

Details of the consultants employed by the Department and the tasks performed for 1992–93 were provided to the efficiency unit as part of its scrutiny on the Government's use of external consultants, copies of which will be placed in the Library. For reasons of confidentiality, and in order to achieve value for money in the future, we are unable to list the specific costs of the consultancies concerned and the amounts paid as this would breach contractual agreements and jeopardise future value for money. Information is not held for 1993–94 and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what Government funding is being provided and what other steps are being taken by the Government to enable pursuit of the research programme recommended in chapter 17 of the report of the national task force on myalgic encephalomyelitis published in September 1994.

Mr. Sackville: The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The MRC has been funding a study at the Institute of Psychiatry, the estimated cost of which is £91,000, to investigate chronic fatigue in general practitioners' attenders. Researchers at the institute are attempting to find ways to help sufferers of chronic fatigue cope with their disease and regain their health.

With a view to securing progress and promoting the development of a professional consensus, the chief medical officer has invited the conference of colleges to consider the national task force's report. The views of the conference of colleges will be of much assistance to the Department in helping to determine the best way forward. It is hoped that a response from the conference will be received by the spring.

Smoking

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the prevalence of cigarette smoking among *(a)* men over 16 years, *(b)* women over 16 years, *(c)* boys aged 11 to 15 years and *(d)* girls aged 11 to 15 years for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: The figures in the tables are extracted from the "General Household Survey 1992" and "Smoking Amongst Secondary School Children in 1993", published by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. Copies of these reports are available in the Library.

Prevalence of cigarette smoking amongst adults aged 16 and over England 1984–1992

Percentages

	1984	*1986*	*1988*	*1990*	*1992*
Men	35	34	32	31	29
Women	32	31	30	28	27

Source: OPCS General Household Survey

Prevalence of regular cigarette smoking amongst pupils aged 11 to 15 England 1984–1993

Percentages

	1984	*1986*	*1988*	*1990*	*1992*	*1993*
Boys	13	7	7	9	9	8
Girls	13	12	9	11	10	11

Source: OPCS Smoking amongst secondary school children

Cosmetic Surgery

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received on the subject of regulating cosmetic surgery.

Mr. Sackville: In addition to representations from the hon. Member and from the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) we have received 17 letters from members of the public on this subject.

Blood Clots (Drugs)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if drugs designed to break up blood clots are available under the NHS to patients aged over 74 years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Yes.

Insulin Syringes (Charges)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospitals charge diabetics for insulin syringes; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to introduce legislation to allow the wider use of personal information extracted from the registers of births, deaths and marriages; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Government have no plans to legislate beyond the proposals they published in 1990 in their White Paper "Registration: proposals for change", Cm 939. These proposals include making records of births, deaths and marriages over 75 years old available to public inspection. The Government will introduce a Bill when parliamentary time allows.

Recruitment

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much her Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to her Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Mr. Sackville: During 1994, the Department and its executive agencies spent £620,870 recruiting 156 staff.

Anabolic Agents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessments she has made of the effect on health of the use of anabolic agents.

Mr. Sackville: Anabolic steroids are used therapeutically for certain hormonal and blood disorders. Before a medicinal product may be licensed in this country, it is subject to stringent assessments to ensure that it meets acceptable standards of safety, quality and efficacy. Thereafter, the Medicines Control Agency and its advisory committees, such as the committee on safety of medicines, monitor the safety of all licensed medicines.

In addition, the Department of Health and Departments for Scotland and for Wales commissioned a report from the Centre for Research on Drugs and Drug Behaviour in 1993, "Anabolic Steroid Use in Great Britain: An Exploratory Investigation", copies of which are in the Library.

Physiotherapy

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has considered the evidence by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy regarding damage done to

patients by unregistered physiotherapists; and what she proposes in response.

Mr. Sackville: To practice within the national health service or local authorities, physiotherapists must be registered under the provisions of the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960.

The Government are considering what action may be needed in the light of the profession's concern about the activities of unregistered practitioners.

Plague Vaccine

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the plague vaccine manufactured in the United States of America by Cutter Laboratories, Miles Inc, has been granted a licence in Britain.

Mr. Sackville: There are no granted licences in Britain for the plague vaccine manufactured in the United States of America by Cutter Laboratories, Miles Inc.

PRIME MINISTER

Mortgage Interest Payments

Mr. Coe: To ask the Prime Minister what has been the reduction in average mortgage interest payments since their peak.

The Prime Minister: The average mortgage interest payment has fallen by £140 per month, not per week as I inadvertently stated in my answer to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) on 26 January 1995, *Official Report*, column 469.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Exports

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of exports from other European Union countries comes to the United Kingdom *(a)* as a whole and *(b)* by each country, in descending order.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information is given in the table.

Visible exports to the United Kingdom as a share of total visible exports

Exports from	*Per cent.*
EU12 less UK	8.6
Ireland	28.7
Portugal	11.4
France	9.2
Netherlands	9.0
Denmark	8.9
Belgium–Luxembourg	8.3
Germany	7.7
Spain	7.5
Italy	6.4
Greece	5.7

Source: Eurostat Comext database (CD-Rom 1/1995).

Lloyd's

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all the legislation governing the activities and regulation of Lloyd's of London.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The principal legislation governing the activities of Lloyd's of London is:

(a) the Lloyd's Act 1982 (together with those provisions of the Lloyd's Acts 1871, 1911 and 1951 which remain in force) and bye-laws made thereunder;

(b) certain provisions of the Insurance Companies Act 1982 (as amended), in particular Part IV (special classes of insurers);

(c) the Insurance (Lloyd's) Regulations 1983 (as amended), and some provisions of the Insurance Companies Regulations 1994, the Insurance Companies (Third Insurance Directives) Regulations 1994 and the Insurance Companies (Amendment) Regulations 1994;

(d) Insurance Accounts Directive (Miscellaneous Insurance Undertakings) Regulations 1993.

That legislation gives effect to EC directives on the consolidation of laws, regulations and administrative provisions relating to direct insurance other than life assurance—directive 73/239/EEC, 88/357/EEC and 92/49/EEC—and the corresponding directives relating to direct life assurance—directives 79/267/EEC, 90/619/EEC and 92/96); and the EC directive on the annual accounts and consolidated accounts of insurance undertakings 91/674/EEC.

Other, more general, legislation also affects those operating in the Lloyd's market in a manner comparable to the way in which it affects other individuals or undertakings, including legislation governing the terms and conditions of contracts of insurance—for example the Marine Insurance Act 1906.

Domestic Gas Appliances

Mr. Spearing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 18 January concerning supply of spare parts for domestic gas appliances, what assessment he has made, and by what means, of the consequences of his plans for the dis-aggregation of British Gas on the current availability of spare parts for licensed appliances and on the time such appliances cannot be used by consumers for reasons of public safety.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The servicing of domestic gas appliances is a competitive market, in which British Gas service business competes with some 48,000 registered engineers. This part of British Gas operations is therefore not subject to economic regulation and it is for the management of British Gas to choose the most economical and effective means for the supply and distribution of spare parts in order to meet customers' needs.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Faber: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to issue the proposed discussion document on the implementation of the chemical weapons convention in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ian Taylor: A discussion document on the implications of the chemical weapons convention for industry will be issued on 31 January; copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

Latin America (Firearms Sales)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information his Department has in respect of, and in what ways it is supporting, trade missions to Latin American countries in January and February; what is the involvement of such trade missions in the sale or

arrangement for sale of items classified under section 5 (1) *(b)* of the Firearms Act 1968; and if he will list the items which are so classified.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* A trade mission organised by the Caribbean trade advisory group of the British Overseas Trade Board will visit Cuba in early February. None of the planned members of the mission is involved in the sale or arrangement for sale of items classified under section 5(1)*(b)* of the Firearms Act 1968.

Nigeria (Military Equipment)

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export licences his Department has issued for the export of non-lethal military equipment to Nigeria since December 1993.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* Thirty export licences have been issued for such military equipment since 1 January 1994.

United Artists (Cable Licence)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library a copy of the licence issued by his Department to United Artists authorising it to lay cable in Livingston, West Lothian.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* Licences issued under section 7 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 are placed in a public register in the Library at the Office of Telecommunications. I have, however, arranged for a copy of the licence for the Falkirk and Livingston cable franchise to be placed in the Library of the House.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidelines are operated by his Department as regards the use of executive search agencies to fill vacancies within his Department and his Department's executive agencies; and in what circumstances his Department employs executive search agencies instead of relying fully on Departmental resources to fill vacant posts.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* My Department considers using executive search agencies when it is believed that this represents a cost-effective way of extending the field of candidates for key posts.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total spent on each local authority area under *(a)* the city task forces, *(b)* the city grant and *(c)* the housing action trusts programmes in 1993–94.

Mr. Curry: Expenditure by local authority area on each of the programmes in 1993–94 is set out in the table.

Expenditure by Local Authority area in 1993–94 on Task Forces, City Grant and Housing Action Trusts

Local Authority	*Task Forces £000s*	*City Grant £000s*	*HATs[1] £000s*
Barnsley	—	2,970	—
Birmingham	1,448	1,665	2,175
Blackburn	—	517	—
Bolton	—	101	—
Bradford	1,187	2,433	—
Bristol	227	59	—
Burnley	—	223	—
Coventry	1,172	404	—
Derby	1,195	326	—
Dudley	—	4,698	—
Gateshead	—	303	—
Hackney	1,050	—	—
Hammersmith and Fulham	945	—	—
Haringey	385	—	—
Hartlepool	24	2,717	—
Kingston upon Hull	1,158	122	28,142
Kirklees	—	654	—
Knowsley	—	364	—
Lambeth	—	35	—
Langbaurgh on Tees	—	122	—
Leeds	—	121	—
Leicester	—	57	—
Lewisham	1,040	41	—
Liverpool	1,200	6,926	19,236
Manchester	958	1,322	—
Middlesbrough	221	521	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	—	2,642	—
North Tyneside	—	145	—
Nottingham	1,102	2,726	—
Oldham	—	775	—
Plymouth	353	872	—
Preston	—	151	—
Rochdale	4	687	—
Rotherham	—	44	—
Salford	—	917	—
Sandwell	—	400	—
Sefton	—	303	—
Sheffield	—	777	—
South Tyneside	1,084	250	—
Southwark	1,226	432	—
St. Helens	—	62	—
Stockton on Tees	452	—	—
Sunderland	—	1,093	—
Tower Hamlets	357	1,511	8,600
Waltham Forest	—	—	25,600
Wigan	—	356	—
Wirral	1,030	165	—
Wolverhampton	—	3,679	—
Wrekin	—	20	—
Total	17,818	44,706	83,753

[1] Gross expenditure by each Housing Action Trust.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in rank order the first round single regeneration budget bids showing where the local authorities fell in the index of deprivation at *(a)* local authority level, *(b)* by census enumeration districts and *c)* by the average score of the three worst wards.

Mr. Curry: The information is shown in the tables. In addition to the bids included in these tables, there were a further 73 successful and 87 unsuccessful bids which covered more than one local authority area. It is not possible to include these in the rankings.

Table 1: SRB successful bids (bids covering single local authority areas or parts of a single local authority only)

Local authority	*Name of bid*	*Rankings (A)*	*(B)*	*(C)*
Newham	Meeting the needs of Newhams Communities	1	5	9
Newham	A regional Role in Tomorrows East London	1	5	9
Newham	New Dimensions for Stratford and Temple Mills	1	5	9
Southwark	Cross River Partnership	2	3	5
Southwark	Peckham Partnership	2	3	5
Hackney	Building on our Strengths	3	1	4
Birmingham	Birmingham Main Bid	5	19	2
Liverpool	Dingle	6	17	19
Liverpool	Speke/Garston	6	17	19
Liverpool	Social Partnership	6	17	19
Tower Hamlets	Stepney Revitalisation Bid	7	2	1
Tower Hamlets	Raising Participation: Raising Achievement	7	2	1
Lambeth	Riverside South	8	6	3
Sandwell	Sandwell Regeneration Partnership	9	31	34
Lewisham	Into the Mainstream	11	12	8
Lewisham	Silwood Estate: Combatting Racial Harassment	11	12	8
Knowsley	Knowsley Industrial Park	12	14	28
Manchester	St. Vincents	13	25	25
Manchester	Manchester	13	25	23
Manchester	Miles Platting and Ancoats Young People Initiative	13	25	23
Greenwich	Greenwich Regeneration: Woolwich Revival	14	15	20
Newcastle	Grainger Town	17	22	26
Newcastle	Education for Regeneration	17	22	26
Newcastle	Tyneside Bsus	17	22	26
Newcastle	Walker Open and Learning and Fitness Centre	17	22	26
Newcastle	Scotswood Regeneration Strategy	17	22	26
Newcastle	North Benwell-New Beginnings	17	22	26
Barking and Dagenham	Roding Valley Area Regeneration	18	30	36
Wandsworth	Wandsworth Partnership	21	18	22
South Tyneside	Step	22	36	54
Bradford	Training for New Technology	23	26	25
Bradford	Royds-Bradford	23	26	25
Middlesborough	Middlesborough Pride and Enterprise	24	79	79
Westminster	The Bloomsbury Project	26	10	12
Salford	The Salford Partnership	28	41	21
Brent	Chalkhill Estate: Economic and Physical Regeneration	29	11	7
Kingston upon Hull	Hull's First SRB Bid	31	57	42
Blackburn	Blackburn SRB Bid	32	37	55
Gateshead	Eastgate Development	33	61	44
Sunderland	City of Sunderland Partnership	34	64	47
Sheffield	Sheffield's Bid to the SRB	36	35	18
Ealing	Centre for Manufacturing and Engineering Innovation	38	24	31
Oldham	Oldham	39	58	48
Brighton	Regenerating Central Brighton	40	21	33
Doncaster	Stainforth Estate Action	41	68	66
Southampton	Southampton City Centre	42	27	32
Bristol	Bristol 2020	43	55	35
Lincoln	City of Lincoln	48	89	124
Rochdale	Canalside Rochdale	50	78	60
North Tyneside	Meadowell Regeneration	52	62	73
Plymouth	Plymouth 2000 Partnership-Turning the Tide	53	29	14
Barnsley	Sustainable Regeneration for Barnsley	54	244	142
St. Helens	St. Helens Southern Corridor	55	134	116
Leeds	Removing Barriers-Creating Opportunity	56	67	24
Burnley	Initiative Burnley	57	65	86
Easington	East Durham Regeneration	58	235	152
Norwich	Norwich Mile Cross	59	75	81
Rotherham	Shaping Rotherham's Future	60	109	90
Wirral	Hamilton Quarter	61	87	59
Langbaurgh on Tees	Grangetown	62	141	93
Wansbeck	Wansbeck Initiative	63	86	140
Wansbeck	Aiming High	63	86	140
Stoke on Trent	Cobridge Community Renewal	64	138	103
Tameside	Tame Valley Initiative	65	112	128
Derwentshire	Consett Southern Area	66	320	173
Hove	Hove Means Business	68	20	45
Stockton on Tees	Tilery Project	69	98	69
Hastings	The Battle for Hastings—Town Centre	70	32	51
Wakefield	SESKU—Wakefield	71	239	143
Oxford	Blackbird Leys/Cowley Initiative	72	43	57
Sefton	Netherton	73	52	63
Sefton	Bootle Village	73	52	63

Table 1: SRB successful bids (bids covering single local authority areas or parts of a single local authority only)

Local authority	Name of bid	Rankings (A)	(B)	(C)
Wigan	Wigan Plc	74	161	136
Derby	Investing in Derby People	76	99	75
Scunthorpe	Grimsby and Cleethorpes	77	101	107
Scunthorpe	Scunthorpe Bid for SRB Resources	77	101	107
Thanet	Thanet District Council SRB Bid	81	39	53
Sedgefield	Bessember Park	85	224	167
Kirklees	Huddersfield Challenge	88	113	113
Kirklees	Kirklees—Routeways to Success	88	113	113
Hyndburn	The Regeneration of Central Accrington	89	151	141
Reading	Hexham Road Estate, Reading	92	53	52
Thurrock	The Tilbury Project, Essex	94	83	111
Thurrock	George Street Redevelopment	94	83	111
Calderdale	West Central Halifax	97	76	100
Calderdale	The Elland Initiative	97	76	100
Hounslow	The Bid for Brentford	99	42	68
Bolsover	Bolsover Diamond	100	320	182
Copeland	Renaissance of Whitehaven	101	219	160
Torbay	Torbay (Brixham)	107	49	76
Rochester Upon Medway	Medway City Estate Management Initiative	109	72	65
Rochester Upon Medway	Small Business Village, Luton, Chatham	109	72	65
Rochester Upon Medway	Chatham Campus—Business Creation and Technology	109	72	65
Lancaster	Morecambe—Turning the Tide	111	48	56
Ipswich	Ispwich Wet Dock	114	135	119
Carlisle	Carlisle—Raffles Sets the Pace	124	253	205
Ellesmere Port and Neston	Ellesmere Port Epicentre Strategy	131	216	134
The Wrekin	The Telford Partnership	132	179	171
Swale	Swale Regenerating the Isle of Sheppey	133	118	122
Eastbourne	Energise Eastbourne—Eastbourne Town Centre	136	83	153
Gloucester	Urban Regeneration in Barton and Tredworth	137	56	83
Alnwick	Amble Regeneration	140	320	234
Dudley	Dudley—Foundation for the Future	142	103	99
Cannock Chase	The Gateway Project	143	320	164
Northampton	Northampton Partnership	144	128	70
Trafford	Old Trafford	146	126	84
Weymouth and Portland	The Island and Royal Manor of Portland	166	117	130
Eden	Eden (Appleby Training Centre)	172	320	309
Dover	Whitecliff Business Park Dover	177	152	120
Fenland	Integrated Regeneration Strategy for the Wisbech Area	178	227	181
Basildon	The Bonus Project	182	217	176
Sutton	The Northern Wards	183	110	147
Gillingham	Architecture Centre—North Kent	192	80	92
Crewe and Nantwich	All Change at Crewe	194	156	161
Chester	Regeneration in West Chester	198	106	109
Ashford	South Ashford Urban Renewal Initiative	206	240	166
Harrow	Ethnic Minority Business Development	207	133	208
West Lindsey	Gainsborough Riverside Regeneration	210	242	190
Epping Forest	The Limes Farm Partnership	212	192	248
Craven	Craven: Hellifield Station	216	320	306
North Bedfordshire	Queens Park Partnership, Bedford	227	105	88
Sedgemoor	The Sydenham Estate, Bridgwater, Somerset	233	194	219
Leominster	Kington Connected Community	237	320	324
Kingswood	Kingswood Revitalisation Project	280	320	300
Congelton	Congleton Town and Industry Initiative	284	320	331
Selby	The Selby Waterfront Partnership	295	320	221
Braintree	The East Braintree Bid	315	320	285
Cherwell	Grimsbury Regeneration, Banbury Oxon	350	160	216

Table 2: SRB unsuccessful bids (bids covering single local authority areas or parts of a single local authority only)

Local authority	Name of bid	Rankings (a)	(b)	(c)
Newham	New Routes to New Jobs, Canning Town	1	5	9
Newham	Royals University College Technology Institute	1	5	9
Southwark	Raising Achievement (ELAN)	2	3	5
Southwark	Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Enterprise Network	2	3	5
Hackney	Enhance Employment Prospects, Promote Equality	3	1	4
Islington	Destination King's Cross	4	4	11
Islington	Investment in Achievement	4	4	11
Birmingham	Bangladeshi Youth Forum	5	19	2
Birmingham	Afro-Caribbean Resource Centre	5	19	2

Table 2: SRB unsuccessful bids (bids covering single local authority areas or parts of a single local authority only)

Local authority	*Name of bid*	*Rankings* (a)	(b)	(c)
Birmingham	Small Heath School	5	19	2
Birmingham	Camp Lane Working Group	5	19	2
Birmingham	Birmingham Consortium of Colleges	5	19	2
Liverpool	Parents and Under 8s	6	17	19
Liverpool	Liverpool City of Architecture	6	17	19
Liverpool	Second Chance	6	17	19
Tower Hamlets	Davenant Centre	7	2	1
Lambeth	Adding Value in Media and Cultural Sectors	8	6	3
Sandwell	Interpretation Services and English Skills	9	31	34
Sandwell	Black Country Urban Vinyard	9	31	34
Sandwell	English Skills for the Sikh Community	9	31	34
Lewisham	Lewisham Literacy 2000	11	12	8
Knowsley	Regeneration Through Partnership	12	14	28
Manchester	Greater Monsall Initiative	13	25	23
Manchester	Support of Ethnic Minorities	13	25	23
Manchester	Advice and Info Strategy	13	25	23
Manchester	INCITU	13	25	23
Manchester	Moss Side Initiative	13	25	23
Manchester	Regional Centres Strategy	13	25	23
Manchester	Gorton	13	25	23
Manchester	Employment Enterprise and Training	13	25	23
Manchester	Visions	13	25	23
Greenwich	Raising Employability	14	15	20
Greenwich	Increasing Business Competitiveness	14	15	20
Hammersmith and Fulham	Enhancing Employment Prospects and EDUC. Achievement	16	9	10
Hammersmith and Fulham	North End Road Corridor	16	9	10
Hammersmith and Fulham	Partnership Against Crime	16	9	10
Newcastle	Newburn Haugh Industrial Development	17	22	26
Newcastle	Newcastle Safer Cities	17	22	26
Newcastle	Televillage	17	22	26
Newcastle	Job Access Programme	17	22	26
Kensington and Chelsea	Language Support—ESOL	19	13	15
Kensington and Chelsea	From Earls Court to World's End	19	13	15
Waltham Forest	SRB Bid for Leyton	20	16	6
Wandsworth	Strategy to Prevent Youth Crime	21	18	22
Bradford	Manningham/City Centre	23	26	25
Bradford	Ethnic Minorities SRB	23	26	25
Bradford	Bradford High Technology Partnership	23	26	25
Bradford	Keighley SRB	23	26	25
Middlesborough	Ethnic Business Initiative	24	79	79
Westminster	Integration of Homeless Families and Refugees	26	10	12
Westminster	Amberely Estate	26	10	12
Westminster	Church Street Neighbourhood	26	10	12
Wolverhampton	Wolverhampton's SRB Bid	27	45	38
Brent	South Kilburn Family Centre	29	11	7
Brent	Brent Language Service	29	11	7
Brent	Crime Reduction, Employment and Training Programme	29	11	7
Brent	Brent Adult and Community Education	29	11	7
Blackpool	Blackpool Strategy for Regeneration	30	23	17
Gateshead	The Bede Centre	33	61	44
Gateshead	Team Valley Crime Prevention Initiative	33	61	44
Gateshead	Top Team	33	61	44
Hartlepool	Hartlepool Youth Strategy	35	130	91
Sheffield	Childcare Partnership Programme	36	35	18
Leicester	The Leicester Mosque Trust	37	70	41
Oldham	Oldham Telecite	39	58	48
Doncaster	Doncaster Regeneration Partnership	41	68	66
Walsall	Walsall for Tomorrow	44	59	64
Preston	Ribble Link Navigation	47	71	37
Preston	Preston Inner East	47	71	37
Bolton	Community Arts and Sports Centre	49	88	62
Bolton	Bolton Renaissance	49	88	62
Rochdale	Blackstone Edge Outdoor Pursuits and Residential Centre	50	78	60
Halton	Building Capacity and Competitive Strength	51	93	117
North Tyneside	Safer Communities Initiatives	52	62	73
Barnsley	Royston Comprehensive School	53	244	142
Barnsley	Rain Project	54	244	142
St Helens	Newton le Willows	54	134	116
Barnsley	Barnsley SRB	54	244	142
Leeds	Jamaica Society	56	67	24
Leeds	Industry/Education	56	67	24

Table 2: SRB unsuccessful bids (bids covering single local authority areas or parts of a single local authority only)

Local authority	Name of bid	Rankings (a)	(b)	(c)
Wirral	Tranmere	61	87	59
Wirral	Business Care Pilot	61	87	59
Wirral	Wirral Green Alliance LEAC	61	87	59
Wirral	Cammel Laird	61	87	59
Wirral	Bidstone/M53 Corridor/Cross Lane	61	87	59
Derby	Derby City Partnership	76	99	75
Corby	Corby Town Centre Regeneration	78	146	172
Blyth Valley	Blyth Renaissance	80	320	169
Thanet	St Peter's Parochial Church Council	81	39	53
Darlington	Darlington SRB	82	126	115
Great Yarmouth	North Quay Refurbishment	86	40	39
Kirklees	Personal Development and Regeneration	88	113	113
Barrow in Furness	Heart of Barrow	93	112	126
Slough	Slough Foyer	95	85	125
Enfield	Interkids Project	96	38	46
Hounslow	Ivybridge South Isleworth	99	42	68
Pendle	Meeting the Challenge to Manufacturing	103	181	127
Merton	Community Enterprise on Phipps Bridge	104	46	61
Merton	Merton Tramlink	104	46	61
Merton	A New View of Pollards Hill	104	46	61
Merton	Wandle Strategy: Partnership for Skills	104	46	61
Merton	Designing Out Crime—Rear Alleyways	104	46	61
Southend	Pierhead Development	110	73	80
Southend	CC-TV Surveillance	110	73	80
Peterborough	The Welland Action Project	112	142	85
West Lancashire	Midstream	116	320	175
Exeter	Exeter Homes Committee	118	81	123
Exeter	Community Safety	118	81	123
Gravesham	The High Street—Gravesend	121	97	133
Gravesham	North East Gravesend	121	97	133
Croydon	Basic Skills for Regeneration in Croydon	125	54	40
Allerdale	Maryport Job-Builder	126	246	165
Chester le Street	Chester le Street Town Centre	128	320	195
Chester le Street	Plawsworth Direct Access Centre	128	320	195
Chester le Street	Chester le Street Riverside	128	320	195
Restormel	St Austell Town Regeneration Strategy	129	119	210
Shepway	Regeneration of East Folkestone	130	50	58
Bassetlaw	Destination Bassetlaw Ltd	138	153	112
Barnet	Cricklewood Partnership	139	51	77
Barnet	Graham Park Area Partnership	139	51	77
Dudley	Cable Technology	142	103	99
Trafford	Longford Park	146	126	84
Ryedale	Writers Workshop	146	63	89
Dartford	Business Innovation Centre	149	213	157
Dartford	Holy Trinity Church	149	213	157
North Cornwall	The Kinsman Estate, Bodmin	151	320	271
Chorley	Chorley Open Learning Centre	152	320	246
North Devon	The Ilfracombe Partnership	153	167	148
North Devon	North Devon Food Village	153	167	148
Cheltenham	Cheltenham Millenium	155	150	110
Havering	Harold Hill Regeneration	158	129	74
Bury	Bridge Hall Area Consolidation	161	108	138
Bury	Building a Quality Learning Community Together	161	108	138
East Staffordshire	Burton Regeneration Programme	165	167	129
Tendring	Clacton Tourism Development Project	168	100	102
Kingston upon Thames	Charter Quay—The Missing Link	169	107	155
Kingston upon Thames	Kingston Country Court Lay Advocacy Scheme	169	107	155
Richmond upon Thames	Boat Project	173	164	232
Richmond upon Thames	Butt Farm Initiative	173	164	232
Warrington	North West International Business Centre	174	155	105
Bexley	Erith and Belvedere Partnership	181	96	101
Bexley	Skills, Training and Enterprise in Thamesmead	181	96	101
Bexley	Whitehall Centre	181	96	101
Bexley	Building Craft Workshops	181	96	101
Sutton	Releasing Local Potential	183	110	147
Newcastle under Lyme	Greater Chesterton Community Programme	184	256	184
Oswestry	Victoria Ward	185	320	263
Wyre	Silicon Fylde Enterprise Stimulation	187	126	137
Canterbury	Whitstable Harbour Ward Regeneration	188	115	87
Waveney	Roman Hill Partnership, Lowestoft	191	121	94
Gillingham	Gillingham District Centre	192	80	92

Table 2: SRB unsuccessful bids (bids covering single local authority areas or parts of a single local authority only)

Local authority	*Name of bid*	*Rankings* (a)	(b)	(c)
Teesdale	Evenwood and Barony Parish	204	320	243
Boothferry	Economic and Social Opportunities in Goole	205	210	198
Amber Valley	Langley Mill	209	255	235
Stockport	Project Youth Stockport	213	131	98
Craven	Craven SRB	216	320	306
High Peak	High Peak Partnership, The Glossop Project	218	180	202
Staffordshire Moorlands	Leek SRB Bid	224	320	241
South Derbyshire	Made in Swadlincote Partnership	225	218	328
Rother	Rye Habour	241	234	159
Thamesdown	Swindon Foyer	245	193	131
Maidstone	Maidstone Town Centre Community Initiative	246	116	132
Arun	Lineside Industrial Estate/Wickbourne Estate	256	126	106
Arun	Investing in the Community—Bognor Regis	256	126	106
Derbyshire Dales	The Bakewell Project	257	320	358
Ribble Valley	Ribble Valley	262	320	352
Macclesfield	Community Link	274	223	274
Milton Keynes	Tackling Disadvantage in a New Town	279	197	170
Woking	Sheerwater, Central and Maybury Regeneration	291	143	180
Poole	Hamworthy SRB Bid	293	145	242
Guildford	North Guildford Quality in Education	304	199	312
Lewes	Newhaven Town Centre	308	229	215
Kennet	Tidworth Community Regeneration Bid	311	320	308
Cotswold	Northleach Regeneration Scheme	316	252	304
Harrogate	Regeneration of Ripon	318	272	224
Charnwood	Loughborough Bid	331	320	186
Woodspring	Developing Individuals	333	132	96
Mendip	Morlands Industrial Site, Glastonbury	334	191	291
West Wiltshire	West Wiltshire DC Sports Facilities	339	320	283
Wealden	Herstmonceux Science Centre	342	266	258
Chelmsford	The Boarded Barns Estate	361	320	289

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish his guidance for the second round of bidding on the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Curry: In the spring.

Recruitment

Nr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much his Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to his Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Sir Paul Beresford: During 1994 my Department spent £451,905 on recruiting staff to the Department and its executive agencies: 122 staff were recruited.

Local Government Commission

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will come to a decision on the Local Government Commission's final recommendations for Lancashire.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We are still considering the Local Government Commission's recommendations about the future structure of local government in Lancashire, and will announce a decision as soon as possible.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Employees

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and, of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The Department and agencies for which my right hon. Friend is responsible did not exist in any comparable form before the 1992 election. The figures for 1993 and 1994 for these and other areas which fall within the Cabinet Office vote are as follows:

	CO/OPSS		*CCTA*		*CS COLLEGE*		*CCC*	
	1993	*1994*	*1993*	*1994*	*1993*	*1994*	*1993*	*1994*
Grade 7	26	27	5	7	21	19	1	1
Grade 3	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0
Executive officer level	115	120	23	20	28	30	50	50
Administrative officer level	153	165	31	40	57	61	108	92
Administrative assistant level	122	116	3	4	4	2	49	44
Total women in department	493	507	124	135	111	112	261	237
Total staff in department	874	906	412	378	268	273	486	447

	OHS		RAS		COI		HMSO	
	1993	1994	1993	1994	1993	1994	1993	1994
Grade 7	3	3	6	6	7	8	5	5
Grade 3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Executive Officer level	18	16	19	16	22	26	149	158
Administrative Officer level	41	39	41	39	59	50	422	397
Administrative assistant level	8	7	28	25	7	5	142	122
Total women in department	112	109	94	86	95	89	971	936
Total staff in department	131	126	197	151	579	515	3,157	3,117

Technology Foresight

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when the panel reports of the technology foresight exercise will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The foresight sector panel reports will be published in the spring. These reports will provide a sectoral focus. An overarching report from the technology foresight steering group will be published. This will draw together the main themes arising from the exercise.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Attorney-General what was the absenteeism rate for *(a)* the Government Property Lawyers and *(b)* the Law Officer's departments in each year since 1991.

The Attorney-General: The information available for absences through sickness is:

	Numbers of staff employed	Numbers of days absences
a) Government Property Lawyers		
1992[1]	—	—
1993	127	1,021.0
1994	128	1,225.0
b) Crown Prosecution Service		
1992	6,221	48,213.0
1993	6,500	53,495.0
1994	6,686	57,284.0
c) Treasury Solicitor's Department		
1992[2]	473	6,344.5
1993	357	6,233.5
1994	377	6,274.0
d) Serious Fraud Office		
1992	168	1,519.0
1993	199	1,398.0
1994	163	1,590.0
e) Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers		
1992	26	47.5
1993	27	46.0
1994	27	32.0

[1] Government Property Lawyers Agency was created on 1st April 1993.

[2] The figures for 1992 include staff of what is now Government Property Lawyers.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Attorney-General if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them published periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

The Attorney-General: The chief executive of the Government Property Lawyers has provided the following information. Of the matters raised by the hon. Member, only the following have resulted from the establishment of the agency:

	£
Cost of specially designed logo	1,586
Cost of specially designed and printed stationery	464

EDUCATION

School Finances

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, columns *641-42*, on what date information requested by the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth on the balances held by schools in England was due in to her Department; what steps are being taken to obtain the information where it is late; and what requirement is made of local education authorities to give reasons if the information is late.

Mr. Robin Squire: Regulations made under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988 require local education authorities to publish their local management of schools outturn statements before 1 November following the end of the financial year to which the statement relates. In relation to statements for the year 1993–94, a letter was sent by the Department to all LEAs in October 1994 reminding them of the imminence of this deadline. In cases of significant delay, the LEAs in question have been further reminded as appropriate, and explanations obtained from them. The attention of LEAs has also been drawn to the powers of the Secretary of State under section 99 of the Education Act 1944.

In the table included in the answer given on 19 January to the hon. Member, the following figures should be substituted for those previously given:

LEA	Balance £000
Avon	12,093
Buckinghamshire	8,116
Dorset	7,200

Secondary Schools

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is *(a)* the number of places, *(b)* the number of pupils and *(c)* the percentage excess or shortage of places in (i) local education authority maintained and (ii) grant-maintained secondary schools in each local education authority in England.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information is given in the table. Data on surplus places in the 286 grant-maintained schools in stage 1 authorities are not available. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) on Friday 9 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *410-14* which gave for each local education authority the total number of unfilled places in schools where the number of places is greater than the number of pupils.

Net surplus places in secondary schools by local authority area (excluding GM schools in stage 1 authorities—see note 1) January 1994

	LEA maintained schools			Self governing (GM) schools (see note 2)		
	Number of places	Number on roll	Percentage excess (see note 3)	Number of places	Number on roll	Percentage excess (see note 3)
LEA						
Avon[1]	63,459	52,708	17	—	—	—
Barking	9,390	9,756	-4	—	—	—
Barnet	9,917	8,885	10	10,351	9,905	4
Barnsley	15,280	12,730	17	—	—	—
Bedfordshire	43,641	35,859	18	9,493	8,852	7
Berkshire	45,556	39,596	13	8,653	7,409	14
Bexley	12,522	10,860	13	3,691	3,655	1
Birmingham	58,380	49,551	15	16,521	15,177	8
Bolton	14,931	14,228	5	3,036	2,803	8
Bradford	46,291	40,988	11	5,005	5,286	-6
Brent	3,329	2,983	10	11,664	9,705	17
Bromley	5,610	5,584	0	11,957	11,553	3
Buckinghamshire	28,608	26,989	6	10,218	10,174	0
Bury	10,687	10,333	3	—	—	—
Calderdale	8,449	6,846	19	7,124	6,543	8
Cambridgeshire	27,112	25,630	5	16,055	15,274	5
Camden	8,810	8,276	6	2,309	2,381	-3
Cheshire[1]	67,671	61,091	10	—	—	—
Cleveland	44,670	36,437	18	—	—	—
Cornwall	30,810	28,977	6	—	—	—
Corporation of London	0	0	—	—	—	—
Coventry	23,232	19,013	18	—	—	—
Croydon	9,654	9,002	7	6,320	5,907	7
Cumbria	23,982	20,311	15	13,042	10,873	17
Derbyshire	50,432	42,062	17	16,348	15,485	5
Devon[1]	57,357	54,127	6	—	—	—
Doncaster	28,134	21,869	22	—	—	—
Dorset	32,932	31,294	5	10,554	9,947	6
Dudley	15,274	13,456	12	4,846	4,669	4
Durham	45,675	37,708	17	—	—	—
Ealing	8,081	7,368	9	6,228	6,111	2
East Sussex	37,232	34,348	8	—	—	—
Enfield	13,616	12,214	10	5,891	5,634	4
Essex	35,532	28,787	19	77,500	67,108	13
Gateshead	14,223	11,751	17	—	—	—
Gloucestershire	12,463	11,239	10	23,285	22,150	5
Greenwich	16,730	13,980	16	—	—	—
Hackney	9,408	7,445	21	—	—	—
Hammersmith	7,248	4,648	36	1,178	1,237	-5
Hampshire	70,357	62,950	11	16,692	16,249	3
Haringey	10,718	9,222	14	—	—	—
Harrow[1]	7,650	7,792	-2	—	—	—
Havering	13,280	11,015	17	3,642	3,880	-7
Hereford and Worcester[1]	51,305	43,833	15	—	—	—
Hertfordshire	57,405	47,368	17	23,557	20,979	11
Hillingdon	2,596	2,127	18	12,369	11,988	3
Hounslow	12,011	12,403	-3	2,108	2,123	-1
Humberside	66,592	56,111	16	—	—	—
Isle of Wight	11,168	10,498	6	—	—	—
Isles of Scilly	345	122	65	—	—	—
Islington	8,855	7,215	19	—	—	—

Net surplus places in secondary schools by local authority area (excluding GM schools in stage 1 authorities—see note 1) January 1994

	LEA maintained schools			Self governing (GM) schools (see note 2)		
	Number of places	Number on roll	Percentage excess (see note 3)	Number of places	Number on roll	Percentage excess (see note 3)
Kensington	3,253	2,541	22	614	621	−1
Kent	60,419	50,126	17	58,380	52,118	11
Kingston upon Thames	5,094	4,886	4	3,214	2,901	10
Kirklees[1]	26,642	23,608	11	—	—	—
Knowsley[1]	9,986	8,365	16	—	—	—
Lambeth	5,464	2,998	45	3,984	3,308	17
Lancashire[1]	87,983	77,417	12	—	—	—
Leeds[1]	48,110	42,450	12	—	—	—
Leicestershire[1]	65,946	56,693	14	—	—	—
Lewisham	11,924	10,888	9	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	23,892	21,206	11	17,736	16,635	6
Liverpool[1]	35,422	28,190	20	—	—	—
Manchester	33,733	21,685	36	—	—	—
Merton	8,674	7,313	16	—	—	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	21,301	16,898	21	—	—	—
Newham[1]	16,144	13,485	16	—	—	—
Norfolk	35,198	32,032	9	9,067	8,802	3
North Tyneside[1]	17,204	14,122	18	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	49,566	44,040	11	—	—	—
Northamptonshire	38,639	35,524	8	10,134	9,386	7
Northumberland[1]	31,320	28,769	8	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire[1]	81,573	61,931	24	—	—	—
Oldham	17,200	16,330	5	—	—	—
Oxfordshire	41,833	35,144	16	—	—	—
Redbridge[1]	14,057	14,237	−1	—	—	—
Richmond upon Thames	7,710	7,622	1	—	—	—
Rochdale[1]	14,105	11,854	16	—	—	—
Rotherham	20,884	18,187	13	—	—	—
Salford[1]	14,509	11,209	23	—	—	—
Sandwell[1]	20,988	17,765	15	—	—	—
Sefton	22,335	19,030	15			—
Sheffield[1]	30,348	25,045	17	—	—	—
Shropshire	26,102	21,522	18	3,703	3,701	0
Solihull	13,948	13,506	3	—	—	—
Somerset[1]	30,803	27,654	10	—	—	—
South Tyneside	11,504	9,570	17	—	—	—
Southwark	8,505	6,598	22	3,175	2,786	12
St. Helens	13,880	11,759	15	—	—	—
Staffordshire[1]	67,215	65,023	3	—	—	—
Stockport	17,812	16,020	10	—	—	—
Suffolk	53,590	48,024	10	—	—	—
Sunderland	21,729	19,436	11	—	—	—
Surrey	35,138	34,015	3	12,529	11,390	9
Sutton	4,443	4,660	−5	6,705	6,699	0
Tameside	12,346	11,001	11	2,171	2,371	−9
Tower Hamlets[1]	13,080	10,985	16	—	—	—
Trafford	10,272	8,864	14	3,402	3,083	9
Wakefield	24,623	20,077	18	—	—	—
Walsall	16,297	13,738	16	6,567	5,768	12
Waltham Forest	11,097	9,407	15	2,078	2,099	−1
Wandsworth	3,464	2,335	33	7,785	6,606	15
Warwickshire	25,580	20,304	21	5,993	4,483	20
West Sussex	45,558	39,952	12	—	—	—
Westminster	7,911	7,464	6	—	—	—
Wigan	21,604	19,523	10	—	—	—
Wiltshire	24,811	20,787	16	15,353	13,700	11
Wirral[1]	22,818	19,052	17	—	—	—
Wolverhampton	16,640	13,597	18	2,747	2,404	12

[1] Stage 1 LEAs which have one or more GM secondary schools

1. Stage 1 = less than 10% of pupils in the GM sector
2. The GM columns include schools which became grant-maintained on or before 1 April 1994.
3. A negative figure indicates a net shortage of places.

Expenditure (Books and Equipment)

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much per pupil was spent by each local education authority on books and equipment in 1993–94 prices in *(a)* 1979–80 and *(b)* 1993–94.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table sets out per-pupil expenditure in 1993-94 prices by LEAs in England on books and equipment at LEA-maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in 1979–80 and 1992–93, the latest year for which figures are available. Equivalent information is not available for grant-maintained schools.

Expenditure on books and equipment per pupil in 1979–80 and 1992–93 by LEA (in 1993–94 prices)	Nursery primary and secondary 1979–80 £	Nursery primary and secondary 1992–93 £
ILEA	126	—
Corporation of London	—	114
Camden	—	81
Greenwich	—	45
Hackney	—	34
Hammersmith	—	61
Islington	—	56
Kensington and Chelsea	—	82
Lambeth	—	14
Lewisham	—	197
Southwark	—	64
Tower Hamlets	—	127
Wandsworth	—	56
Westminster	—	261
Barking	40	111
Barnet	55	102
Bexley	63	55
Brent	75	66
Bromley	53	71
Croydon	50	69
Ealing	56	48
Enfield	50	31
Haringey	66	13
Harrow	67	105
Havering	51	85
Hillingdon	56	92
Hounslow	53	93
Kingston upon Thames	46	71
Merton	51	102
Newham	66	82
Redbridge	54	102
Richmond upon Thames	50	74
Sutton	55	54
Waltham Forest	71	63
Birmingham	37	76
Coventry	48	65
Dudley	29	51
Sandwell	45	56
Solihull	38	97
Walsall	45	80
Wolverhampton	47	51
Knowsley	47	76
Liverpool	47	48
St Helens	34	84
Sefton	44	71
Wirral	44	59
Bolton	46	96
Bury	52	68
Manchester	69	71
Oldham	48	82
Rochdale	51	49
Salford	48	12
Stockport	46	98
Tameside	44	73
Trafford	36	69
Wigan	45	84
Barnsley	48	91
Doncaster	52	0
Rotherham	35	63
Sheffield	52	67
Bradford	42	55
Calderdale	38	77
Kirklees	35	96
Leeds	36	57
Wakefield	39	67
Gateshead	50	87
Newcastle upon Tyne	58	64
North Tyneside	50	1
South Tyneside	69	74
Sunderland	50	81
Isles of Scilly	40	18
Avon	39	109
Bedfordshire	57	86
Berkshire	46	101
Buckinghamshire	49	85
Cambridgeshire	47	91
Cheshire	39	62
Cleveland	49	67
Cornwall	47	80
Cumbria	40	64
Derbyshire	45	66
Devon	43	93
Dorset	46	72
Durham	36	51
East Sussex	58	93
Essex	46	77
Gloucestershire	37	79
Hampshire	36	97
Hereford and Worcester	44	83
Hertfordshire	49	19
Humberside	47	86
Isle of Wight	57	82
Kent	51	46
Lancashire	39	100
Leicestershire	44	116
Lincolnshire	40	101
Norfolk	49	60
North Yorkshire	48	102
Northamptonshire	48	86
Northumberland	55	61
Nottinghamshire	46	81
Oxfordshire	58	89
Shropshire	40	17
Somerset	44	70
Staffordshire	54	73
Suffolk	45	189
Surrey	32	53
Warwickshire	36	92
West Sussex	55	109
Wiltshire	45	88
Total	49	77

Pupil Statistics

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the estimated number of pupils in 1995–96 aged *(a)* five to 10 years and *(b)* 11 to 15 years in each local education authority and in total.

Mr. Robin Squire: The projected numbers for England for January 1996 are as follows:

	Age (at 31 August 1995) Five to 10[1]	11 to 15
Maintained primary and secondary schools[2]	3,583,000	2,691,000
Maintained special schools[2]	33,000	48,000

[1] Excluding rising fives, ie pupils whose fifth birthday falls between 1 September 1995 and 31 December 1995.

[2] Including grant maintained schools.

Projections at local education authority level are not available.

Recruitment

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much her Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to her Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Mr. Boswell: In 1994, the Department and its executive agency recruited 339 staff. We estimate the recruitment costs to the Department to have been approximately £210,000.

Projections at local education authority level are not available.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *720*, on what date she was informed of the allegations made concerning the Student Loans Company; what was the nature of these allegations; at what date management consultants were invited to tender to carry out an investigation into the allegations; if she will identify those consultants who were invited to tender; which consultant submitted the lowest tender; on what date the contract was awarded; on what date the provisional findings were received; and if she will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend was informed of the most recent allegations of impropriety at the Student Loans Company on 5 October 1994. Tenders for the contract to carry out an investigation were invited from three organisations—Robson Rhodes, Ernst and Young and Coopers and Lybrand—on 10 October 1994.

The contract was awarded to Coopers and Lybrand on 12 October. The winning tender was not the lowest. The contract was awarded to the tenderer who was considered to offer the best value for money. Lowest cost alone is not necessarily the best indicator of this.

My right hon. Friend received a report of Coopers and Lybrand's provisional findings on 9 January 1995. The investigation into the allegations is not complete. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the nature of allegations which are still under investigation, nor to make public provisional findings. The full conclusions of the investigation will be reported to the Public Accounts Committee in the usual way.

Boxing Skills

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if she will give the names and locations of any other schools that have applied for, or will be participating in, the basic boxing skills training scheme similar to that given at Croxteth community school; when the scheme will be launched; and what will be the extent of Government funding;

(2) what funding has been made available to Croxteth community school to teach basic boxing skills.

Mr. Forth: The boxing skills training scheme at the Croxteth community school is privately sponsored and attracts support of £5,000 through the Government's sports match scheme. Information about similar schemes is not collected centrally.

SCOTLAND

Health Care International

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what offer of regional selective assistance has been made to the Abu Dhabi Investment Group in relation to its bid for the Health Care International hospital at Clydebank; on what this RSA assistance will be spent; if the offer is conditional on the original employment targets at the Health Care International being achieved; and what these targets are.

Mr. Stewart: No further offer of regional selective assistance has been made. If a new investor were prepared to take the project forward, it is possible that the balance of existing offer could be transferred. Such a transfer would be subject to appropriate conditions and would be based upon the project being taken forward as previously envisaged. If the offer were transferred, the unpaid balance of grant would be released by stages, in line with the achievement of job targets which would otherwise have applied to HCI. These targets envisaged the ultimate creation of 1,800 direct new jobs at Clydebank.

Gemini Housing Association

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what funds Scottish Homes has made available to Gemini Housing Association;

(2) which housing associations have been invited to make a bid to take over Scottish Homes's property in *(a)* Springburn, *(b)* the Royston area and *(c)* Dennistown;

(3) when the board of Scottish Homes decided that its officers and staff would form Gemini Housing Association;

(4) how many officers of Scottish Homes have been involved with the setting up of Gemini Housing Association;

(5) how many hours Scottish Homes's officials and staff have devoted to the running of Gemini Housing Association during 1994.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked its chairman, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member with the relevant information.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, if he has decided on the compulsory competitive tendering timetables to apply in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The Government are committed to ensuring that the benefits of local government reorganisation and compulsory competitive tendering are realised across Scotland. To achieve both aims, a flexible programme is required, linked closely to Scottish circumstances.

I therefore issued a consultation paper on compulsory competitive tendering and local government reorganisation last July. I have considered carefully the responses submitted and have decided on certain adjustments to the timetables proposed in the consultation paper.

For work subject to CCT under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, competition will be reintroduced with effect from 1 July 1997. By this date, contracts must be commenced. There will be no

exemptions for construction contracts worth over £0.5 million.

For work subject to the Local Government Act 1988, competition will be reintroduced and contracts will require to be let between July 1997 and July 1998.

The new manual services, security services and vehicle management will follow the same timetable as for the existing 1988 Act activities.

The new professional services will require to be let between April 1998 and April 1999. Authorities will have flexibility during that period to decide the areas of work that they wish to put out to competition first.

The timetable for housing management remains unchanged. However, the dates will now refer to when contracts are let rather than when the contracts commence. This is in line with the timetable for professional services.

WALES

Schools, Clwyd

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit *(a)* Penyffordd voluntary primary school and *(b)* Penyffordd county primary school, Clwyd; and if he will meet the governors of each school.

Mr. Richards: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have any plans at present to visit Penyffordd voluntary primary school or Penyfford county primary school. We will, however, bear these in mind when arranging our future programmes of school visits.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning his Department's allocation of money for schools in Clwyd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The Department has received many representations on the issue of education funding in Clwyd in 1995–96 from school governors, head teachers, parents and others. My right hon. Friend does not set individual county education budgets. It is for each local authority to determine how much of its available resources to direct towards the services it provides, including education, in the light of its statutory responsibilities and its perception of local needs and priorities.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning his new policy on school playing fields.

Mr. Richards: No. Neither my right hon. Friend nor I has announced a new policy on school playing fields.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the absenteeism rate for *(a)* the Welsh Office and *(b)* Cadw in each year since 1991.

Mr. Redwood: The average number of working days absent per member of staff was 9.82 in 1992 and 10.1 in 1993. Statistics on a comparable basis are not available for 1991.

Details for Cadw are not separately identified; they are included in the Welsh Office totals.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many official Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 1994; how much these cards will cost, *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Members' Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he intends to send this year.

Mr. Redwood: I apologise for not replying to the hon. Gentleman's question sooner.

Ministers in this Department sent out 900 official Christmas cards in 1994 costing *(a)* £755 to buy, and *(b)* £200 to post.

The disaggregated cost for staff time is not available.

Departmental Employees

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and, of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Redwood: The numbers of individuals were as follows:

As at 1 April	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Total women	1,016	1,140.5	1,021	948
Grade 3	—	—	1	1
Grade 7	25	26	24	23
Executive officer	200	207.5	191	190
Administrative officer	295.5	282.5	259	240
Administrative assistant	161	187.5	157	158

Ministerial Visits (Schools)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which schools he and his Ministers have visited since the 1992 general election.

Mr. Richards: School visits undertaken by Welsh Office Ministers since 9 April 1992 are as follows:

Aberdare girls high school
Ashgrove Special School
Bedwas Comprehensive School
Bishop Vaughan Grant-Maintained School
Bishopston Comprehensive School
Brynhyfryd School
Brynmawr Grant-Maintained School
Coed y Lan Comprehensive School
Corpus Christi High School
Crickhowell High School
Croesyceiliog Comprehensive School
Dame Anna Childs Endowed School
Dynevor Comprehensive School
Eglwys Wen and Melin Gruffydd Primary School

Eirias High School
Garnfach Infants School
Glan Ely High School
Heol Ddu Comprehensive School
Holyhead High School
John Beddoes School
Llandovery College (Independent)
Llandrindod County Primary School
Llanfigangel Rhydithon County Primary School
Lliswerry Comprehensive School
Llwyn Crwn County Primary School
Maes Dyfan Special School
Marlborough Road Junior School
Palmerston County Primary School
Pencoed Comprehensive School
Pentrepoeth School
Pilgwenlly County Primary School
Radyr Comprehensive School
St David's College (Independent)
St David's High School, Wrexham
Tredegar Comprehensive School
Tregynon (Special Needs) School
Trelai County Primary School
Windsor Clive Infants & Junior Schools
Ysgol Bro Lleu
Ysgol Caergeiliog (Grant Maintained)
Ysgos Croes Atti
Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan (Grant Maintained)
Ysgol Esgob Morgan
Ysgol Glan Clywd
Ysgol Gwynllyw (County Secondary)
Ysgol Gyfun Rhydfelin
Ysgol Gymraeg Dewi Sant
Ysgol Gynrdd Gymraeg Brynsierfel
Ysgol Rowen

Company Sizes

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many companies in Wales employ *(a)* more than 200 persons; *(b)* fewer than 200 but more than 20 persons and *(c)* fewer than 20 persons; and what are the percentages represented by each of all companies.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is not available for companies in Wales. However, a breakdown of census of employment data units, which are roughly equivalent to workplaces, is available and is shown in the table:

Size of units (Number of employees)	*Number of units[1] in Wales (thousands)*	*Per cent. of total*
1-24	52.5	88.4
25-199	6.3	10.6
200 and over	0.6	1.0
All sizes	59.4	100.0

Source: NOMIS.
[1] The figures relate only to data units with employees. Solo proprietors and HM forces are excluded. Also excluded are agricultural and horticultural holdings. Some workplaces may comprise several data units because of the way the information is collected eg. because of different pay arrangements, for weekly and monthly paid staff.

Recruitment

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to his Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Mr. Redwood: In 1994, my Department spent £121,000. Forty-one substantive staff were recruited, some from other Departments.

SMART Scheme

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the European Union on the criteria to be used and the control and compliance mechanisms in adjudicating applications for assistance under the SMART scheme.

Mr. Redwood: SMART is a nationwide competition whose guidelines are drawn up by the DTI as the lead Department. The European Commission was consulted and notified of the criteria used for running the competition and judging the entries. All SMART programmes receive EC approval prior to launch.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to strengthen the scientific, technological and engineering qualifications and know how available to his advisory panel on applications for assistance under the SMART scheme.

Mr. Redwood: I am satisfied that its combined professional qualifications and experience, and the additional expertise that it is able to call upon when necessary, suitably equip the appraisal team for the task of judging the SMART competition.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the scientific and engineering qualifications of his advisory panel on applications for assistance under the SMART scheme; when he last assessed the quality of the science and engineering qualifications required to make appropriate assessment of such applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The members of the appraisal team together possess the following qualifications: BSc, PhD, DipSH, ONC(Eng), IEng, MIMechE, AMIEE. Each also has direct experience of having worked in industry.

In addition, the panel is able, as necessary, to consult specialist advisers within other Government Departments, the research establishments and the Patent Office, thus affording them access to expertise of worldwide repute.

NHS Trusts Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to announce the appointment of a chairman and the board for the *(a)* Dental Hospital trust, Cardiff and *(b)* Cardiff Community and Priority Services trust.

Mr. Redwood: Interviews for the post of chairman of both trusts will be held shortly, and I shall make an announcement as soon as possible thereafter. I hope to announce the names of non-executive directors by 31 March.

Cultural Organisations

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library copies of the reports from *(a)* his Department, *(b)* S4C and *(c)* the Association for Business Sponsorship in the Arts in Wales into the funding of cultural organisations in Wales via matching grants.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has not prepared any reports into his matter. Any reports relating to S4C or the Association of Business Sponsorship in the Arts in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning past expenditure on out-sourcing computer systems and relevant infrastructure expenditure on dedicated land lines which required but did not receive *(a)* board approval, *(b)* advertisement in the contracts supplement of the *Official Journal* of the European Union and *(c)* his Department's approval; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have written to the chairman of the WDA expressing my concern about the breaches of the rules on the procurement of information systems. The chairman shares that concern and the agency has taken steps to ensure that such breaches do not recur. The chief executive of the agency has reported on these matters to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and has taken disciplinary action.

My Department is discussing with the agency what further action may be necessary.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *717*, if he will give the equivalent out-turn figures for 1993–94 and the anticipated out-turn figures for 1994–95 for the management running costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies he sponsors.

Mr. Redwood: The figures are set out in the table:

NDPB Running Costs

Executive NDPB	*Out-turn 1993–94*	*Forecast out-turn 1994–95*
Housing for Wales	2.9	2.9
Sports Council for Wales	[1]not available	1.016
Arts Council of Wales	—	1.719
Further Education Funding Council	2.7	2.8
Higher Education Funding Council	1.091	1.4
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	4.094	4.0
Land Authority for Wales	1.882	1.882
National Museum of Wales	9.895	10.24
National Library of Wales	4.224	4.339
Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments	1.18	1.18
Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting	0.987	0.957
Wales Youth Agency	0.38	0.386
Welsh Language Board	—	0.872

NDPB Running Costs

Executive NDPB	*Out-turn 1993–94*	*Forecast out-turn 1994–95*
ACAC	—	1.573
Wales Tourist Board	3.859	4.14
Welsh Development Agency	15.09	14.13
Development Board for Rural Wales	3.27	3.253
Countryside Council for Wales	8.72	9.2

[1] The definition of running costs for the Sports Council for Wales has been revised, effective from 1994–95.

Konver Scheme

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the eligibility of *(a)* the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Cardiff and *(b)* the Cardiff area as a whole for designation under the Konver scheme.

Mr. Redwood: Assessment of the Atomic Weapons Establishment, and its impact on the wider Cardiff area, has shown that the area and the establishment will not be eligible for Konver support.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have had their claims for invalidity benefit withdrawn in Liverpool each quarter during the last five years for the reason for being found fit for work within limits; what is the average weekly loss of income incurred by a claimant who has invalidity benefit withdrawn.

Mr. Hague: The information requested on the numbers who have had their invalidity benefit withdrawn is not available.

The average weekly amount of invalidity benefit in payment at 3 April 1993, the latest date for which information is available, was £79.34.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the consequential effect will be to claimants of the proposed changes from invalidity benefit to incapacity benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: Existing invalidity benefit recipients will be protected. Incapacity benefit will be paid at the same rates as the preceding invalidity benefit. The rates will continue to be uprated annually with the exception of the earning-related addition, which will be frozen at the rate in payment at the point of change.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total annual amount paid to those people in receipt of invalidity benefit; and if he will break the figures down in percentage terms for payments to *(a)* single claimants, *(b)* additions for spouses or partners, *(c)* additions for children or dependants and *(d)* additional component element, and age additions.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. In 1993–94 the total amount paid to people in receipt of invalidity benefit was £6,967 million. Data are not collected on the breakdown of expenditure

between each of the components of invalidity benefit. Estimates of the breakdown are in the table:

Breakdown of invalidity benefit expenditure at 1993–94 prices

	£ million	Per cent.
Personal benefit	4,610	66
Adult dependency increase	780	11
Child dependency increase	120	1.7
Invalidity allowance (net)	210	3
Additional Pension	1,200	17
Graduated benefit	40	0.6

Note: 1. Estimates rounded to the nearest £10 million. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

2. The invalidity allowance figure is the net amount paid. Invalidity allowance is extinguished by additional pension and /or guaranteed minimum pension entitlement.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what savings are expected to arise from the change from invalidity benefit to incapacity benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: Total estimated savings from the incapacity benefit changes are:

1995-96: £410 million

1996-97: £1,185 million

1997-98: £1,720 million

Note: Estimates rounded to nearest £5 million, expressed in cash terms.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants who lose their entitlement to invalidity benefit will be entitled to income support.

Mr. Hague: On average, in 1995–96 we estimate that about 45 per cent. of claimants excluded by the new medical test will be entitled to income support.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what resources he has made available to the Social Security Benefit Agency and the Independent Tribunal Service to cope with appeals arising out of the change from invalidity benefit to incapacity benefit.

Mr. Hague: The total amount provided to the Benefits Agency to deal with incapacity benefits in the first year is £37 million. This includes resources to deal with appeals. The amount provided for the independent tribunal service for incapacity benefit appeals in the first year is £8.17 million.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the current invalidity benefit claimants will be exempt from the new test for incapacity benefit, by virtue of *(a)* age, *(b)* receipt of disability living allowance care allowance—higher rate—and *(c)* prescribed list of severe medical conditions.

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) on 9 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *385–86*.

CSA

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much revenue has been collected by the Child Support Agency as fees in the first half of 1994–95; how much in the way of fees is outstanding; and how many actions have been taken by the CSA to enforce outstanding fees.

Mr. Burt: Administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 27 January 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the collection and enforcement of fees due to the Child Support Agency.

During the period April 1994 to September 1994 the Agency collected in excess of £1 million in fees. At the end of November 1994, the total for the year to date was £1.45 million and the amount of outstanding fees due to the Agency, including fees charged in 1993/94 was £11.6 million.

The Agency has sought or is seeking Court action for the recovery of outstanding fees in approximately 1,350 cases.

I hope that this is of help.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the total sum expended by his Department on incentive payments to those opting into personal pensions.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The most recent published, audited figure on the cost to the national insurance fund of incentive payments for those opting out of SERPS into appropriate personal pensions for the period 1988 to 1993 is £2.4 billion, up to the end of 1992–93.

The Government Actuary's report on the contributions uprating order for 1994–95 estimated to total additional cost for 1993–94 and 1994–95 as £0.7 billion.

Fraud

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what evaluation he has made of the experience of the Australian Government in the detection and eradication of fraud by benefit claimants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: As part of the six nations social security interchange scheme, a senior official from the security, fraud and control division of the Australian Department of Social Security has been seconded to this Department since 1993. He has been assisting in the development of the security strategy, modelled on the equivalent Australian fraud control plan.

A small team from Australia is currently working with the Information Technology Services Agency and the Benefits Agency as part of the security strategy.

Recruitment

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to his Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Invalidity and Disablement Allowance

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the current claimants in receipt of

invalidity or severe disablement allowance are *(a)* single, *(b)* in receipt of additional payments for their spouses or partners, *(c)* in receipt of an additional earnings-related element and *(d)* in receipt of additional payments in relation to age bands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: There is no information on the number of invalidity benefit or severe disablement allowance recipients who are single.

The available information is in the table.

The number of Invalidity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance recipients in Great Britain on the 3 April 1993 (latest date for which information available)

Benefit	*Number of recipients*
Invalidity Benefit	1,580,000
Adult dependency increase	457,000
Additional pension	1,384,000
Invalidity allowance[1]	584,000

The number of Invalidity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance recipients in Great Britain on the 3 April 1993 (latest date for which information available)

Benefit	*Number of recipients*
Severe Disablement Allowance	316,000
Adult dependency increase	4,000
Additional pension	1,000
Age related addition	310,000

Notes:
[1]736,000 recipients entitlement to invalidity allowance is extinguished by their additional pension and/or guaranteed minimum pension.
Source: Based on a one per cent sample of claimants within Great Britain, rounded to the nearest thousand.

Family Credit

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much family credit expressed *(a)* in overall cash terms and *(b)* as a percentage of total expenditure on family credit, has been given to families with (i) one child, (ii) two children, (iii) three children, (iv) four children and (v) five or more children in each of the past five years.

Mr. Roger Evans: The precise information is not available. Information derived on a pro-rata basis is set out in the tables:

Family credit expenditure

£ million

	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Family with one child	129	145	178	277	335
Family with two children	141	162	212	329	390
Family with three children	88	105	131	188	219
Family with four children	41	49	61	82	92
Family with five or more children	27	33	44	53	55
All families	425	494	626	929	[1]1,091

[1] Estimated outturn.

Percentage

	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Family with one child	30	29	28	30	31
Family with two children	33	33	34	35	36
Family with three children	21	21	21	20	20
Family with four children	10	10	10	9	8
Family with five or more children	6	7	7	6	5
All families	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Five per cent. sample of Family Credit awards and the Departmental Report 1994.

EMPLOYMENT

Jobcentres

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list by region the location of every jobcentre in Scotland stating in each case if the jobcentre runs job clubs.

Miss. Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 27 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the location of every Jobcentre in Scotland by region, stating in each case if the Jobcentre runs Jobclubs.

In Scotland, Jobclubs are run both directly by the Employment Service (ES) and on behalf of the ES by external contractors. The following table shows the location of Jobcentres by Regional and Island Council Authorities and those which run Jobclubs.

I hope this is helpful.

Regional Authority	*Jobcentre*
Strathclyde	[1]Irvine
	[1]Kilbirnie
	[1]Kilmarnock A and B
	[1]Kilwinning
	Largs
	Saltcoats
	[1]Ayr
	[1]Cumnock
	Girvan
	Troon
	[1]Bridgeton

Regional Authority	Jobcentre
	Cambuslang
	'Castlemilk
	Central
	'Langside
	'Laurieston
	'Rutherglen
	'Shawlands
	'South Side
	'Easterhouse
	'Shettleston
	'Parkhead
	'Cumbernauld
	'Kirkintilloch
	Kilsyth
	'Springburn
	'Govan A and B
	Hillington
	'Renfrew
	'Alexandria
	'Anniesland B
	'Clydebank
	'Drumchapel
	'Dumbarton
	Helensburgh
	'Maryhill A and B
	Oban
	'Partick
	Dunoon
	'Greenock A and B
	'Port Glasgow
	Rothsey
	Carluke
	'Lanark
	'Larkhall
	'Motherwell A and B
	Shotts
	'Wishaw
	'Airdrie
	'Bellshill
	Blantyre
	'Coatbridge
	'East Kilbride
	'Hamilton
	'Uddingston
	'Barrhead
	Campbeltown
	'Johnstone
	'Paisley
	Paisley A and B
Lothian	'Dalkeith
	'Haddington
	Loanhead
	'Musselburgh
	Penicuik
	'Edinburgh A, B and C
	'Leith
	'Portobello
	SOSTAS—Edinburgh, South St. Andrew Street
	'Wester Hailes
	'Bathgate A and B
	Broxburn
	'Livingston
Borders	Eyemouth
	'Galashiels
	'Hawick
	Kelso
	Peebles
Dumfries and Galloway	Annan
	Castle Douglas
	'Dumfries
	Lockerbie
	Newton Stewart
	Sanquhar
	'Stranraer
Fife	'Cowdenbeath
	Cupar
	'Dunfermline
	'Glenrothes
	Inverkeithing
	'Kirkcaldy
	'Leven
	St. Andrews
Central	'Alloa
	Bo'ness
	'Denny
	'Falkirk
	'Grangemouth
	'Stirling
Highland	'Fort William
	'Portree
	'Thurso
	Wick
	Dingwall
	'Elgin
	Forres
	'Invergordon
	'Inverness A and B
	Nairn
Grampian	'Aberdeen A, B, C and D
	Banff
	'Buckie
	'Fraserburgh
	'Peterhead
Tayside	'Arbroath
	Blairgowrie
	'Dundee A, B, C and D
	Forfar
	Montrose
	'Perth
Western Isle Island Council	'Stornoway
Shetland Islands Council	Lerwick

' Denotes the Jobcentres which have linked Jobclubs.

Recruitment

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much his Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to his Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Miss Widdecombe: In 1994, the Employment Department group recruited 1,630 permanent staff. It is not possible to identify the cost separately from general expenditure on human resource management.

Staff Safety

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what research has been carried out into the feasibility of safety screens for Employment Service staff dealing with the jobseeker's allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment

Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about what research has been carried out into the feasibility of safety screens for Employment Service (ES) staff who would administer the proposed Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA).

The ES is currently considering what safety measures will be appropriate as and when the proposed JSA is introduced.

A generic risk assessment has concluded that most JSA processes can be handled in an open plan environment. Local risk assessments will be carried out in all of our local offices.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. McCartney : To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many assaults have been committed on staff in the Employment Service and Department of Employment in each year since 1979 *(a)* nationally, *(b)* by region and *(c)* by individual office; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdercombe: I am able to supply statistics for the period 1989 to September 1994. No earlier statistics are available. I am sorry that details at individual office level could be obtained only at disproportionate cost to the taxpayer.

Employment Service 1989—September 1994 reported assaults (all types)

Region	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*[1]1994*
Yorkshire and Humberside	46	79	112	81	126	104
North west	125	144	170	199	185	168
London and south east	695	608	520	455	593	440
Northern	51	86	60	72	52	102
South west	72	117	83	131	149	113
Wales	21	30	45	57	41	47
Scotland	56	73	67	83	85	52
East Midlands	93	118	79	103	99	148
West Midlands	50	135	98	208	115	114
Total	1,209	1,390	1,234	1,389	1,445	1,288

This table includes statistics of all reported assaults. These include actual physical assaults, attempted physical assaults and verbal abuse. Of the 7,955 incidents reported during the period, 1,065 were actual assaults, 1,197 were attempted assaults and 5,693 were incidents of verbal abuse. Most of the actual assaults do not result in an injury and only a small proportion of injuries require any kind of medical treatment.

[1] This is a nine month figure

Department of Employment Statistics: 1990–1994

Department	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Health and SafetyExecutive	6	1	7	13
ACAS	nil	nil	nil	1
Employment Department	nil	nil	nil	nil

All parts of the Department regard any assault as serious. Those parts of the group that experience assaults are keenly aware of the issues and take appropriate steps either to eliminate the risk or to reduce it, so far as is reasonably practicable. Such steps would include providing information on the risks, appropriate training and the issue of protective equipment such as attack alarms and mobile telephones.

Skills Training Agency

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his most recent assessment of the privatisation of the skills training agency.

Mr. Paice: The privatisation was completed in 1990 in line with the objectives set for it. The purchasers of skill centres have been responsible for the business since then.

Training

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the Government will provide training, rehabilitation and assistance from the Employment Service to provide for those taken off invalidity benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: People whose claims to invalidity benefit are disallowed and who register with the Employment Service have immediate access to a full range of provision to help them return to work. This help includes referral to training programmes run by training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies as well as the advice, assessment and guidance, and where necessary specialist services for people with disabilities, which are available directly from the ES. These arrangements will continue and be expanded following the introduction, from April 1995, of incapacity benefit.

DEFENCE

Departmental Employees

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Freeman: The number of women employed by my Department and its agencies over the past four years at the specified grade levels is set out below.

Civilian women

	1 April 1991	*1 April 1992*	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*
Non-Industrial women	33,639	33,914	32,301	30,602
Industrial women	9,251	8,933	7,285	7,118
Total women	42,890	42,847	39,586	37,720

Grade levels[1]	*1 April 1991*	*1 April 1992*	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*
Grade 3	1	2	2	2
Grade 7	136	148	156	157
Executive officer	4,252	4,325	4,185	4,225
Admin officer	14,004	14,160	13,388	13,532
Admin assistant	11,320	11,156	10,426	10,007

[1] Non-Industrial staff only, including grade equivalents.

Electro-shock Devices

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement regarding the payment arrangements for military, security and police equipment supplied by United Kingdom companies for

the Al-Yamamah contract with special reference to electronic batons.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave the hon. member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 17 January *Official Report*, column *452*.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them published periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. Freeman: These are matters for the chief executives of my Department's executive agencies. I have therefore asked them to reply.

Letter from Mike Dymond to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 26 January 1995:

1. As part of his co-ordinated reply to your question concerning the operation and costs of Next Steps Agencies, Minister of State (DP) has asked me to provide you with the details for the Defence Accounts Agency.

2. The Agency was launched under the title of its predecessor organisation (Director General Defence Accounts) on 1 April 1991 and was restyled the Defence Accounts Agency on 1 July 1993.

3. We occupy the same buildings as we did before becoming an Agency. No new buildings have been acquired.

4. Staff numbers have been reduced steadily since the Agency's launch, from 2,184 on 1 April 1991 to an expected 1,808 on 31 March 1995. No additional staff have been required as a result of agency status.

5. We continue to publish a monthly staff newsletter (Snapshot) which was originally introduced by the Director General Defence Accounts in September 1989 as a means of improving communication within the organisation.

6. The Agency has no executive cars.

7. The badge which we use as our logo is an amended version of that granted by the College of Heralds to the Director General Defence Accounts in 1980. The amendment, to reflect the Agency's change of title in July 1993, was made at a cost of £500.

8. The Agency has no corporate clothing.

9. The Agency does have a small stock of its own letterheaded paper. The letterhead was designed in-house; the cost of printing was £2,016.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 23 January 1995:

PO NO. 5744G Dated 20 January 1995

Minister of State (DP) has asked me to reply to your question about Next Steps Agencies and how this relates to my Agency.

Taking the individual parts of your question in the order put to me:

DASA has not acquired its own headquarters building.

No additional support staff were employed since becoming an Agency. All work associated with our status was absorbed by existing staff at a time when DASA was reducing its staff numbers by 10%.

DASA publishes an Annual Report and Accounts. The main cost of this has been borne centrally by MoD. We estimate this cost to be about £15,000.

We have no fleet cars.

DASA's logo was designed and produced by our own staff at negligible cost.

We have no corporate clothing.

Since becoming an Agency in 1992 we have spent a total £3,028 on corporate stationery.

Letter from A. C. Sleigh to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 23 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your question on perquisites and other expenditure by Next Steps Agencies.

This Agency has not acquired any additional land or buildings since it was launched as an Agency on 1 July 1992. The number of support staff has reduced by 14 since that date. The fleet of passenger vehicles has been reduced from 5 to 1, the annual operating cost being approximately £11,000. The design cost of the Agency logo was £2,000 and the cost of corporate stationery is £1.20 per 1000 sheets of paper.

This Agency does not publish periodical journals, neither does it have corporate clothing.

Letter from Keith Ellender to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your written question to the Secretary of State for Defence on additional costs incurred, as they affect my Agency.

I can tell you that:-

a: No of HQ building has been acquired;

b. No additional support staff have been required;

c. No periodical journals are published;

d. No cars have been acquired;

e. No special logo has been designed;

f. No corporate clothing has been acquired;

g. No specially designed and printed corporate stationery has been purchased. New stationery to reflect the change of status was ordered through Ministry of Defence, Common Service channel, at negligible cost.

Letter from J. R. Drew to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 27 January 1995:

I am responding as Chief Executive of the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO) to your Parliamentary Question about Next Steps Defence agencies.

ABRO was launched on 1 April 1993 and consists of 9 workshops and 11 contract repair offices in various locations around the United Kingdom with a Headquarters in Andover, Hampshire. The Headquarters occupies exactly the same MOD building as the organisation which preceded it—Command Army Static Workshops.

The increased delegations afforded to the Agency have necessitated an increase in support staff of 22.5 since launch date.

In 1994 the Agency published its first Annual Report and Accounts at a cost of £33,746 inc. VAT. The Corporate Plan for 1994 was also published at a cost of £22,105 inc. VAT. These were given wide public and parliamentary distribution and copies are enclosed for you.

ABRO has no fleet of executive cars. As Chief Executive I retain the use of the Army MT pool car for official business to which I was earlier entitled. This vehicle is also available to the rest of the Headquarters staff and is used extensively by them. Most of the

satellite workshops also have a car available but, again, it is used in a "pool" role rather than as dedicated Executive Car.

ABRO does have its own logo which was designed in-house prior to launch, at no additional cost.

There is no corporate clothing currently in use within the Agency. However the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency (DCTA) have undertaken to supply overalls for our workforce which will incorporate the ABRO logo on the back. This will be in place of the Army coveralls currently supplied by DCTA and will involve no additional cost.

ABRO still uses normal MOD channels for its day to day stationery requirements however we are currently in the process of ordering a three year supply of specially designed and printed business cards for about 100 of our Headquarters staff at a cost of some £1400. We have many dealings with private companies and contractors for which these cards will prove invaluable.

Letter from Richard Kirby to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

PQ ON NEXT STEPS AGENCIES

Your Ordinary Written question, tabled in Parliament on Thursday 19 January, sought specific information concerning the operation and expenditure of agencies.

I am responding as the Chief Executive of the Defence Clothing & Textile Agency—a Tri Service organisation which was granted Defence Agency status on 22 November 1994. For ease of reference, I have tabled my responses in the attached Annex and I trust they meet with your requirements.

Annex:

A. Questions and Responses to the PQ.

Questions and responses to the PQ from the Hon. G. Kaufman MP which relate to the defence clothing and textiles agency (DCTA)

1. Q: Have they acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rent?

A: No acquisition has been made. Continuing use is being made of existing service facilities.

2. Q: How many support staff they have acquired which were not required when their operations were within his Department?

A: None, staff numbers are reducing in accordance with Defence Cost Studies and efficiency programmes.

3. Q: How many of them published periodical journals and at what annual cost?

A: None that are new—existing Corporate and Business plans are available and will continue to be produced.

4. Q: How many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost?

A: None that are special. Ministry of Defence Central Motor Transport services are used where appropriate.

5. Q: How many have specially designed logos and at what cost?

A: One DCTA logo, as depicted on my covering letter with no cash expenditure as it was designed in-house.

6. Q: How many have corporate clothing and at what cost?

A: There is no discrete corporate clothing within the DCTA excepting normal service uniforms for Service personnel.

7. Q: What is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery?

A: No additional costs have arisen.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 27 January 1995:

QUESTION 27, ORDER PAPER 19 JANUARY 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if he will set out for each of the Next Steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them published periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down.

2. The Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE) became a Defence Agency on 1 April 1991 at which time the opportunity was taken to change the Establishment name from the Chemical Defence Establishment in order to fully reflect the range of work carried out. As such there was no need to change the Establishment logo apart from modifying "CDE" to "CBDE".

3. CBDE did not need to acquire additional or new headquarters buildings nor did it have to produce specially designed and printed corporate stationery. It does not have corporate clothing or a fleet of executive or single executive cars.

4. CBDE does not publish periodical journals as such but as an Executive Agency is required by the Treasury to publish an Annual Report and Accounts which is available to the public through HMSO. We also publish much of our work in scientific and technical journals.

5. Only one additional Higher Executive Officer was employed to deal with the additional delegations afforded to the Director General contained in the Framework Document.

Letter from Andrew Roach to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 23 January 1995:

I have been advised of your Parliamentary Question regarding Agencies, made on 17 January and my reply is set out below.

The Defence Animal Centre (DAC) is a single military unit and very few infrastructural changes have been made in order to facilitate the move to Agency status. In particular:

no additional HQ buildings have been acquired (in fact the number of buildings has reduced as a result of colocation of sites)

no additional support staff have been employed

no periodical journals have been published

I have a military staff car which is also used for other purposes and is not an "Agency extra"

the DAC logo was designed by one of my staff (at no cost)

we do not have corporate clothing other than military uniform

we do not have corporate stationary

I hope that this answers your question satisfactorily. Please contact me if you require any further information. This reply has been sent initially to the MOD Framework Team.

Letter from Tweedie M. Brown to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your questions about the cost of various Defence Agency activities. In respect of the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency the information is as follows:

Purchase/Lease of HQ Buildings: None—Existing buildings retained.

Support Staff: 4.

But this would be offset within MOD from whom we took over the work.

Periodical/Journals: None.

Cars: None.

Logo: Design produced in house. Reproduction costs £1,000.

Clothing: Protective clothing with Corporate symbol—£1,500.

Corporate Stationery: Produced in house. Cost not separately identifiable.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying to you on the operational and managerial issues regarding the Defence Research

Agency (DRA) as part of the overall response to your question concerning costs of Next Steps Agencies.

No extra costs were incurred in providing a headquarters building when the DRA was formed as I and my staff were able to move into offices already available at our existing site at Farnborough previously occupied by the Royal Aerospace Establishment senior management which was being superseded by the Agency.

Part of the change in establishing the Agency in 1991 involved amalgamating four separate establishments to form the DRA and disbanding the previous headquarters operation in London. We were able to reduce significantly the number of support staff in this process but, since we no longer have records of support from the previous establishments, I cannot give precise details.

My two Managing Directors and I currently retain three cars for official business at a total annual running cost of £4,500. When not required all three vehicles are available for use by other senior staff in a pool system. The previous arrangements involved each of the four Directors of establishments having their own cars plus at least one car for the London headquarters.

The DRA currently has one in-house journal, the DRA News, which has an annual printing cost of £86k. This replaced three pre DRA journals (RAE News, ARE News and RARDE News).

Corporate clothing is worn by police and guards, DRA reception staff and messengers at all our sites. This is not fundamentally different from clothing worn by MOD messengers and similar staff. Costs are not held centrally and it would involve disproportionate effort to ascertain exactly what they are across the organisation.

The DRA has its own logo to assist with developing and maintaining a corporate trading image which was designed as part of an in-house competition. The prize of a bottle of champagne was the only design cost involved!

The DRA corporate stationery was mainly designed by our in-house staff at little extra cost and, although exact figures are not held centrally, I estimate the current annual printing cost is around £40k. Of course stationery used to be printed for all establishments separately at rather greater cost.

I hope you find this information useful.

Letter from G. H. Wilson to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your PQ 5744G.

HQ Building. We have occupied the same building since 1909.

Support Staff. We have achieved a net reduction in staff.

Journals. Our only externally published document is the annual report and accounts. For 1993/94 this was £1671.

Cars. We have no executive cars.

Logos. Our logo has remained substantially the same since 1892. There have been no design costs since then.

Clothing. We do not have corporate clothing. The cost to the Department of school clothing has reduced since acquiring Agency status.

Stationery. We have no specially designed stationery. Our letterheads which have remained unchanged for several years are produced in-house.

Letter from M. R. Pack to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 27 January 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION - PQ S744G

You recently asked The Secretary of State for Defence several questions relating to Next Steps Agencies within the Ministry of Defence. I am replying on behalf of the Hydrographic Office.

The Hydrographic Office occupies the same buildings that it did prior to its becoming a Defence Agency in 1990. The most recent of these buildings was built 1968–69.

No additional support staff have been employed since the HO became an Agency in 1990.

The Hydrographic Office does not publish a journal but in common with all Agencies is required to publish an Annual Report and Accounts. Our last report, for the financial year 1993/94, was published in July 1994 and laid in the House on 21 July 1994 (HC 482). The Report and Accounts were printed in-house. The costs are estimated to be in the region of £3,300.

The Hydrographic Office one car for the use of staff on official business. The full cost amounts to approximately £27,000 a year.

No extra costs have been incurred on specially designed logos, corporate clothing and specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Letter from A. W. Pollard to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your question in the House on 17 January 1995 concerning setting up costs of Next Steps Agencies. You will be aware that the Logistic Information Systems Agency (LISA) is one of the newest within the Ministry of Defence having been launched on 21 November 1994.

LISA inherits the organisation, accommodation, resources and commitments of the Directorate of Logistic Information Systems (Army) which it replaced. This resulted in a smoother transition and less upheaval to our activities and staff than can sometimes be the case (where, for example, collocation accompanies a move to agency status).

Costs associated with LISA were kept to a minimum and met within current budget. Where possible, in-house resources were used in preference to contractors.

Answers to your specific questions are as follows in respect of LISA:

a. *Acquisition of Headquarters Buildings.* No extra buildings were required.

b. *Additional Support Staff Required.* LISA is committed to meeting the Options for Change and other manpower reductions to which its predecessor Directorate was working. While the Agency does call for some different skills these have generally been met by re-classifying existing posts and commencing a programme of re-training with costs being met within existing training funds.

c. *Periodic Journals.* I have no current plans to introduce a periodic journal. The cost of publishing the necessary Framework Document, Corporate Plan and Key Targets was £7,750.

d. *Executive Cars.* All executive travel is met by Departmental transport. I have no current plans for fleet or single executive cars.

e. *Logo.* LISA's logo appears on this letterhead. Its cost was kept to the minimum commensurate with the importance of establishing a corporate identity which our staff could share and our customers recognise. It was designed in-house by the Department's Common Services (Graphics) staff. £2,000 of civil service overtime was incurred for this and the graphic design of the documents in sub-paragraph c above. The cost was met from my budget.

f. *Corporate Clothing.* I have no current plans to introduce corporate clothing.

g. *Corporate Stationery.* Expenditure on corporate stationery is no greater than that normally required by Departments and Branches. Stocks of the predecessor Directorate's stationery were deliberately run down in anticipation of the transition to Agency status.

I hope that the above information answers your questions. Please contact me if you require any more detail.

Letter from J. C. R. Hunt to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

The Defence Secretary has asked me to reply in respect of the Meteorological Office to the questions you recently asked about Next Steps agencies.

In brief:

the translation of the Meteorological Office to agency status did not require us to acquire a new HQ building

some 22 extra staff were needed to support the changed organisation but overall staff numbers have fallen by 113 since Vesting Day

no new journals have been produced. The Meteorological Office publishes only one periodical, 'Outlook', a customer magazine, at a cost of £40,000

no additional cars have been provided. I make use of a car and driver as part of RAF MT support, at an estimated cost of £24,000

the Meteorological did not change its logo when it became an agency

no corporate clothing was introduced

no corporate stationery was specially designed or printed; the Meteorological Office continued to use its existing logo.

I hope this gives you the information you need.

Letter from M. Wilson to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 27 January 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION ON NEXT STEPS AGENCIES

I am replying in respect of the Military Survey Defence Agency to your recent question reference PQ5744G on additional costs arising from our status as a Next Steps agency.

Taken in the order of your question, the answers are:

a. *Headquarters Building* The Military Survey headquarters is accommodated in the building occupied prior to agency launch. No expenditure on land or buildings has been incurred as a result of agency status.

b. *Support Staff*

The need to produce agency accounts has resulted in the establishment of two additional Management Accountant posts: 1 Senior Executive Officer and 1 Executive Officer with 2 supporting Administrative Officers. However, agency requirements aside, it is likely that the Management Accountancy posts would be needed in the future to support Treasury's resource accounting and budgeting initiatives.

c. *Journals*

A quarterly publication is produced to inform staff on policy and internal developments affecting Military Survey, but not specifically in the agency context. Whilst some copies are distributed outside Military Survey, it is intended principally as a house magazine. Editorial and publication costs are as follows:

Staff: £15,200 per annum

Production: £8,800 per annum

d. *Transport*

As a 2-star serving officer, the Director General has access to a Grade 1 staff car. This entitlement is not related to his capacity as an agency chief executive.

e. *Logo*

Military Survey acquired its logo some 50 years ago. No money has been spent on a corporate image since agency launch.

f. *Corporate Clothing*

None.

g. *Corporate Stationery*

Military Survey uses standard MOD-style letter headings. No special stationery has been designed.

Please let me know if you require further information. I am copying this letter to Minister (Defence Procurement).

Letter from Captain W. Graham to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

The response to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning questions on specific costings. Our responses are itemised below:

a. The NARO has not created a Headquarters building.

b. Two additional staff have duties directly attributable to Agency functions.

c. All Annual Reports and Accounts are produced at a cost of £8,000 per annum. A Corporate Plan and Framework Document were produced when the Agency was launched, at a cost of £9,000 each.

d. No executive vehicle has been acquired as a consequence of the NARO's existence.

e. The NARO logo was designed using in-house Agency resources at no additional cost.

f. A NARO logo has been added to workforce overalls at a cost of £941.

g. NARO headed stationery has replaced MOD stationery at no additional cost.

Letter from Brian Raine to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION

I have been asked to reply to your Question on various matters concerning the Agency.

Queen Victoria School has not acquired any additional headquarters buildings since the introduction of Agency status. We have recruited one full time and one part time support staff to manage additional agency responsibilities.

The only periodical journal published is the annual School magazine at no cost to public funds.

The school has no executive cars, specially designed logos, corporate clothing or specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

I hope this answers your Questions satisfactorily, but if there is anything on which you wish me to elaborate, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Letter from R. H. Kyle to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 27 January 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he would set out for each of the Next Steps Agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them published periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual costs; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery. As Chief Executive of the RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency, I have been asked to reply with regard to my Agency.

The RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency has not acquired a new HQ building since achieving Agency status in 1991. The Agency's Headquarters staff still occupy offices in their parent Command's Headquarters building at Headquarters Logistics Command, RAF Brampton, Cambridgeshire. However, the space the Group occupies has reduced since the Agency formed in 1991.

Staff numbers were not increased as a result of adopting Agency status. Indeed, the overall number of HQ staff has been reduced significantly since launch and further reductions are planned as part of a rationalisation programme following the formation of Logistics Command. Any new posts that might be considered to exist solely because of Agency tasks and status were created by reorganising existing posts and activities.

The Agency does not publish a periodic journal, but it does publish its Annual Report and Accounts. Copies of this document are used for internal and external publicity purposes, as well as to meet the statutory reporting and accounting requirements. The cost

to the Department for the printing of the 1993/94 Report was £12,673, including HMSO's management and handling charges.

The Maintenance Group's requirement for executive cars has not been affected by Agency status. If anything, the actual requirement has decreased in line with the decrease in the number of executive staff.

The Agency has not incurred any additional expense for headed stationery or specially designed logos as a result of attaining Agency status. Neither has the Agency adopted any form of corporate clothing.

Since its formation as a Defence Agency, the Maintenance Group has consistently achieved its Key Management Targets. Detailed reports against these targets are contained in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts, the latest copy of which I have enclosed with this letter.

Letter from Peter Ayee to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

NEXT STEPS AGENCYS

I WRITE, AS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE SIGNALS ENGINEERING ESTABLISHMENT (RAFSEE), WHICH WAS LAUNCHED AS A NEXT STEPS DEFENCE AGENCY ON 22 NOVEMBER 1994, IN RESPONSE TO YOUR WRITTEN QUESTION OF 19 JANUARY 1995 TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE.

RAFSEE, WHICH REMAINS PART OF THE LOGISTICS COMMAND OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE, IS BASED AT RAF HENLOW AND HAS A DETACHED GROUP AT RAF WYTON. THE AGENCY OCCUPIES THE SAME BUILDINGS THAT IT DID BEFORE LAUNCH AND HAS NOT ACQUIRED ANY ADDITIONAL STAFF, VEHICLES OR CORPORATE CLOTHING. MOREOVER, IT HAS NOT SO FAR PUBLISHED ANY JOURNALS, CREATED A LOGO OR HAD ANY STATIONERY SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED OR PRINTED FOR THE DEFENCE AGENCY.

Letter from John May to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 27 January 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION NO. PQ5744G—TRAINING GROUP DEFENCE AGENCY REPLY

I WRITE IN REPLY TO YOUR QUESTION OF THURSDAY 19 JANUARY, IN WHICH YOU SOUGHT INFORMATION ABOUT CONSEQUENTIAL COSTS OF NEXT STEPS AGENCIES.

I AM ABLE TO TELL YOU THAT THE LAUNCH OF TRAINING GROUP DEFENCE AGENCY HAS NOT BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY UNWARRANTABLE OR UNNECESSARY EXPENDITURE IN ANY OF THE FIELDS COVERED BY YOUR QUESTION. THE AGENCY'S HEADQUARTERS DOES NOT HAVE ITS OWN BUILDING OR EXECUTIVE CARS; IT SHARES THE BUILDINGS AND POOL OF CARS ESTABLISHED FOR HEADQUARTERS ROYAL AIR FORCE PERSONNEL & TRAINING COMMAND, OF WHICH IT IS AN INTEGRAL PART. THE AGENCY HAS NOT INTRODUCED ANY CORPORATE CLOTHING OR ANY SPECIALLY DESIGNED STATIONERY AND HAS NO PLANS TO DO SO; SIMILARLY, THE AGENCY HAS NO PLANS TO ADD TO THE LIST OF JOURNALS IT HAS TRADITIONALLY PUBLISHED FROM TIME TO TIME AS A ROYAL AIR FORCE GROUP.

THE AGENCY HAS NOT ACQUIRED ANY SUPPORT STAFF BEYOND THE SPECIALISTS REQUIRED TO OPERATE THE MANAGEMENT AND FINANCIAL REGIME REQUIRED BY THE NEXT STEPS INITIATIVE; THE POSTS IN QUESTION WERE ESTABLISHED BEFORE THE AGENCY WAS VESTED ON 1 APRIL 1994.

THE AGENCY SOMETIMES MAKES USE OF A SIMPLE LOGO THAT WAS DEVELOPED IN-HOUSE AT NO EXTRA COST TO THE AGENCY'S BUDGET. THIS ARTWORK WAS REQUIRED TO IDENTIFY THE AGENCY'S CORPORATE DOCUMENTATION THAT WAS LODGED IN THE LIBRARIES OF THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT AT THE TIME OF VESTING, AND WILL SIMILARLY IDENTIFY FUTURE ANNUAL REPORTS AND ACCOUNTS.

I AM COPYING THIS LETTER TO THE AGENCY'S OWNER, THE AIR OFFICER COMMANDING IN CHIEF HEADQUARTERS PERSONNEL AND TRAINING COMMAND.

Letter from Ian Mitchelson to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 27 January 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION NEXT STEPS AGENCIES

Service Children's Schools (North West Europe) was formed as a Defence Agency in April 1991 within the Ministry of Defence to provide an educational service to dependent children residing with MOD personnel in North West Europe. The Agency's Headquarters is collocated with among other formations Headquarters United Kingdom Support Command (Germany) and Headquarters 2 Group Royal Air Force at Rheindahlen and shares their accommodation. As part of the civilian component, which supports our Forces in Germany, the arrangements for the Agency's accommodation is covered by the Status of Forces Agreement which provides the basis for the stationing of Sending States Forces in Germany. Under this Agreement buildings are owned by the German Government and made available for use of the British Forces without charge. Therefore the Agency occupies accommodation under the same arrangements as that prior to its acquisition of Agency status.

Prior to its formation, some 28 support staff (ie non-professional, non-educational staff), were employed directly in support of the provision of education to service children in Service Children's Schools (Germany), the forerunner of the Agency. These were employed at the Headquarters at Rheindahlen and in two Area Headquarters Offices.

In addition, Service Children's Schools received a significant degree of support (i.e. Financial, Budgetary, Contractual, Personnel, Legal, Property Management etc) from a multitude of sources both within BAOR and more widely from the Department. The organisation also received much administrative and professional support from the Service Children's Education Authority based in the United Kingdom.

On formation at the outset of FY 1991/1992, the Agency's support staff increased to 36, in direct relation to the additional responsibilities that accompanied the change in status. Corresponding and no doubt greater savings in staff will have been made by those areas of the Department that were relinquishing their duties in respect of the new Agency.

In the period since the formation of the Agency, the support staff has increased in size to a current figure of 41. This has occurred partly as further responsibilities have been delegated to the Agency, but mainly in response to the demands placed upon SCS(NWE), by the need to manage the Agency's response to Drawdown, (ie, the reduction in Troop deployment in North West Europe and the consequent closure of schools). Some 40 schools have been closed over the period since September 1992.

With the conclusion of the Drawdown process later this year, the Agency has planned for FY 1995/1996 a rationalisation programme, to reduce the level of its support staff. This will include, for example, the closure of the two Area Education Offices and the loss of the associated staff. Whilst plans have yet to be finalised, it is expected that the Agency's support staff will reduce in number to about 36, the number with which it was originally formed. Further efficiency improvements may well prove possible as part of the Department's and Agency's continuing drive for value for money.

SCS(NWE) produce one in-house journal for the benefit of parents and staff 3 times per year. It is compiled and edited in-house and published by HMSO at an annual cost of £7000.00 pa.

The Agency does not have any cars on its books at all. In order to meet travel needs for individual journeys the Agency does have access to a pool of cars operated by the Army in Germany on a self-drive basis. This arrangement also applies to the Chief Executive.

The Agency does have a logo, again this was designed in-house at no additional cost. The Agency does use its logo and letterhead on paper which is produced locally alongside all the other headed stationery used by UKSC(G) and HQ 2 Gp RAF (as was the case in the pre-Agency days) at no additional cost compared to other like stationery; however a notional cost can be provided if this would be helpful. I attach an example of the headed letters in use.

The Agency does not have any corporate clothing apart from discretionary ties which may be obtained by staff as a private transaction.

Al-Yamamah Fund

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what types of equipment have been funded from the Al-Yamamah fund.

Mr. Freeman: Equipment supplied under the Al-Yamamah programme includes Tornado and Hawk

aircraft and naval minesweepers, along with associated equipment, support and infrastructure. Further orders for Tornado and training aircraft have been announced since January 1993.

Bullying

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance is given to senior armed forces personnel regarding investigation of allegations of bullying.

Mr. Soames: The armed forces take a very serious view of bullying and senior armed forces personnel are aware that all allegations of bullying should be referred promptly for formal investigation. Guidance in the form of policy letters has been issued by the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy to remind all personnel of the policy on bullying. The Royal Air Force also produced orders specifically covering bullying to be read and signed annually by officers. The Royal Air Force's policy on bullying and initiation ceremonies is also repeated in quarterly standing orders, which all Air Force personnel are required to read. In 1993, the Army published a discipline and standards paper, which included instructions to counter bullying.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions since 1991 no disciplinary action has been taken against soldiers who went absent without leave when on their return it was established that the absence was because of bullying.

Mr. Soames: This information is not recorded centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary to State for Defence what guidance is given to all levels of armed forces personnel regarding procedures for reporting incidents of bullying.

Mr. Soames: Information about making complaints under the redress of complaints procedure provided for in the Service Discipline Acts is given to all new recruits on joining. Advice on making complaints about bullying is also included in the leaflet "The Armed Forces. Your Rights and Responsibilities" given to new recruits. Details of the redress of complaints procedures are also set out in Queen's regulations, which are available in every ship and service establishment. Advice on making complaints about bullying is also repeated in policy letters and other documents.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many courts martial there have been in each of the last five years; in how many of these the charge was related to some form of bullying; and in how many there was a guilty verdict.

Mr. Soames: The number of courts martial recorded in the last five years is as follows:

1990: 1,030
1991: 900
1992: 887
1993: 857
1994: 813

Bullying is not an offence under the Services Discipline Acts, but is dealt with under charges such as conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline, ill-treatment of subordinates, common assault and actual bodily harm. To identify the cases relating to bullying among all courts martial records for the last five years would entail disproportionate cost.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress made by his Department in preventing bullying and brutality in the armed forces.

Mr. Soames: The armed forces take a very serious view of bullying. It has been made clear throughout the services that bullying will not be tolerated and various measures have been taken by the services to counter bullying.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serious individual cases of bullying have been referred to his Department each year since 1990.

Mr. Soames: My Department regards all cases of bullying as serious and service personnel are aware that all complaints of bullying will be vigorously investigated and the perpetrators punished. Details of the seriousness of individual cases are not recorded centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Yachts

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when and at what cost his Department purchased yachts from a Swedish company; whether the proposed purchase was announced in his Department's "Contracts Bulletin"; what consideration was given to the purchase of British-built yachts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The yachts in question were bought by the British Kiel Yacht Club in Germany, from its private funds; no costs were incurred by my Department.

Mull of Kintyre Cairn

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on whom the cost fell for the cairn on the Mull of Kintyre at the site of the recent crash of a helicopter transporting personnel from Northern Ireland.

Mr. Soames: The building of the cairn was a local community initiative. The cairn stones were laid by members of the rescue services and subsequently cemented together to create a permanent fixture. I understand that local lighthouse employees paid for the brass plaque, which was mounted on the cairn

David Hart

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *451*, (1) what formal undertakings will be made of Mr. David Hart in respect of his work as special adviser in the next phase of the privatisation of the married quarters estate;

(2) if any of the independent advisers used in the development of plans for the next phase of the privatisation of the married quarters estate will be permitted to purchase properties included in that sale.

Mr. Soames: The undertakings required of independent advisers on the future of the married quarters estate will be designed to ensure that there is no conflict of interests between that role and possible business interests. No independent adviser assisting in consideration of the way ahead will be permitted to have a financial stake in the outcome of the transaction.

Married Quarters Estate

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those individuals or companies who have shown an interest in the purchase of the married quarters estate in any future privatisation.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is commercially confidential.

Land Mines

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy concerning the export of land mines which possess a self-destruct mechanism.

Mr. Freeman: The United Kingdom has declared an indefinite moratorium on the export from the UK of all anti-personnel land mines which do not have self-destruct or self-neutralising mechanisms. We are also in the forefront of efforts to establish international measures to regulate the transfer of anti-personnel land mines. Any application for an export licence for a land mine which did possess a self-destruct mechanism would be assessed carefully in the light of these and other factors.

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy concerning the export of components which can be used in the manufacture of land mines.

Mr. Freeman: Any application for an export licence for specially designed land mine components would be subject to strict controls, and would be considered case by case in the light of the indefinite moratorium which the United Kingdom has declared on the export from the UK of anti-personnel land mines which do not have self-destruct or self-neutralising mechanisms, and other established criteria.

Cazalet Report

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if his Department has instructed those named in Sir Peter Cazalet's report into perks for officers not to speak publicly about the report;

(2) if his Department has instructed those officers named in Sir Peter Cazalet's report to consult legal advisers about their position.

Mr. Soames: Sir Peter Cazalet's report on the requirement for representational entertainment is expected to be submitted to my Department in February. Ministers are separately currently considering KPMG Peat Marwick's report into the circumstances surrounding expenditure on the official service residence known as Haymes Garth. Before that report was finalised, those named in it were shown, in confidence, draft extracts to enable them to comment on the passages that dealt with their involvement. They were not instructed to seek legal advice.

Haymes Garth

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what limit was placed on expenditure for fixtures and fittings at Haymes Garth; and who granted permission for this money to be spent.

Mr. Soames: An allocation of £60,000 for carpets, curtains and interior decoration was included in a budget agreed by RAF support command for work on Haymes Garth in January 1993.

Former Yugoslavia

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has provided military intelligence to the international tribunal for the prosecution of persons responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Defence debriefing team has provided unevaluated information via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the tribunal on matters relating to alleged war crimes activity in the former Yugoslavia.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what actions his Department has taken to assist the international tribunal for the prosecution of persons responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia

Mr Soames: We continue to assist the efforts of the tribunal. This assistance has included passing to the tribunal information acquired by the defence debriefing team on alleged human rights violations and war crimes committed in Bosnia, and arranging interviews with British military personnel who have returned from theatre for the purposes of collecting eyewitness statements.

Anti-personnel Mines

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions his Department has had with representatives of the United Nations concerning the banning of the export of anti-personnel mines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: No such discussions have taken place, although there has been a considerable amount of discussion between the United Kingdom and other states concerning the export of anti-personnel land mines, in the context of the review of the UN weaponry convention and other initiatives.

Recruitment

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to his Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Mr. Freeman: A total of 9,261 permanent and temporary UK-based civilian staff were recruited by my Department and its executive agencies during the calendar year 1994. Of this total, 5,400 were non-industrial and 3,861 industrial staff. Information on the total cost of recruitment is not held centrally and could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost.

Naval Staffing

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the current staffing levels for his Department's Guard Service of HMS Caledonia; what changes are proposed; how far the proposal to reduce Rosyth to a naval support establishment took account of these costs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: At present, 54 Ministry of Defence guard service personnel are in the Rosyth area, of whom five are deployed at HMS Caledonia. The total number is planned to reduce to 38 when Rosyth becomes a royal

naval support establishment, 15 of whom will be deployed at the HMS Caledonia site. All manpower costs were included in the investment appraisal, on which the decision was based.

Southwick House

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the regulations concerning the use of the riding school at Southwick house naval establishment; if people who are not employed in the armed forces are permitted to use the riding school; what groups of people are permitted to use the riding school; how many people use the riding school each year; and what is the total cost of the establishment.

Mr. Soames: The naval riding centre evolved from the HMS Dryad saddle club, which was started when the Navy moved to Southwick house in 1942. Although it is constituted primarily to provide equitation facilities for the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines, the regulations allow the facilities to be made available to service dependants, the local community, including disabled groups, schools, colleges and youth schemes; on average the centre is used by 100 people per day. The club is self-financing and there are no costs to public funds.

Records (Police Access)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *548*, on how many occasions in each of the past five years the civilian police have requested access to the records of service personnel; and on how many occasions this access has been denied.

Mr. Soames: My Department does not maintain a central record of the number of requests from the civilian police for access to the records of service personnel.

Gulf War

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department was in possession of plague vaccine manufactured in the United States of America by Cutter Laboratories, Miles Inc; and whether this vaccine was administered to British members of the armed forces during the Gulf war.

Mr. Soames: Details relating to biological warfare medical counter measures available to British forces remain classified.

Alcohol Abuse

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent initiatives he has taken to address the problems of alcohol abuse in the armed forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The armed forces have on-going programmes to combat the problems of alcohol abuse. All service personnel are warned of the dangers of the misuse of alcohol and are made aware of the punishments which may be awarded for alcohol-related offences. A comprehensive system of education and treatment, together with deterrent administrative and disciplinary action, has been developed. A series of alcohol education programmes, making use of pamphlets, films and lectures, have been produced to make all personnel aware of the dangers of abuse. The services' policies on alcohol abuse are kept under constant review.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces serving in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Navy and *(c)* the Royal Air Force have been disciplined in each of the past five years for alcohol-related offences.

Mr. Soames: The numbers of service personnel convicted of alcohol-related driving offences of drunkenness between 1988 and 1992, the latest years for which figures are available, are as follows:

	Royal Navy	*Royal Marines*	*Army*	*Royal Air Force*
1988	248	26	1,476	609
1989	300	52	1,362	525
1990	260	40	1,340	682
1991	226	35	1,093	544
1992	200	34	1,012	445

Chemical Weapons

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement about the existence of chemical weapons in the sea surrounding the British Isles following the end of the second world war;

(2) how many chemical weapons remain deposited in the sea surrounding the British Isles; what types of weapons are involved; what chemicals were contained in these weapons; in what locations they are; when the chemical weapons were first deposited in the sea; when the weapons deposited were last inspected; what evidence there is of chemical leakage; and what steps he is taking to ascertain the circumstances of their disposal.

Mr. Soames: Between 1945 and 1949, the United Kingdom disposed of approximately 120,000 tonnes of chemical weapons, munitions, bombs and shells, mainly filled with mustard and phosgene gas, by deep-sea dumping; an additional 25,000 tons of residual United Kingdom munition stocks and ex-German world war two aerial bombs, containing the nerve agent Tabun, were sea dumped in the Atlantic between 1955 and 1957. Dump sites were located between 50 and 100 miles west of Hebrides, 80 miles north-west of Northern Ireland, 250 miles south-west of Lands End in the western approaches and in Beauforts dyke in the north channel. Sea dumping was considered to be the safest and most practical disposal method at the time. The majority of munitions were sealed within redundant cargo vessels which were then scuttled. No subsequent monitoring of the dump sites has been undertaken in view of the depth. Current scientific evidence indicates that such CW dump sites present no significant risk to human health or to the marine environment.

Atomic Weapons Establishment, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to conduct a defence diversificatior study for the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Cardiff; and if he will consult *(a)* the Welsh Development Agency, *(b)* South Glamorgan county council, *(c)* Cardiff city council and *(d)* Hunting-Brae Ltd. in this respect.

Mr. Freeman: Hunting-BRAE Ltd. will continue to seek suitable non-defence work which can be carried out at AWE Cardiff during the period up to 1997 alongside the Trident system. Once the work on Trident components is concluded, no other defence work can be directed to AWE Cardiff. My Department will be happy to consider any proposals for the use of the facility, including proposals from the bodies listed in the question.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will issue instructions to the management of the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Cardiff, that it should utilise the remaining period of its activity to pursue diversification of the rare earth metals engineering expertise at the plant into civilian uses.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 26 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *293*.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the possible alternative uses for the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Cardiff.

Mr. Freeman: Once the work on Trident components is completed, no other defence work can be given to AWE Cardiff. My Department is prepared to consider any proposals for alternative future uses of the site.

Indonesia (Hawk Aircraft)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the sale of Hawk aircraft to Indonesia.

Mr. Freeman: It is Government policy to support the sale of British defence equipment overseas wherever this is compatible with our political, strategic and security interests, and does not conflict with our international obligations. In the case of the Hawk sales to Indonesia, an important factor in our consideration was the assurances that we received from the Indonesian Government that the aircraft will not be used for purposes of internal security.

Equipment (Exports)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) at what interest rate defence equipment was sold to Jordan under the British-Jordanian defence sales agreement; and what was the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development consensus interest rate at the relevant time;

(2) what payments were made towards the financing of the contracts for defence equipment sold to Jordan under the terms of the British-Jordanian defence sales agreement.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* The details of the financial arrangements applied to the 1985 Jordan defence package remain confidential.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Diplomats (Expulsion)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many diplomats officially accredited to missions in London and of what nationality have been expelled from the United Kingdom in each year since 1965.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 18 January *Official Report*, column *498*, which detailed the number and nationality of expelled accredited diplomats between 1979 and 1995.

The information requested was not centrally recorded before 1972, but the number of diplomats officially accredited to missions in London who were expelled between 1972 and 1978 is as follows:

1972: Yemen 1
1973: Cuba 1
1974: nil
1975: nil
1976: nil
1977: nil
1978: Iraq 7

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom diplomats officially credited to missions in foreign countries have been expelled from *(a)* Libya, *(b)* the former Soviet Union, *(c)* Czechoslavakia, *(d)* Bulgaria, *(e)* Cuba, *(f)* Vietnam, *(g)* Iraq, *(h)* Iran, *(i)* South Africa, *(j)* Sudan and *(k)* Iran since 1979; and on what dates and for what stated reasons.

Mr. Goodlad: It will take some time to gather this information. I will write to the hon. Gentleman when it has been compiled.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons the Foreign Office expels diplomats officially accredited to missions in London.

Mr. Baldry: The rules governing the expulsion, or requests for withdrawal, of diplomats officially accredited to missions in London are set out in paragraph 69 of the 1985 White Paper on diplomatic immunities and privileges, Cmnd 9497, dated April 1985.

Recruitment

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to his Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Mr. Goodlad: My Department and its executive agencies, including the aid and diplomatic wings, spent £887,175.85 externally in 1994 on recruitment, and recruited 295 members of staff. In addition, 92 people transferred to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as a result of inter-departmental trawls; the cost of these is included in the above figure.

Indonesia

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the number of East Timorese killed by the Indonesian Army since its occupation.

Mr. Goodlad: There is no reliable source of information about the number of people killed in East Timor.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Hawk aircraft manufactured in the United Kingdom and supplied to Indonesia are used for counter-insurgency purposes.

Mr. Goodlad: The Hawk aircraft supplied to Indonesia in the 1980s are trainer aircraft. We have no evidence that they have been used for counter-insurgency purposes.

East Timor

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the violence in Dili in East Timor in 1991.

Mr. Goodlad: Along with our EU partners, we strongly condemned the violence in Dili in 1991. We received reports of what happened from various sources, including a report of the Indonesian national commission of inquiry. These differed widely in their accounts of the numbers killed or missing. The United Nations special rapporteur on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions has recently produced a new report which will be considered by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights at its next session.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether Hawk aircraft have been used against civilians in East Timor.

Mr. Goodlad: We have no evidence to support allegations that Hawk aircraft have been used against civilians in East Timor.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in what circumstances other Community countries could apply conservation measures similar to those granted to Portugal and Spain under article V-I (a) of the Fisheries Council agreement.

Mr. Jack: The agreement reached by the Fisheries Council in December 1994 provides that the Council will incorporate into Council regulation 3094/86, dealing with technical conservation measures, a ban on fishing for tuna species with drift nets or purse seine nets in certain Spanish and Portuguese waters; some of these measures previously operated on an annual basis.

This agreement is in accordance with the provision of article 4 of the basic common fisheries policy, Council regulation No. 3760/92. The Commission can propose new technical conservation measures for Council decision at its own initiative or in the light of member states' requests.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about the amount of aid paid to fishing in each of the other EEC fishing nations in the form of *(a)* building grants, *(b)* fuel or operating support, *(c)* market support and *(d)* unemployment support when not fishing; and for each form of support, what representations he has made to the Commission or to the Government concerned to get the subsidy ended.

Mr. Jack: Under European Union law, member states are permitted to pay certain types of aid to the fishing industry, provided these are approved by the Commission in its sectoral plans. These may include vessel modernisation and construction grants, aid for fishing port facilities and for the processing and marketing of fishery products. It is the Commission's responsibility to ensure that no unauthorised payments are made. Details of the amounts paid by individual member states are not notified directly to us, but we will always follow up any allegations of illegal support.

Mr. Allason: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how may Spanish-owned ships in Britain's fishing fleet applied for United Kingdom decommissioning grants in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Jack: Under the Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning) Scheme 1993 we received seven applications for grant in respect of vessels upon which Spanish nationals held at least a 25 per cent. interest; only one was successful.

Following the introduction of the Merchant Shipping (Registration of Shipping) Regulations 1993—SI 1993 No. 3138—the registrar general of shipping and seamen no longer collects details of shareholdings in United Kingdom companies owning British-registered fishing vessels.

Farm and Conservation Grants

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he sought advice from the National Rivers Authority, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Nature Conservation Council on the effects of ending the farm and conservation grants.

Mrs. Browning: Far from ending the farm and conservation grant scheme, grants for conservation measures are still available, although the land improvement and waste handling grants were withdrawn at the end of 1994. We did not seek advice on the closure of the plan side of the farm and conservation grant scheme as the scheme legislation provided for this part of the scheme to close on 31 December 1994. Neither did we seek advice on the withdrawal of grants for waste handling facilities. We hold regular meetings with the National Rivers Authority and with English Nature. These meetings include discussions on a wide range of issues. Meetings with the Countryside Council for Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Harvesting Restrictions

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *545*, if he will make it his policy to waive the harvesting restriction to prevent food going to waste.

Mr. Jack: No. However, we will examine the rules for planting crops on set-aside land for harvest in the next cropping year to ensure farmers do not have to choose between receiving set-aside payments and harvesting edible crops.

Cormorants

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the number of cormorants in England and Wales during each of the years 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94; how many licences to shoot cormorants in the interests of the protection of inland fisheries were issued by his Department in each of those years; and how many birds are known to have been shot under these licences.

Mrs. Browning: No figures are readily available of the number of cormorants in England and Wales during each of the last three years. However, a report by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology estimates that the population of cormorants over-wintering in Britain has been increasing at a rate of 4 per cent. per year and currently stands at approximately 20,000 birds. Research on the population and distribution of cormorants is a part of the research and development programme currently being discussed by this Department and the Department of the Environment.

Details of the number of licences granted by this Department in England and the number of birds shot under licence are as follows:

Year	*Number of licences issued*	*Number of cormorants shot under licence*
1991	3	18
1992	4	13
1993	20	72
1994	30	[1]28

[1] Some licences extend into 1995. The figure given is for the number of birds shot up to 31 December 1994.

Animal Exports

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what independent legal advice he has now received concerning the export of veal calves from the United Kingdom to other EU member states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have made it clear that I shall set out the Government's view of the legal position, and I hope to be able to do so in the near future.

Vessel Decommissioning

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what impact on Britain's multi-annual guidance programme he expects to achieve with the addition of £28 million to his vessel decommissioning programme.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* As I explained in my reply on 25 January, *Official Report*, column *217*, it is not possible to say in advance how many vessels will be decommissioned as a result of the additional funding. On the basis of experience with previous schemes, however, I would expect the results to make significant further contributions towards meeting the targets for capacity reduction in our multi-annual guidance programme.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Howard: In November 1991, 11,247 members of staff in the Home Office were women. Of these, three were at grade 3 level, 131 were at grade 7 level, 2,052 were at executive officer level, and 5,094 were at administrative officer level and 3,072 were at administrative assistant level.

In October 1992, 12,366 members of staff were women. Of these, six were at grade 3 level, 117 were at grade 7 level, 2,363 were at executive officer level, 5,709 were at administrative officer level and 3,210 were at administrative assistant level.[1]

In September 1993, 13,035 members of staff were women. Of these, seven were at grade 3 level, 141 were at grade 7 level, 2,427 were at executive officer level, 5,834 were at administrative officer level and 3,355 were at administrative assistant level.[2]

In September 1994, 13,417 members of staff in the Department were women. Of these, six were at grade 3 level, 179 were at grade 7, 2,749 were at executive officer level, 5,928 were at administrative officer level and 3,195 were at administrative assistant level.

[1] The figures for grades 3 and 7 level are as at June 1992.

[2] The figures for grades 3 and 7 are as at March 1993.

Police Exhibition

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a list of exhibitors and country delegations that attended the police scientific development Branch conference-exhibition held recently at Bramshill college, organised by the Association of Police and Public Security Suppliers.

Mr. Maclean: The police scientific development branch equipment exhibition at the Police Staff college, Bramshill, in October 1994 attracted some 130 exhibitors, a list of which has been placed in the Library.

The exhibition was attended by visitors from police agencies in Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa and Sweden.

Mobile Phone Thefts

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many mobile phones have been reported stolen in each month for the past two years; what measures he is taking to apprehend the criminals involved; and what steps he intends to take to make illegal the reprogramming of mobile phones.

Mr. Maclean: From information collected centrally, it is not possible separately to identify offences of thefts of mobile phones. The investigation of criminal offences and the allocation and deployment of resources are operational policing matters and, as such, the responsibility of the chief officer of the force concerned. A number of forces have established specialist squads to tackle the problem of mobile phone theft.

The Government have no plans, at present, to make the reprogramming of mobile phones a criminal offence.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *528*, if he will explain the delay in the publication of Statistics of "Scientific Procedures Performed on Living Animals","Great Britain", 1993; and what measures he is taking to ensure that it does not recur.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The delay in the publication of the annual Command Paper was caused by problems with the computer systems upon which the collection of data for this publication is dependent, and by a need to investigate possible omissions in the data. With these statistics, completeness is more important than timeliness. I am pleased to say that the problems have been resolved satisfactorily. Arrangements for handling the annual returns issued to persons licenses to perform scientific procedures have been modified to ensure more timely publication in future years.

Sexual Offences (Children)

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many British citizens have been prosecuted for sexual offences involving children outside the United Kingdom for each year since records have been kept.

Mr. Maclean: Information on the number of British citizens prosecuted abroad is not collected centrally by my Department.

Electric Shock Equipment

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *535*, what were the terms of the authority granted to Royal Ordnance under section 5(1)*(b)* of the Firearms Act 1968, with particular reference to the stocking of or trading in any form of electro-shock equipment and to what extent Royal Ordnance has dealt in such equipment in the last 10 years.

Mr. Maclean: The specific authority referred to allows Royal Ordnance to possess, purchase, acquire, sell and transfer no more than 100 weapons to which sections 5(1)*(a)*, 5(1)*(ab)* or 5(1)*(b)* of the Firearms Act 1968 apply, in the course of their business as registered firearms dealers. The authority makes no reference to electric shock equipment. I have no information about dealings by them in such equipment.

Right of Settlement

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how may immigrants were granted the right of settlement in British during *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information, which is for 1993 and the first six months of 1994, was published in table 1.1 of Home Office statistical bulletin "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom, First and Second Quarters 1994", issue 25/94, a copy of which is in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 30 January 1995

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Advertisements

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what factors lead to the description of advertisements in public places, newspapers or periodicals as being placed on behalf of a Minister of the Crown rather than on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Within the framework of collective responsibility, there is no practical distinction between publicity described as being issued by a single Minister or Her Majesty's Government. The terminology used may properly reflect the content and context of the advertising.

TREASURY

Oil Fuel Excise Duty

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what types of oil fuel are subject to a reduced or rebated rate of excise duty; what are the rates on rebated fuel; what are the unrebated rates; and what are the most common uses for the rebated fuels.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There are two classes of oil: light oil and heavy oil.

The full, unrebated, rate of duty on light oil is 36.14p per litre. This is levied on leaded motor spirit.

These are two types of rebated light oil: unleaded motor spirit which is rebated to a rate of 31.32p per litre is used in cars, taxis, light goods vans, and motor cycles; and furnace fuel which is rebated to a rate of 1.66p per litre is burned by approved furnace operators.

The full, unrebated, rate of duty on heavy oil is 31.32p per litre. This is levied on diesel road fuel and kerosene when used as a road fuel.

There are four types of rebated heavy oil:

Kerosene which is fully rebated is used for heating and lighting in the domestic, industrial, and agricultural sectors, and as aviation turbine fuel to power jet aircraft;

Gas oil which is rebated to a rate of 2.14p per litre is used as a heating fuel, as power for heavy industrial and marine diesel engines, and can be used instead of diesel road fuel in certain off road situations, for example, in agricultural or construction plant;

Fuel oil which is rebated to a rate of 1.66p per litre is used mainly as a power source in electricity generation and in manufacturing industries;

Other heavy oil which, by chemical analysis, falls outside the preceding categories is fully rebated and is used in grease making, road building, and as lubricating oil.

Wessex Regional Health Authority

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to be able to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen to the Financial Secretary regarding the Wessex regional health authority dated 9 December 1994.

Sir George Young: This letter has been passed to the Minister for Health for answer. I understand that my hon. Friend intends to issue a reply to the hon. Member shortly.

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by the Department or agency.

Mr. Nelson: For the calendar year 1994 the information requested is:

	Course description
For HM Treasury:	
Title:	Finance programme for generalists
Objective:	To enable and prepare non-specialists—in finance—to work more effectively in the specialist finance areas of Treasury
Organisation:	Management Development Associates Ltd.
Responsibility of participants:	Senior managers
Evaluation:	Evaluation forms from course participants from which written reports produced
Title:	Management training programme—four separate courses
Objective:	For good management skills to be perceived as integral for performance effectiveness
Organisation:	Sundridge Park
Responsibility of participants:	Senior managers
Evaluation:	Evaluation forms from course participants from which written reports produced
Title:	Economics for generalists
Objectives:	To enable officials with general responsibilities to work more effectively with specialist economists
Organisation:	London business school
Responsibility of participants:	Senior managers
Evaluation:	Evaluation forms from course participants from which written reports produced
Title:	Equal opportunities seminars
Objective:	To increase the understanding of equal opportunities with Treasury

	Course description
Organisation:	Pearn Kandola
Responsibility of participants:	All staff
Evaluation:	Evaluation forms from course participants and post-course evaluation workshops
For the Royal Mint:	
Title:	Commercial systems analysis
Objective:	To increase the understanding of new computer systems and how they can be applied
Organisation:	W S Atkins Management Consultants
Responsibility of participants:	First-line supervisors
Evaluation:	Evaluation forms from course participants and feedback to departmental manager
Title:	Operators training course
Objective:	To become fully conversant with new equipment supplied and familiarise operators with the operator input to System 21
Organisation:	Davy International Ltd.
Responsibility of participants:	Shop floor operators and shift managers
Evaluation:	Evaluation forms from course participants and shop floor feedback
Title:	System 21 integrated training
Objective:	Familiarisation operation and maintain the ability of the system
Organisation:	Davy International Ltd.
Responsibility of participants:	Plant electricians/technicians
Evaluation:	Evaluation forms from course participants and feedback to departmental managers
Title:	1st year off-the-job Apprentice training
Objective:	To gain initial skills/qualifications as part of the engineering apprenticeship
Organisation:	Pontypridd technical college
Responsibility of participants:	1st year engineering apprentices
Evaluation:	Achievement of NVQS and evaluation by EnTRA assessor
Title:	Total quality facilitator training
Objective:	To provide training for newly appointed facilitators as part of a total quality programme
Organisation:	Coopers and Lybrand
Responsibility of participants:	Cross-section from first line
Evaluation:	Evaluation forms from course participants and feedback to quality manager
For the Central Statistical Office:	
Title:	Leadership and management programme
Objective:	To improve the leadership and management skills of CSO staff
Organisation:	Centre for Action learning
Responsibility of participants:	All staff
Evaluation:	Questionnaire
Title:	Aspects of hardware communication
Objective:	To train staff in aspects of information systems
Organisation:	Networks
Responsibility of participants:	Information systems staff
Evaluation:	Questionnaire
For Paymaster:	
Title:	Customer care/Telephone skills/Letter writing
Objective:	To give the pensions staff the necessary skills to deal with both pensioners and customers in various media
Organisation:	West Sussex Training Association
Responsibility of participants:	All staff up to higher executive officer grade in pensions sections
Evaluation:	Questionnaire
For the Valuation office:	None

Providing the actual costs paid in each case could be unfairly advantageous to possible future competitors. However, the total cost of the above training is £113,718 for the Treasury and £239,734 for the agencies.

Profit-related Pay Schemes

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the annual cost to the Exchequer of the tax reliefs afforded to profit-related pay schemes; and what margins of error should be attributed to such estimates.

Sir George Young: An estimate of the cost of income tax relief for profit-related pay schemes is published in table 1.6 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1994", a copy of which is in the Library.

Bonus Payments

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the annual cost to the Exchequer of *(a)* bonus payments to employees paid gross of tax, in terms of the interest opportunity cost to the Exchequer and *(b)* bonus payments paid by employers in such a way as to temporarily or permanently avoid paying employers' national insurance contributions on such payments.

Sir George Young: In the Finance Act 1994 and subsequent regulations, the Government introduced measures to counter the avoidance of pay as you earn and national insurance contributions. These measures are expected to end the deferral of about £300 million in PAYE tax and the avoidance of about £75 million of NICs.

These costs relate to all forms of remuneration paid to employees by their employers. Employers are not required to identify bonus payments separately from other payments, and figures on bonus payments could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Since these measures were introduced, the Secretary of State for Social Security has announced further measures to combat other NIC avoidance devices.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the absenteeism rate for *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Central Statistical Office, *(c)* the office of the Paymaster and *(d)* the Royal Mint in each year since 1991.

Mr. Nelson: The table gives the average number of days sickness absence per member of staff:

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
HMT	7.5	6.9	7.1	9.2
CSO	9.8	9.2	8.9	[1]9.9
Paymaster	10.6	10.6	10.4	13.7
Royal Mint[2]	5.9	5.3	5.7	8.4

[1] Provisional figure
[2] Non-industrial staff only

Mortgages

Ms Gordon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to assist self-employed workers who are part of the new flexible work force to overcome difficulties they experience in obtaining a mortgage when purchasing a home; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: The lending policies of mortgage providers are matters for their own commercial judgment, though it is clear that lenders remain keen to do business with those who can sustain the costs of home ownership in the longer term. Lenders have a responsibility to ensure that mortgages are adequately secured, and that borrowers are in a position to meet the repayments.

VAT (Private Health Care)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue would be raised if VAT was charged at 17.5 per cent. on private health care; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Treasury publication "Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs" suggests that the exemption from the standard rate of VAT of health services—a category which includes private health care—costs £300 million in a full year. These figures make no allowance for behavioural responses.

Building Society Takeovers

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for reviewing the Building Societies Act 1986 so that all long-term investors are treated equitably when a building society is subject to a takeover bid.

Mr. Nelson: I have been engaged in a comprehensive review of the Building Societies Act 1986. I intend to announce the outcome shortly.

Credit Cards

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue he estimates would be raised by placing a £10 tax on the possession of each credit card.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* A £10 tax on the 25 million existing credit cards would yield £250 million on the assumption of no behavioural change.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates his Department has made as to the effects on credit card usage of the imposition of a £10 tax on credit cards.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* No such estimates are available.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if his Department has considered charge cards and credit cards to be similar for tax purposes;

(2) what differences between credit cards and charge cards have implications for the imposition of a tax on each.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* There is no taxation of either charge cards or credit cards.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will issue a consultation paper on the taxing of credit cards in the coming year.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to do so.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which organisations he has consulted in respect of taxes on credit cards.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* None.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 25 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *116*, by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Recruitment

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to his Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* The table shows the number of permanent or fixed-term appointments to HM Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's executive agencies during 1994, together with the cost of recruitment arrangements.

	Number of staff	Cost including VAT £
HM Treasury	27	216,750
Central Statistical Office	72	202,388
Paymaster	3	1,148
Royal Mint	20	17,214
Valuation Office	61	nil
Total	183	437,500

ENVIRONMENT

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them publish periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Sir Paul Beresford: There are five next steps agencies within the Department of the Environment:

The Building Research Establishment

The Buying Agency

The Planning Inspectorate

The Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre

The Securities Facilities Executive

Responsibility for the subject matter of the question has been delegated to the chief executive of each agency. I have asked each of them to reply to the right hon. Member in respect of their own agency.

The Secretary of State for the Environment is also responsible for Ordnance Survey, a separate Department and next steps agency. I have also asked its chief executive to reply to the right hon. Member.

Letter from R. G. Courtney to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 30 January 1995:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for the Environment to reply to this PQ in respect of the Building Research Establishment.

The relevant information is:

BRE's headquarters are unchanged since becoming an Executive Agency.

Devolution of personnel, finance and estates responsibilities from DOE and PSA has led to the creation of four additional posts at Grade 7 and above; overall, however, support staff numbers have fallen by 30.

The BRE Annual Review has not changed in style. The cost of preparing the 1994 Review was £49k (including staff costs).

BRE's use of cars is unchanged; the annual cost of its two cars in 1993/4 was £14.6k.

The BRE logo has not changed.

BRE does no provide corporate clothing.

BRE's stationery was redesigned in 1994 at a cost of £3.36k because the previous stationery referred to a site that was closed.

Letter from S. P. Sage to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 30 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for the Environment has asked me to reply to your Question about various items of expenditure incurred by The Buying Agency (TBA), one of DOE's executive agencies. The details are as follows:

TBA remains in the same premises it occupied prior to agency status in 1991.

TBA staff numbers have varied only slightly since becoming an agency. In 1991 they averaged 105; in 1995 they will average 110.

We publish newsletters to TBA's 10,000 customers and suppliers three times a year. In 1994 the cost was £20,000. The newsletters provide an update on goods and services available through TBA.

We operate 13 lease cars for our network of national and regional account managers. In 1994 the cost was £75,000.

Following its launch as an agency TBA modified the logo used by its parent, The Crown Suppliers. There was no development cost.

Each member of staff has a TBA tie (men) or scarf (ladies). The cost for design and printing these was about £1,000.

On becoming an agency TBA modified its stationery in line with its logo. Again there was no development cost.

Letter from C. Shepley to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 30 January 1995:

1. The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to this Parliamentary Question insofar as it relates to the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency.

2. In the Planning Inspectorate we have incurred no expenditure on most of the items you refer to. Specifically, we have not acquired our own buildings; we do not publish a journal; we do not have executive cars; and we do not have a specially designed logo, corporate clothing or corporate stationery as a result of changing to Agency status.

3. The question of support staff is more difficult to answer with precision because a number of functions have been transferred to us by the Department and some of the requirements relating to those functions have since changed. Wherever possible we have carried out these functions with fewer staff than had previously been deployed by the Department for the same tasks. For example our typing unit consists of 8 staff in Bristol and replaced previous arrangements which utilised significantly more staff located away from our Headquarters building. In total we have taken on 31 staff for such tasks—mainly in the typing, personnel and finance areas. This has provided us with more immediate higher quality support services, with increased accountability for the actions they take. Over the period from the launch of the Agency in April 1992 staff numbers in comparable terms have fallen from 649 to 585 despite the arrival of the additional staff.

Letter from Marcus C. Buck to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

I have been asked to reply on behalf of The Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre (QEIICC) to the range of questions you have asked of Next Steps Agencies in Question 866.

(I) The QEIICC Executive Agency occupies the conference centre building at the discretion of the Secretary of State for the Environment. Since 1993–94 it has paid an annual rent of £6.4 million.

(II) Being a purpose-built conference centre, the QEIICC's operations did not exist prior to the completion of the building in 1986. No staff figures exist within the QEIICC prior to its launch as an Executive Agency in 1989. However the number has reduced from 68 in July 1990 to 64 in January 1995.

(III) The QEIICC is required to produce an Annual Report and Accounts each year. The most recent—that for 1993–94—cost £11,000.

(IV) The QEIICC has no executive cars.

(V) The QEIICC's logo was designed in-house at no cost.

(VI) Approximately half of the QEIICC's staff (those working on events) wear uniforms. The 1994–95 annual budget for uniforms is £6,000.

(VII) The QEIICC's 1994–95 annual budget for corporate stationery is £22,000. This covers letter-headed and continuation paper, envelopes delegate writing pads and pencils, business cards, job application forms, performance assessment forms, three-part invoices, cheques and remittance advice.

Letter from John King to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

You have asked the Secretary of State for Environment for information about the Next Steps Agencies in his Department. My reply deals exclusively with the Security Facilities Executive (SAFE). The information which you have asked for is given below:

SAFE does not have its own headquarters building. It shares its HQ accommodation with other Government Departments.

A similar number of support staff are employed in the Agency compared with when it was part of DOE.

No periodical journals are published by the Agency.

The Agency does not have any executive cars for senior staff.

Our new logo was designed to coincide with the launch of the Agency, and is used on brochures, presentation packs tender documents and corporate stationery. The cost of the new logo cannot be separately identified.

The Agency does not have corporate clothing. However, drivers from the Government Car Service, the InterDespatch Service and Custody guards have always had their own uniforms. The only change has been that the drivers now wear ties incorporating the Agency logo.

The cost of designing new stationery for the Agency was £13,855 plus VAT. This included all general and financial stationery used in dealing with our customers. The cost of the initial print run was £8,054 plus VAT.

Letter from David Rhind to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 23 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for the Environment has asked to reply to your question about the additional costs attributable to the establishment of Ordnance Survey as an Executive Agency.

Ordnance Survey has always been and remains a department in its own right and the move to operation on Next Steps Agency lines did not of itself incur new or additional costs. The answers to the specific parts of your question are as follows:

Ordnance Survey occupies the same headquarters building that it occupied prior to becoming an Executive Agency;

no additional support staff were required;

Ordnance Survey continues to publish an Annual Report (with Trading Accounts) and a Corporate Plan;

no fleets of executive cars or single executive cars have been purchased;

the Ordnance Survey logo has not changed since becoming an Executive Agency;

Ordnance Survey does not use corporate clothing;

stationery costs have not varied as a result of the change to Executive Agency status.

I hope the foregoing provides all the information you need.

Merseyside Development Corporation

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will meet the creditors of the Merseyside development corporation; if he will provide for their claims for compensation from public funds; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: Any matters which might arise between the MDC and any creditors it may have would be for the parties concerned.

Housing, West Midlands

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what considerations underlay the proposal in the draft Government regional planning guidance for the west midlands that the 20-year housing needs assessment should be reviewed in June; what account this took of *(a)* population projections and *(b)* shortage of land; and if he will make it his policy to introduce a quinquennial review of land needs.

Sir Paul Beresford: The draft regional planning guidance for the west midlands proposes that the Forum of Local Authorities should review the housing figures by June, in order to take into account new household projections, which are to be published shortly. The housing figures in the draft guidance were based on the figures submitted by the Forum of Local Authorities, which took account of household projections and the current land availability. Regional planning guidance is expected to be revised on average every five years, providing an opportunity for the review of land needs.

Fuels

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effects on the environment of the use of *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* oxygenated petrol.

Mr. Atkins: Petrol and diesel have known environmental benefits and disbenefits for both global and local environments, but the environmental case for oxygenated petrol is not yet clear. Government will continue to keep these under review, and participate fully in the setting of standards for vehicle emissions and fuel formulation at a European level, in particular in the light of the forthcoming report from the European tripartite initiative on future engine and fuel technologies.

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the Departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document "Focus on Ability".

Sir Paul Beresford: The following information covers non-industrial staff in my Department, excluding Property Services Agency Services:

Registered disabled staff	*Non-registered disabled staff*	*Combined percentage of total*
70	68	2.0

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of

each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by his Department or agency.

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not held centrally and could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

Construction Contracts

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to implement the recommendations of the Latham report with particular reference to a construction contract Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to report and legislate on the recommendations of the Latham report.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will chair a meeting of the standing strategic group for the construction industry on 7 February, at which the recommendations of the review implementation forum for taking forward the proposals in the Latham report will be discussed. We have made it clear that we are prepared in principle to legislate on these proposals subject to agreement on the need for and form of such legislation.

Opencast Coal Sites

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many suggested opencast coal sites are registered in the national land bank;

(2) if he will publish the names and the locations of opencast coal sites registered in the national land bank.

Sir Paul Beresford: This Department does not hold a register of opencast coal or proposed opencast coal sites.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the opencast coal sites working as at 3 January giving details of locations.

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not held centrally.

Business Rates

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance he can offer to any business which is facing economic difficulties because of high increases in business rates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The 1995 revaluation of all non-domestic property takes effect on 1 April. Transitional relief will ensure that rate bills will not rise because of the revaluation by more than 10 per cent. a year after allowing for inflation. Maximum increases for properties with a rateable value less than £10,000—£15,000 in Greater London—will be 7.5 per cent. after allowing for inflation. The Government have pledged some £500 million towards the cost of the relief for England in 1995–96.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the impact the increased valuation of non-domestic properties will have on business in Yorkshire.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We estimate that without transitional relief, the average increase in rates bills in 1995–96 as a result of the 1995 revaluation for North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire taken together would have been 36 per cent. Transitional arrangements will limit these increases to 7.5 per cent., after allowing for inflation, for property with a rateable value below £10,000. Property with a rateable value above these thresholds will have increases limited to 10 per cent. after allowing for inflation. The average increase in rate bills in Yorkshire after transitional relief is 9 per cent. This relief is worth £185 million.

Business Rates

Mr. William O'Brien : To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average increase in valuations being received by businesses in the Normanton constituency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Information for the Normanton parliamentary constituency is not available. However, the average increase in rates bills for 1995-96, after transitional relief, in the Wakefield metropolitan district is 10 per cent. Without transitional relief the average increase would have been 32 per cent. The relief is worth £11 million to ratepayers in Wakefield.

Agenda 21

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what monitoring he is undertaking of the progress by local authorities in the implementation of Agenda 21; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities' implementation of Agenda 21—the report from the UN Conference on Environment and Development—is carried out individually and through their national "local Agenda 21 initiative". Monitoring this is a matter for local government. I have regular discussions about progress, however, with local government representatives in the central and local government environment forum.

Leasehold

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *111*, if he will make it his policy to introduce modifications to part 2 of the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993, to remedy shortcomings identified in the interim report of the leasehold enfranchisement advisory service.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I consider it far too soon since the enactment of the 1993 Act to be considering major revisions to the enfranchisement rights which it contained. With the help of the leasehold enfranchisement advisory service, we will, of course, continue to keep these provisions under review.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the outcome of consultation on the local government finance settlement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I am today laying before the House the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1995–96, the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1995–96 and the Special Grant Report (No. 12). These reports establish the

amounts of revenue support grant and non-domestic rates to be paid to local authorities in 1995–96, and the basis of their distribution; specify the amounts which are to be used as the basis of comparison for measuring increases in certain local authorities' budgets in 1995–96 for the purpose of capping, and provide for a special grant to be paid to certain authorities for 1995–96. Two hundred authorities made written representations and Ministers met 90 delegations from local councils.

I shall be sending copies of these reports to all authorities as soon as possible, together with a table showing each authority's standard spending assessment and its entitlement to RSG, NDR and special grant. I have also placed copies of the reports and the table in the Library and the Vote Office.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what reserves are currently held by each county council;

(2) what reserves were held by each county council at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The latest available estimate of the level of reserves as at 1 April 1994 are given. These estimates are subject to amendment as authorities finalise their accounts. Compatible data on the use of balances in 1994–95 which would be needed to derive an estimate of the level of reserves at 1 April 1995 are not yet available.

Estimated Level of Reserves[1] at 1 April 1994[2]

	Outturn £000
Avon	27,608
Bedfordshire	22,788
Berkshire	83,457
Buckinghamshire	47,590
Cambridgeshire	56,532
Cheshire	48,563
Cleveland	22,713
Cornwall	31,725
Cumbria	11,336
Derbyshire	[3]11,600
Devon	51,858
Dorset	10,201
Durham	20,359
East Sussex	35,010
Essex	74,504
Gloucestershire	19,293
Hampshire	92,717
Hereford and Worcester	24,376
Hertfordshire	56,403
Humberside	32,436
Isle of Wight	3,774
Kent	47,747
Lancashire	72,114
Leicestershire	16,845
Lincolnshire	46,650
Norfolk	33,850
Northamptonshire	12,820
Northumberland	18,239
North Yorkshire	36,604
Nottinghamshire	13,203
Oxfordshire	25,557
Shropshire	7,232
Somerset	36,476
Staffordshire	48,424
Suffolk	28,102
Surrey	74,955
Warwickshire	15,591
West Sussex	16,818
Wiltshire	23,957

Notes:

[1] These reserves include those held for local management of schools and other purposes which may not be available to the council for general use.

[2] Source: Level of reserves—outturn—at 1 April 1993 +/- appropriations to/withdrawals from reserves 1993–94—(RS return for 1993–94.

[3] Level of reserves—revised estimate—at 1 April 1994—RA returns for 1994–95.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total proposed expenditure in each local authority area by *(a)* urban development corporations, *(b)* English Partnerships and *(c)* inner-city tasks forces for 1995–96.

Mr. Curry: Planned gross expenditure in 1995–96 by each urban development corporation is set out in table A. Where the urban development area crosses local authority boundaries, each local authority is listed.

Planned expenditure by English Partnerships in 1995–96 is expected to be £263.2 million including the use of receipts.

The national allocation for task forces in 1995–96 is £13.0 million and the local authority areas where task force expenditure is expected are set out in table B. Budgets for individual task forces have not yet been decided, but those task forces which remain open for the whole financial year will each receive a budget of about £1 million. For task forces which have closed, expenditure will be limited to commitments made before closure.

TABLE A: Planned gross expenditure by UDCs in 1995–96

UDC	*Gross expenditure £000*	*Local authority*
Birmingham Heartlands	13,438	Birmingham City Council
Black Country	37,270	Sandwell BC
		Walsall BC
		Wolverhampton BC
Bristol	13,322	Bristol City Council
Central Manchester	12,558	Manchester City Council
Leeds	200	Leeds City Council
London Docklands[1]	89,900	LB Newham
		LB Southwark
		LB Tower Hamlets
Merseyside	34,000	Liverpool City Council
		Sefton BC
		Wirral BC
Plymouth	11,750	Plymouth City Council
Sheffield	17,156	Sheffield City Council
Teeside	52,650	Hartlepool BC
		Langbaurgh BC
		Stockton on Tees BC
		Middlesborough BC
Trafford Park	29,400	Trafford BC
		Salford City Council
Tyne and Wear	53,731	Newcastle City Council
		North Tyneside BC
		South Tyneside BC
		Sunderland BC

Note:

[1]Excludes DLR proposed gross expenditure of £38.7 million.

TABLE B: Local authority areas with task force expenditure in 1995–96

Local authority area	*Task force*
Bradford	Bradford
Kingston upon Hull	Hull
London Borough of Lewisham	[1]Deptford
London Borough of Hackney	Hackney
London Borough of Southwark	[2]North Peckham
London Borough of Haringey	Tottenham

TABLE B: Local authority areas with task force expenditure in 1995–96

Local authority area	*Task force*
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham	[2]West London
South Tyneside	South Tyneside
Stockton on Tees	Stockton and Thornaby
Derby	Derby
Nottingham	[1]Nottingham
Birmingham	Newtown/Ladywood
Birmingham	[2]East Birmingham
Manchester	[1]Moss Side and Hulme
Wirral Metropolitan Borough	Wirral
Liverpool	Granby/Toxteth
Plymouth	Plymouth
Bristol	[2]Bristol

[1] Closing at the end of 1994–1995.
[2] Closed.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the allocation made to each local authority in 1993–94 from *(a)* the urban partnership, *(b)* estate action and *(c)* the derelict and grant programmes.

Mr. Curry: Expenditure by local authority area in 1993–94 on the urban partnership fund, estate action and derelict land grant is set out in the table.

Expenditure in 1993–94 on the Urban Partnership Fund (UPF), Estate Action and Derelict Land Grant (DLG).

£000s

Local authority	*UPF*	*Estate action*	*DLG*
Allerdale	—	900	898
Alnwick	—	866	—
Amber Valley	—	—	47
Barking and Dagenham	—	—	254
Barnet	—	1,202	—
Barnsley	—	4,599	1,576
Barrow in Furness	—	600	52
Basildon	—	850	—
Bassetlaw	—	—	1
Bath	—	1,195	152
Bedford	—	—	11
Bedfordshire	—	—	4
Bexley	—	—	14
Birmingham	245	19,342	1,008
Blackburn	—	4,953	39
Blackpool	—	650	75
Blyth Valley	—	1,277	—
Bolsover	—	94	106
Bolton	224	2,025	569
Boston	—	81	—
Boothferry	—	—	12
Bradford	—	4,800	1,312
Braintree	—	—	6
Brent	125	—	36
Bristol	500	6,285	—
Broxbourne	—	323	—
Burnley	137	2,291	103
Bury	—	485	1,260
Calderdale	—	3,230	3,278
Cambridge	—	4	26
Camden	—	305	4
Cannock Chase	—	300	278
Canterbury	—	156	—
Caradon	—	—	677
Carlisle	—	2,255	—
Carrick	—	—	87
Charnwood	—	—	17
Cheltenham	—	323	—
Cheshire	—	—	3,229
Chester	—	750	20
Chesterfield	—	659	154
Chester le Street	—	250	—
Chorley	—	—	970
Cleveland	—	—	6
Colchester	—	481	—
Congleton	—	—	86
Copeland	—	1,050	—
Corby	—	2,900	1,811
Cornwall	—	—	536
Coventry	2,600	5,937	123
Craven	—	778	—
Crewe and Nantwich	—	300	1
Croydon	—	—	27
Cumbria	—	—	4,123
Darlington	—	535	235
Dartford	—	—	22
Daventry	—	—	57
Derby	175	6,577	11
Derbyshire	—	—	2,221
Derbyshire Dales	—	—	92
Derwentside	—	3,062	2,203
Devon	1,239	—	—
Doncaster	70	1,867	1,629
Dudley	282	2,834	3,742
Durham	—	130	1,065
Ealing	—	510	36
Easington	—	1,572	117
East Yorkshire	—	270	—
Eden	—	300	—
Ellesmere Port and Neston	—	2,239	1,990
Enfield	—	141	—
Erewash	—	413	1,346
Fenland	—	155	—
Forest of Dean	—	—	36
Gateshead	378	200	2,169
Gedling	—	—	5
Gillingham	—	272	—
Glanford	—	—	5,164
Gloucester	—	721	—
Gosport	—	—	5
Gravesham	—	—	84
Great Grimsby	—	600	4
Great Yarmouth	—	532	47
Greenwich	345	2,970	266
Guildford	—	—	33
Hackney	125	9,081	—
Halton	—	1,956	1,166
Hammersmith and Fulham	81	2,077	—
Haringey	—	4,616	—
Harrogate	—	298	—
Hartlepool	150	1,486	—
Hastings	—	—	35
Hereford and Worcester	—	—	14
Hertfordshire	—	—	14
High Peak	—	1,055	—
Hillingdon	—	750	—
Hinckley and Bosworth	—	—	6
Hounslow	—	2,221	—
Humberside	—	—	50
Huntingdonshire	—	378	12
Hyndburn	—	1,494	297
Ipswich	—	292	17
Islington	1,040	5,233	—
Kensington and Chelsea	—	1,450	—
Kent	—	—	48
Kerrier	—	—	1,502

Expenditure in 1993–94 on the Urban Partnership Fund (UPF), Estate Action and Derelict Land Grant (DLG).

£000s

Local authority	UPF	Estate action	DLG
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	—	—	2
Kingston upon Hull	25	4,323	176
Kingswood	—	—	3
Kirklees	1,140	4,013	1,927
Knowsley	1,000	3,174	610
Lambeth	—	6,652	263
Lancashire	—	—	243
Lancaster	—	—	3,276
Langbaurgh on Tees	127	1,523	85
Leeds	300	6,472	253
Leicester	233	7,127	4
Leicestershire	—	—	404
Lewisham	—	9,884	32
Lichfield	—	—	103
Lincoln	—	290	313
Lincolnshire	—	—	55
Liverpoool	1,065	19,338	986
Luton	—	—	8
Macclesfield	—	191	217
Maidstone	—	744	—
Manchester	350	17,327	3,249
Mansfield	—	500	1,812
Melton	—	106	—
Merton	—	199	23
Middlesbrough	36	678	44
Newark and Sherwood	—	790	188
Newcastle under Lyme	—	213	433
Newcastle upon Tyne	250	3,064	455
Newham	326	7,600	292
North Cornwall	—	—	7
North East Derbyshire	—	363	323
North Kesteven	—	158	—
North Norfolk	—	—	49
North Tyneside	729	2,723	518
North Warwickshire	—	—	12
North West Leicestershire	—	—	46
North Wiltshire	—	110	—
Northampton	—	100	9
Northavon	—	245	—
Northumberland	—	—	789
Norwich	—	631	5
Nottinghamshire	65	—	2,085
Nottingham	370	6,111	333
Nuneaton and Bedworth	—	500	152
Oadby and Wigston	—	100	—
Oldham	340	3,050	1,805
Peak National Park Joint Planning Board	—	—	110
Pendle	—	—	82
Penwith	—	—	24
Peterborough	—	253	—
Plymouth	960	1,411	54
Poole	—	503	—
Portsmouth	—	220	10
Preston	348	2,716	—
Reading	—	1,150	1
Redbridge	—	2,738	—
Redditch	—	605	—
Reigate and Banstead	—	—	6
Restormel	—	—	63
Ribble Valley	—	116	—
Richmond upon Thames	—	75	—
Richmondshire	—	—	36
Rochdale	240	3,826	354
Rossendale	—	710	378
Rotherham	685	—	3,354
Rushcliffe	—	—	1
Rushmoor	—	574	—
Salford	870	6,002	2,225
Sandwell	215	9,285	5,412

Expenditure in 1993–94 on the Urban Partnership Fund (UPF), Estate Action and Derelict Land Grant (DLG).

£000s

Local authority	UPF	Estate action	DLG
Scunthorpe	—	486	—
Sedgefield	—	1,346	148
Sefton	310	2,798	561
Sheffield	675	6,625	664
Shropshire	—	—	1,569
South Cambridgeshire	—	—	34
South Derbyshire	—	—	16
South Hams	—	245	15
South Lakeland	—	—	29
South Ribble	—	174	7
South Staffordshire	—	—	6
South Tyneside	500	718	139
Southampton	—	679	—
Southwark	1,000	17,223	21
St. Edmundsbury	—	213	17
St. Helens	—	5,415	787
Stafford	—	444	—
Staffordshire	—	—	616
Staffordshire Moorlands	—	—	10
Stevenage	—	496	—
Stockport	—	3,260	1,117
Stockton on Tees	119	2,035	532
Stoke on Trent	—	1,969	1,021
Stroud	—	963	—
Sunderland	1,000	5,511	520
Surrey	—	—	31
Sutton	—	565	—
Tameside	—	—	1,075
Teesdale	—	—	6
Teignbridge	—	—	1
Thamesdown	—	100	16
The Wrekin	—	—	383
Thurrock	—	1,000	2
Torbay	—	—	25
Tower Hamlets	—	11,767	236
Trafford	—	751	—
Vale Royal	—	835	2
Wakefield	—	2,144	2,790
Walsall	—	1,549	4,325
Waltham Forest	—	3,797	16
Wandsworth	670	—	—
Warrington	—	600	20
Warwickshire	—	—	4
Watford	—	242	—
Wealden	—	—	111
Wear Valley	—	1,701	290
Westminster	—	179	—
West Devon	—	—	8
West Sussex	—	—	54
Weymouth and Portland	—	131	—
Wigan	420	2,147	3,058
Wirral	75	4,681	496
Wolverhampton	250	2,293	915
Worcester	—	1,050	—
Wyre	—	763	—
York	—	1,280	30
Total	22,409	357,437	104,148

PRIME MINISTER

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has now made of an unclassified document emanating from the air intelligence agency department of the United States air force, sent to him by the hon. Member for Linlithgow, asserting that Ali Akbar Mohrashemi paid cash and gold to terrorist organisations to carry out terrorist activities, and to destroy Pan Am flight 103 in retaliation for the United States shoot-down of the Iranian airbus.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Gentleman on 26 January 1994, *Official Report*, columns *299-300*.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library his correspondence with Mr. English of Chard, Somerset, in relation to Libya and Lockerbie.

The Prime Minister: It is not my normal practice to do so.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Prime Minister which Minister is responsible for deregulation in each Government Department.

The Prime Minister: The deregulation initiative is headed by the right hon. Michael Heseltine, President of the Board of Trade. Ministers are appointed in each of the regulatory Department's to be responsible for deregulation issues. They are:

Department	*Minister*
Her Majesty's Treasury (Revenue and Customs)	Right Hon. Sir George Young MP Financial Secretary
Department of Transport	John Watts MP Minister of State
Scottish Office	Allan Stewart MP Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Welsh Office	Roderick Richards MP Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Home Office	Michael Forsyth MP Minister of State
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	Earl Howe Parliamentary Secretary
Department of Trade and Industry	Jonathan Evans MP Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Department of Health	Hon. Tom Sackville MP Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Department of Employment	Hon. Philip Oppenheim MP Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Department of Social Security	James Arbuthnot Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Department of Environment	Right Hon. Viscount Ullswater Minister of State
Northern Ireland Office	Baroness Denton of Wakefield Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Ministry of Defence	Righ Hon. Roger Freeman Minister of State
Department for Education	Eric Forth MP Minister of State
Office of Public Service and Science	Robert Hughes MP Parliamentary Secretary
Lord Chancellor's Department	John Taylor MP Parliamentary Secretary
Department of National Heritage	Iain Sproat MP Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

Correspondence

Ms Gordon: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to reply to the letters of inquiry sent to him six months ago by Mr. R. Nimmo of 202 Morville street, London E3.

The Prime Minister: The Department of Employment replied on my behalf on 28 July 1994, a copy of which has recently been sent to Mr. Nimmo.

Common Currency

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Prime Minister what is his current attitude towards the introduction of the hard ecu as a common currency within the EU.

The Prime Minister: Although the United Kingdom advocated the hard ecu during the Maastricht treaty negotiations, it was eventually agreed that the route set out in the treaty would avoid the problems of the control of the money supply that a parallel currency would inevitably involve. We therefore agreed to a three-stage process in which responsibility for our monetary policy will remain firmly in national hands unless and until Parliament agrees that we should seek to join a single currency.

World Summit for Social Development

Miss Lestor: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to attend the world summit for social development in Copenhagen in March; and if he will list those who will be representing Her Majesty's Government.

The Prime Minister: I will make a decision on attendance nearer the date.

EU Fraud

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has to persuade the French Government to include the issue of the eradication of fraud in their objectives for their EU presidency.

The Prime Minister: At the Essen European Council, I made a number of proposals on the subject of fraud, waste and mismanagement which were agreed by the Council. I refer the hon. Member to my statement to the House on 12 December, *Official Report*, columns *613-30*.

The French presidency has made clear that it intends to pursue these measures vigorously. This was endorsed by the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers at its meeting on 16 January when the presidency work programme was discussed.

The reports from member states, commissioned at Essen, on the measures member states are implementing domestically to combat waste and the misuse of Community resources will be examined under the French presidency.

The French presidency fully shares our views on fraud, as the French Prime Minister made clear to me at our Chartres meeting last December.

Chequers (Entertainment)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* dates of *(b)* nature of and *(c)* individuals present at each occasion at Chequers in the period from 2 December 1994 to 20 January 1995 which has involved

the provision of food, drink and other forms of reception or entertainment paid for out of public funds.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* There was one such occasion on 13 January 1995. This was a meeting of Ministers reviewing British foreign policy. It is not my normal practice to provide a list of individuals present on such occasions.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Wellcome-Glaxo Merger

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to the long-term effect on research and development of the proposed takeover of Wellcome by Glaxo; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The relevant competition authorities will be considering the proposed merger in due course. Therefore, it is not appropriate for my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to comment.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the absenteeism rate for *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Accounts Services Agency, *(c)* Companies House, *(d)* the Insolvency Service, *(e)* the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, *(f)* the NEL, *(g)* the National Physical Laboratory, *(h)* the National Weights and Measures Agency, *(i)* the Patent Office and *(j)* the Radiocommunications Agency in each year since 1991.

Mr. Heseltine: The average number of days sick leave per employee for the Department and its agencies is shown in the table.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Department excluding Agencies listed below	8.1	8.1	10.3	9.5
Accounts Service Agency[1]	—	—	13.9	13.0
Companies House	10.9	13.4	17.4	16.8
Insolvency Service	7.8	8.9	11.4	10.8
Laboratory of the Government Chemist	5.4	7.0	7.9	6.6
NEL	6.0	5.5	6.6	10.6
National Physical Laboratory	5.4	7.3	7.6	6.4
National Weights and Measures Agency	3.9	4.1	8.1	13.3
Patent Office	7.0	8.2	12.0	11.5
Radiocommunications Agency	8.2	9.1	11.5	8.8
Total	7.9	8.6	11.0	10.3

[1] For 1991 and 1992 ASA figures are part of the departmental figures.

Northern Electricity

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade by how much domestic electricity prices for Northern Electric customers have changed since 1991 in relation to the UK average.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Using the normal assumption that the average domestic household buys 3,300 kWh of electricity per year, Northern Electric's standard tariff rose by 1.9 per cent. between 1991 and 1994. If allowance is made for inflation, as measured by the gross domestic product (market prices) deflator, this represents a fall of 7.4 per cent. in real terms. For customers on Northern Electric's Economy 7 tariff, the price of electricity rose by 2.4 per cent. in current price terms and fell by 7 per cent. in real terms (assuming consumption of 6,600 kWh per year—3,000 day units and 3,600 night units). VAT has been excluded from the above figures. This tax (8 per cent.) was imposed from 1 April 1994, but an unspecified number of consumers paid in advance and will not have paid any VAT during 1994.

For all regional electricity companies in England and Wales, the corresponding average change over this three-year period for standard tariff customers was –0.9 per cent., (9.9 per cent. in real terms), and for Economy 7 tariff customers it was +0.9 per cent., (–8.4 per cent. in real terms).

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effect of the takeover of Northern Electric by Trafalgar House on the sale of the National Grid Company.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is awaiting the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading on the proposed takeover by Trafalgar House of Northern Electric.

Company Accounts

Dr. Wright: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many companies have had penalties imposed upon them by Companies House for the late submission of accounts in each of the past five years; and what has been the total amount of such penalties in each of these years.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Responsibility for the subject of this question has been delegated to Companies House under its chief executive, Mr. Durham. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Durham to Dr. Tony Wright, dated 30 January 1995:

Jonathan Evans, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, has asked me as Registrar and Chief Executive of Companies House Executive Agency, to reply to the following Parliamentary Question which you tabled:

How many companies have had penalties imposed upon them by Companies House for the late submission of accounts in each of the past five years; and what has been the total amount of such penalties in each of these years.

The late filing penalty system was introduced on 1 July 1992. Details of the number of penalties levied and the sums involved are set out in the table below.

Late filing penalties raised: Great Britain
Financial years 1992–3; 1993–4; 1994–5

	Number	*Value (£ million)*
1992–93 (July-March)	79,928	12.5
1993–94 (April-March)	84,384	20.8
1994–95 (April-December)	55,053	13.8

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many statutory instruments requiring affirmative resolution he expects will be brought before the House in the current Session; and how many of these he expects to be considered by *(a)* Standing Committees or *(b)* on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Newton: The information is not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

European Union

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Lord President of the Council what communication he has received from the President of the European Parliament concerning its resolution of 10 February adopting the proposal for a constitution for the European Union, as proposed by its Committee on Institutional Affairs; and what action he has taken consequent on any requests therein.

Mr. Newton: The European Parliament did not adopt the draft constitution prepared by the Committee on Institutional Affairs, but only took note of it. I have received no communication from the President of the European Parliament concerning the resolution of 10 February 1994.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Register of Available Personnel

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many prospective candidates seeking employment in the United Kingdom's overseas aid programme had their details held on the Overseas Development Administrations's register of available personnel for each year since 1979; how many of them were appointed; and how many of them were removed from the register after two years.

Mr. Baldry: The historical information about the register of available personnel, which has only existed since 1987, is not available. Information about recent years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Consultants

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which are the four main consultancies and recruitment agencies supplying personnel to the United Kingdom's overseas aid programme since 1979.

Mr. Baldry: Individuals employed under the aid programme are normally recruited directly by the Overseas Development Administration. No records are kept which distinguish between contracts with consultancy firms relating solely to the supply of expertise to the aid programme and those which also cover the supply of other services.

Aid, Africa

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what decisions have been made in the past six months by the European Commission about the provision and destination of aid within Africa.

Mr. Baldry: Tables providing details of EC projects approved between July and December 1994 which benefit sub-Saharan Africa under (i) the European development fund, (ii) European Community food and humanitarian aid and (iii) the special programme for South Africa, have been placed in the Library of the House.

In October 1994, a framework agreement creating the first bilateral treaty relationship between the EC and South Africa was signed. In November 1994, the Development Council agreed a programme of 67 mecu—about £53 million—to rehabilitate social and production structures in Rwanda.

Arun Project, Nepal

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what topics were discussed at the recent informal briefing with members of the inspection panel of the World bank; and what conclusions were drawn by the United Kingdom executive director;

(2) if he will instruct the United Kingdom executive director of the World bank to support the preliminary recommendations of the inspection panel of the World bank on the Arun III project.

Mr. Baldry: There has been a preliminary exchange of views on the inspection panel's report on a request for an inspection of the Arun III hydroelectric project in Nepal. Executive directors decided to defer further action pending receipt of the views of the newly elected Government of Nepal, and also pending a review by the panel of its report in the light of additional information to be supplied by bank management.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department has about the current position of the Government of Nepal on approval of the Arun III project.

Mr. Baldry: We understand the newly elected Government have expressed broad support for the project, but wish to take stock before reaching a firm view on whether to proceed.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the board of the World bank will consider the full appraisal report of the Arun III project.

Mr. Baldry: No date has been set.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what organisations he will consult before deciding the British Government's policy in the World bank on the Arun III project;

(2) what organisations will be consulted by the board of the World bank before it reaches a final decision on the Arun III project;

(3) what organisations he will consult before deciding the British Government's policy on implementing the recommendations of the inspection panel of the World bank on the Arun III project;

(4) what organisations will be consulted by the board of the World bank before it reaches a final decision on implementing the recommendations of the bank's inspection panel on the Arun III.

Mr. Baldry: The board as such does not normally consult outside organisations, but will want to be assured that the borrower and the bank have consulted fully, in accordance with bank policies and procedures. Individual members of the board will have their own arrangements for consultation. We have received views from a number of organisations, notably the Intermediate Technology Development Group, on the proposed project and have encouraged the bank to consult widely with informed groups, particularly those active in Nepal. We shall take account of these views when considering the proposed project and in relation to the report of the inspection panel.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the minimum projected rate of return on the Arun III project which would be required for the United Kingdom to support this project.

Mr. Baldry: As a minimum, we would expect the economic rate of return to exceed the opportunity cost of capital of 10 per cent. used for this project.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's current policy towards the Arun III project in Nepal.

Mr. Baldry: The Arun project raises complex economic, environmental, social and institutional issues. Debate on these issues is continuing, especially given the new Government's desire to take stock of the project; and the independent inspection panel's report.

World Bank Inspection Panel

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the initial work of the inspection panel of the World bank.

Mr. Baldry: The inspection panel became operational only in August 1994, and to date has received only one request for inspection. It is too soon to draw conclusions about its effectiveness.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom executive director of the World bank attended the recent informal briefing with members of the inspection panel of the World bank.

Mr. Baldry: Yes.

Somali Refugee Camp

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what visits have been made to refugee camps containing Somali people and in which countries; and what view Her Majesty's Government have formed of the conditions there.

Mr. Baldry: United Kingdom officials visited Somali refugee camps in Kenya in September 1994 and in Ethiopia in December 1994. The condition of refugees in Kenya is generally stable; that of Somali refugees in Ethiopia is more variable, with some groups remaining vulnerable to food and medical shortages. We have provided over £11 million since 1991 to help refugees in Kenya and Ethiopia, most of whom are Somalis.

TRANSPORT

Nuclear Waste Shipments

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek an urgent meeting with the EU Transport Commissioner to discuss the safety arrangements under Council directive 92/3Euratom of 3 February 1992 on the supervision and control of shipments of radioactive waste into and out of the European Community, as they apply to the imminent shipment of radioactive waste from La Hague in France.

Mr. Atkins: I have been asked to reply.

No. Council directive 92/3/Euratom sets out provisions for the authorisation of shipments of radioactive waste, into and out of the European Union and between member states, by the competent authorities of the country of origin. Authorisation of the shipment referred to is a matter for the French competent authority.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from the Channel Islands in regard to the forthcoming sea shipment of high-level nuclear waste from La Hague in France to Japan.

Mr. Norris: None.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *880*, which posts were filled as a result of the employment of executive search agencies; which executive search companies were involved in this exercise; and what were the values of the individual contracts involved.

Mr. Norris: The two posts filled with the help of executive search agencies were:

1. The Highways Agency chief executive. Korn Ferry International

assisted in carrying out the search and selection: the cost was £23,500.

2. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency chief executive. Saxon Bampfylde International plc carried out the search and administration; the cost was £31,800.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what jurisdiction local authorities have over noise made by aircraft while on the ground.

Mr. Norris: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on 24 January, *Official Report*, column *110*, by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside.

Civil Servants

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document "Focus on Ability".

Mr. Norris: As of 1 July 1994, 181 Department of Transport staff were known to be registered as disabled. This is 1.4 per cent. of the total staff—12,929. In addition, 134 DOT members of staff have responded to questionnaires and declared themselves to have a disability which is not registered. This is 1 per cent. of the total staff.

Coventry Airport

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *98*, what local authorities, including parish councils, have contacted him about noise and nuisance at Coventry airport in the last 12 months; how many of the complaints relate to *(a)* day and *(b)* night flights; how many complaints there were in each of the previous five years; and if he will divide them into complaints about (i) day and (ii) night flights and list the local authorities involved.

Mr. Norris: Of the 14 representations mentioned in my answer of 24 January, 11 related to noise generally at Coventry airport, of which four also made specific reference to night flights. The remaining three representations concerned night flights alone.

The number of complaints received in each year since 1992 is as follows:

	Total complaints	*General noise*	*Day flights*	*Night flights*
1992	3	1	1	2
1993	5	3	0	3
1994	14	11	0	7

Some complaints covered more than one topic. Information for earlier years can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

In addition, since January 1990 my Department has had one contact from a local authority about noise and nuisance at Coventry airport. This took the form of a meeting in July 1994 between the Minister for Aviation and Shipping and a delegation from Warwick district council led by my hon. Friend himself. At this meeting the subject of aircraft noise at Coventry airport was discussed generally, but with a particular focus on ground noise and night flights.

Lobbying Organisations

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a list of all those who were received by him, his fellow Ministers or senior officials in the past six months, indicating which ones were representatives of lobbying organisations.

Dr. Mawhinney: No; it is not our practice to do so.

Coaches

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people have died in coaches crashing in the right-hand lane of carriageways with more than two lanes, in each of the last five years.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is not available.

Stafford's Railway Bridge

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what additional safety measures have been undertaken in the past 12 months on the Stafford's railway bridge in Exeter.

Mr. Watts: Railtrack has informed me that, between November 1993 and February 1994, additional bracings were installed between the piers and the upstream side of the main girders of the Stafford's railway bridge to increase its lateral stability. I understand that the work undertaken allows the bridge to remain open longer during periods when the River Exe is in flood.

Mayday Call (Olympic Airways)

Mr. MacKinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what circumstances caused the Mayday call of Olympic Airways Boeing 737 Flight 265 from Athens on 17 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Olympic Airways Flight OA265 on 17 January 1995 was inbound from Athens to London Heathrow at a time air traffic control was advising all aircraft of 40-minute delays in landing. When given the delay, OA265, then holding in a "stack" at flight level 180, requested an earlier approach, stating engine de-icing problems. Air traffic control advised that a priority approach could be given only if the aircraft declared an emergency.

The pilot promptly made a "mayday" call, which is a distress emergency call to signify that an aircraft is threatened by grave and imminent danger and requests immediate assistance. This is for the captain to judge. However, there seems some doubt about the seriousness of the situation in this case: for example, there is no evidence that one engine had been shut down, as was reported in the press.

ATC offered the captain an immediate diversion to Gatwick airport, which he declined. Accordingly, the aircraft was then cleared for a direct approach to Heathrow airport, which instigated full emergency procedures. The aircraft landed safely and a subsequent examination apparently revealed no damage or technical malfunction.

The Civil Aviation Authority's safety data units received notification of the incident as an ATC occurrence report. Details of the incident have been passed to its flight operations policy department for consideration of any possible subsequent action by the authority.

Heathrow

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the districts of Greater London over which aircraft normally fly while making their final descent into Heathrow airport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The London Boroughs normally overflown are: Wandsworth, Richmond, Hammersmith and Fulham, Spelthorne, Hillingdon and Hounslow. In addition, aircraft skirt the southernmost boundary of Kensington and Chelsea.

Mr.Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information his Department now has as to the statistical analysis for a major crash on Greater London by an aircraft using Heathrow airport; and when such an incident last occurred.

Mr. Norris: The statistical analysis available to the Department is derived from worldwide accident data and is not specific to individual airports. The last major crash of an aircraft using Heathrow airport occurred near Staines in 1972.

Aircraft (City Approaches)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport at which cities in Europe and north America, other than Greater London, airliners routinely fly over more than 15 miles of the city during an airliner's final approach to landing at the normal airport destination; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is not available.

Oxygenated Petrol

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has carried out into oxygenated petrol; what plans for research into the environmental suitability of oxygenated petrol he has; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 26 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *367*.

Fishing Vessels (Medical Supplies)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from fishermen's organisations about regulations governing the carriage of medical supplies on fishing vessels.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* Ministers have received 28 representations from fishermen's organisations via hon. Members about the regulations governing the carriage of medical supplies on fishing vessels. Of these, 22 have come from the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, one from the Leigh and Southend Joint Fishermen's Association and one from the Fleetwood Fishermen's Association. Direct representations to the Department have also been received from the NFFO, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and the Southern Sea Fishermen's Council.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Birth Control

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what specialist provision exists in Northern Ireland to offer contraception advice and counselling to young people; and what plans he has to extend these provisions following the findings of the recent study of the director of public health into the eastern health and social services board on abortions and contraception.

Mr. Moss: Family planning services are available to young people in Northern Ireland through family planning clinics, general medical practitioners and voluntary agencies. The provision of these services is a matter for health and social services boards to determine in the light of local needs and priorities. I understand that the Eastern health and social services board proposes to target family planning services on areas of social deprivation and high teenage pregnancy.

Atmospheric Pollution

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to change existing policy on atmospheric pollution in Northern Ireland following the recent Eastern health and social services report on the link between atmospheric pollution and the incidence of lung cancer.

Mr. Moss: In his fifth annual report, the director of public health for the Eastern health and social services suggested that a link may exist between atmospheric pollution and the incidence of lung cancer in certain parts of Northern Ireland, particularly in the Belfast area and that atmospheric pollution may be one of several environmental factors linked to the causation of disease. It presented no specific evidence however to show that such a link exists.

The Government have made a firm commitment to ensure that statutory air quality standards set to protect public health are achieved and maintained throughout Northern Ireland. They also have an on-going programme of major initiatives designed to improve air quality and inform the public when conditions are such that those at greatest risk are made aware of the situation.

Last week, a joint statement was issued by the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment setting out proposals for a new air quality management strategy for the United Kingdom taking account of the nine most significant pollutants. Northern Ireland has been consulted and will be fully involved in the evaluation and implementation of initiatives flowing from the strategy.

Queen's University

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total public funding for the Queen's university of Belfast in each of the past five years.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

Academic year	*£ million*
1989–90	56,126
1990–91	65,152
1991–92	67,177
1992–93	72,404
1993–94	78,078

Schools

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the average number of parents in attendance at the annual meetings of parents held in 1993 and 1994 in *(a)* controlled primary schools, *(b)* controlled secondary schools, *(c)* controlled grammar schools and *(d)* maintained schools in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Murders, Londonderry, East

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many murders against *(a)* civilians and *(b)* members of the security forces were committed in the Londonderry, East constituency and on what dates in each of the last five years; and in how many cases (i) charges have been brought and (ii) convictions have resulted.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* The information requested is as follows:

Murders in East Londonderry constituency

1990	*Civilian/security forces*	*Location*
1 December	Civilian	Kilrea

To date no one has been charged or convicted for this murder.

1991	*Civilian/security forces*	*Location*
16 August	Civilian	Kilrea
25 August	Civilian	Coleraine
30 August	Civilian	Coleraine
16 September	Civilian	Magherafelt
17 September	Security Forces	Maghera
6 November	Security Forces	Bellaghy

One person has been charged with murder but convicted of manslaughter for the incident on 25 August. One person has been charged and convicted of the murder on 30 August.

1992	*Civilian/security forces*	*Location*
3 March	Civilian	Greysteel
2 April	Civilian	Kilrea
30 July	Civilian	Castledawson

One person has been charged with murder but convicted of manslaughter for the incident on 3 March. One person has been convicted of actual bodily harm for the death which resulted from the incident on 30 July.

1993	*Civilian/security forces*	*Location*
25 March	4 civilians	Castlerock
30 October	7 civilians	Greysteel

Four persons have been charged with the eight murders at Greysteel. One person has been charged with the murders at Castlerock.

1994	Civilian/security forces	Location
14 April	Civilian	Greysteel
24 April	2 civilians	Garvagh
12 July	Civilian	Coleraine

One person has been charged with the murders on 24 April. One person has been charged with the murder on 12 July.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judiciary (Secret Societies)

44. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to require members of the judiciary to declare membership of secret societies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has no such plans.

Transsexuals (Marriage)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what plans he has to recognise British post-operative transsexuals who marry legally abroad as being married in their acquired gender; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if post-operative transsexuals who have married under New Zealand law will be recognised as married under British law; and if will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The position in the law of England and Wales is that a marriage to which parties are not respectively male and female is void. What sex a person has for this purpose is a question of fact, but the present legal position is that the biological criteria for determining sex are established at birth. The Government have no plans to change the law.

Custody

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many times the Official Solicitor recommended that the children that he is acting on behalf of are given into the custody of *(a)* the mother, *(b)* the father or *(c)* the local authority in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. John. M. Taylor: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Automatic Party Status (Divorce Proceedings)

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals he has to give children automatic party status in divorce proceedings.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has no such proposals.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mutual Defence Agreement

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, columns *740–41*, if there are any further amendments to the 1958 United States-United Kingdom mutual defence agreement, which are still in force at the present time, made prior to 1965.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The 1958 US-UK mutual defence agreement was also amended in 1959.

Mrs. Shazia Noreen

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when is a decision to be taken by the United Kingdom post in Islamabad on the application of Mrs. Shazia Noreen, ref: IMM/C5048, to join her husband in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: I have asked the entry clearance officer in Islamabad to let me have a report on the application by Mrs. Shazia Noreen. I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as soon as possible.

Rwanda

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to press through the appropriate United Nations authorities to establish whether the Rwandan nationals accused of the murder of their countrymen and countrywomen have been brought to justice.

Mr. Ethrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the United Nations to assist the Rwandan authorities to indict those who are responsible for the murder of Tutsis.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom was a co-sponsor of UN Security Council resolution 955 of 8 November 1994 which established an international criminal tribunal for Rwanda.

In addition, the UN has drawn up a plan to help reconstruct the Rwandan judicial system.

World Summit for Social Development

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what documents have been published by his Department in preparation for the world summit for social development in Copenhagen in March.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We will be issuing an information brief on the world social summit in early February.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what follow-up mechanisms he favours in order to ensure that commitments given by member states at the world summit for social development are adhered to.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The summit documentation makes clear that follow-up at the national level will be the responsibility of national Governments. The UK is already addressing most of the issues that the summit will cover. We will note carefully any further action required and will seek to implement it through existing mechanisms.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what will be the composition of the United Kingdom delegation to the UN social summit in Copenhagen in March.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A final decision on attendance at the summit will be made nearer the date.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will be representing his Department at the world summit for social development in Copenhagen in March.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A final decision on attendance at the summit will be made nearer the date.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultation his Department has undertaken with non-governmental organisations regarding the draft plan of action for the world summit for social development.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Information about the summit has been disseminated to over 200 contacts from a wide range of organisations in the United Kingdom. Of those who wish to be involved, some are in direct contact with the Government; others are in touch with a central contact point in UNED-UK, the United Kingdom branch of the United Nations environment and development non-governmental organisation, which we are funding specifically to disseminate information about the summit and to ensure any NGO with an interest in the summit's issues can make its voice heard. We welcome their interest and involvement and will remain in close touch with United Kingdom NGOs during the preparatory process and at Copenhagen itself.

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the Departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document, "Focus on Ability".

Mr. Goodlad: On 1 July 1994, the number of non-industrial civil servants employed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration and its agency, who were registered disabled was 52, representing 0.67 per cent. of the whole. Figures for the number and proportion of non-registered disabled staff are not available.

Mrs. Surraya Ashraf

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a solicitor, based in Bradford, visiting Pakistan asked officials at the United Kingdom post in Islamabad to review the refusal of an application by Mrs. Surraya Ashraf and her daughter Miss Noreen Akhtar, ref. GV100/24649, to enter the United Kingdom; when the request to review the application was agreed; what was the outcome of the review; when was that information sent to the solicitor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I have asked the entry clearance officer to let me have a report on the applications by Mrs. Surraya Ashraf and her daughter, Miss Noreen Akhtar. I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as soon as possible.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to be able to reply to the questions asked by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North on 18 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *28*, on entry clearance applications and appeals.

Mr. Baldry: The answer to the hon. Member's question of 18 July 1994, was conveyed, in full, in a letter to him from me on 13 September. Arrangements were also made for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library.

Regrettably, the answer to the hon. Member's other question of 18 July has not been answered in full. I am therefore taking this opportunity to ask posts to update their final returns and will give the hon. Member the answer he seeks as soon as possible.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the total number of applicants at the British embassy in Addis Ababa for permission to travel to Britain by nationality, waiting time for interviews and decisions for each of the past five years.

Mr. Baldry: I have asked the entry clearance officer in Addis Ababa to let me have a report. I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth office as soon as possible

Western Sahara

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken by his Department to further progress on the United Nations referendum on the future of the Western Sahara.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As a member of the UN Security Council group of Friends of the Western Sahara, we have supported the efforts of the UN Secretary-General to bring about a resolution of the conflict in the Western Sahara. We have helped to broker various Security Council resolutions on the subject. Until September 1993, the United Kingdom contributed military personnel to the mission for a referendum in the Western Sahara.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which countries to which asylum seekers are forcibly returned British embassy officials meet them on arrival or monitor their return.

Mr. Baldry: None other than Vietnam where our embassy both meets on arrival and monitors repatriated Vietnamese migrants from Hong Kong who have been screened out as non-refugees.

Kurdistan

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings and discussions have been held with the PUK, KDP and Kurdish national parliament in recent months; and if he will make a statement on the internal conflict in Kurdistan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have sent messages to the leaders of the Iraqi Kurd political parties involved in the recent fighting urging them to reach an early and lasting settlement.

We understand that the parties have indicated a willingness to seek peace through the auspices of the Iraqi National Congress. We fully support those efforts, not

least because the only beneficiary from violence in northern Iraq is Saddam Hussein.

Iran

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations on human rights issues have been made to the Government of Iran; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The European Union sponsored a strong human rights resolution on Iran which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 23 December 1994. The Union also raised human rights issues in recent discussions with Iran.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the main functions of the chargé d'affaires in Tehran; and what proportion of his time is spent on visa applications.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our chargé d'affaires in Tehran, as head of mission, has a wide range of responsibilities which include political, representational, commercial and management functions. He supervises all embassy work including consular and visa matters.

East Timor

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made to the Indonesian Government concerning the action of their army in East Timor.

Mr. Goodlad: The European Union expressed concern in July and November 1994 about heightened tension in East Timor. The UN Secretary-General made an appeal on 9 January 1995 to East Timorese of all shades of opinion to exercise restraint. We look to the Indonesian Government to act similarly.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts at preventive diplomacy are being made by *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the UN, *(c)* the European Union and *(d)* the Organisation of African Unity, in respect of the internal security situation in Sierra Leone.

Mr. Baldry: We are very concerned at the recent deterioration in the security situation which had led to the abduction of a number of Sierra Leonean and foreign nationals, including six Britons. We are following developments closely and have reinforced our high commission in Freetown with experienced hostage negotiators. We are in touch with the Sierra Leone Government and our Commonwealth, EU and other partners in the region. We have also given strong encouragement to the UN Secretary-General's proposals to send a special representative. We hope it may be possible to bring about a peaceful solution in Sierra Leone and we are ready to contribute in any way we can to resolve the present difficulties.

Ivory Coast

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring of the safety of deportees from Britain is undertaken in the Ivory Coast; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We have no mechanism to monitor what happens to deportees from Britain returning to Cote d'Ivoire.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of the human rights situation in the Ivory Coast; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to his question of 10 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *59*.

Liberia

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of the activities of the west African peacekeeping forces in Liberia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We have received reports from many sources on west African peacekeeping activities in Liberia.

We continue to follow developments closely. We welcome and support the efforts of regional leaders and the United Nations to bring about a peaceful solution to the conflict in Liberia.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts Her Majesty's Government have had with representatives of different factions in Liberia in the past year.

Mr. Baldry: Our diplomatic missions in the region monitor developments in Liberia and have been contacted by representatives of most of the factions at some time.

EDUCATION

Emotionally Disturbed Children

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will outline his policy for dealing with emotionally disturbed children within the education system.

Mr. Forth: Children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, the term usually applied to children and young people whose symptoms lie between those associated with stressed but normal behaviour and those associated with psychiatric illness, have special educational needs. It is for schools and local education authorities to see that their needs are assessed and suitably met along with those of other children with learning difficulties. The code of practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs provides targeted advice and this is expanded in the joint Department for Education-Department of Health circular "The Education of Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties", DFE ref: 9/94, both documents being available in the Library. They point up the vital importance of close collaboration between services. The Office for Standards in Education continue to monitor the quality of the education provided for this group of children.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many institutions there are who deal with the education of emotionally disturbed children; and how many there were in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Forth: Time series data are not available centrally, but recent returns from schools suggest that about 380 maintained and non-maintained special schools and independent schools would describe themselves as making special provision for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. In addition, all mainstream schools are required to identify and where appropriate make suitable provision for individual pupils who fall within this category, following the guidance in the code of practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs. Further provision is made within pupil referral units in most local education authorities.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children from the borough of Rotherham receive assisted places at independent schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information about the local education authority area from which assisted pupils originate is not collected centrally. There are no schools participating in the scheme within the borough of Rotherham.

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many assisted places have been awarded in the current academic year to pupils attending former direct grant schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: Figures are not yet available for the current academic year. In academic year 1993–94, 17,445 such pupils held assisted places.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of pupils with assisted places comes from households where the parents are in full-time salaried or waged employment paying pay-as-you-earn tax.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information concerning the occupations and tax position of parents in the assisted places scheme is not collected centrally.

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the departments and agencies for which she has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document, "Focus on Ability".

Mr. Forth: The number of registered disabled people employed by the Department and the Teachers Pensions Agency is 60, representing 2.9 per cent. of the total. Figures for the number of all disabled people employed by the Department and the Teachers Pensions Agency are not currently available.

Special Needs

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children were statemented in each year from 1965 to 1980 inclusive.

Mr. Forth: The arrangements for issuing statements of special educational needs were introduced under the Education Act 1981. In England, the number of pupils newly assessed as requiring special educational treatment in calendar years 1977 to 1980 inclusive were 23,210; 22,972; 21,570 and 22,243 respectively. Information for England is not available for earlier years.

Standard Spending Assessment, Devon

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the percentage change between the proposed education standard spending assessment for 1995–96 and the comparable figure for 1994–95 for Devon county council.

Mr. Robin Squire: The proposed education standard spending assessment for 1995–96 for Devon is 2.2 per cent. higher than the comparable figure for 1994–95.

Direct Grant Schools

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many former direct grant schools are now independent schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: There are 120 registered independent schools which were formerly direct grant grammar schools.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what was the estimated cost of the development of computer systems for the fast-track applications system introduced by the Student Loans Company;

(2) what remuneration has been received by the assessor of the Student Loans Company in each year of the existence of the position;

(3) what was the expenditure by the Student Loans Company on computer systems development in each of the last two financial years for which figures are available; and to what specific purposes this expenditure was directed.

Mr. Boswell: These matters are for the Student Loans Company. I have asked the acting chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Student Loans

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many students in London she expects to be in receipt of the new rate of loan for those who could conveniently live at home in 1995–96.

Mr. Boswell: The new rate of loan will apply from the academic year 1995–96 to students studying in London and living away from home whose grant is limited to the "parental home" rate of grant because their local education authority judges that they could conveniently live at home. Information is not collected centrally about the number of students in respect of whom LEAs have exercised this discretion.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list for each year since January 1991 for the grant-maintained secondary school sector *(a)* the number of full-time equivalent pupils, *(b)* full-time equivalent qualified teachers and *(c)* the pupil-to-teacher ratio.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is shown in the table.

Pupil: teacher ratios in grant-maintained secondary schools in England 1991–94 Position in January each year

	Full-time equivalent pupils	*Full-time equivalent qualified teachers*	*Pupil teacher ratio*
1991	36,400	2,390	15:3
1992	105,800	6,690	15:8
1993	221,400	13,780	16:1
1994	485,300	29,800	16:3

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list those grant-maintained schools in Liverpool that have received loans from the Funding Agency for Schools; and whether these loans have been repaid or renewed.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information relating to loans made to grant maintained schools is held by the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member.

Free School Meals

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what statutory or discretionary provision exists for the provision of free school meals to pupils under the age of 19 years whose parents are in receipt of income support in *(a)* incorporated colleges of further education and *(b)* incorporated sixth form colleges.

Mr. Forth: Provision of this nature is encompassed within discretionary awards and access funds which are administered by local education authorities and FE colleges respectively. The rate of grant payable to students and the method of assessment are for the authority to determine. FE colleges decide which students who are suffering hardship they will support from access funds.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Employees

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many employees for which his Department is responsible were women *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994; and of these, how many were (i) at grade 7 level, (ii) at grade 3 level, (iii) at executive officer level, (iv) at administrative officer level and (v) at administrative assistant level.

Mr. Lang: The numbers of women employed in the Scottish Office, its executive agencies, excluding the Scottish Prison Service, and associated departments at 1 April in the years from 1991 to 1994 and those at grade 7, grade 3, executive officer, administrative officer and administrative assistant levels were as follows:

Grade equivalent	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*		*1994*	
	(FTE)	*(FTE)*	*(FTE)*	*(Headcount)*	*(FTE)*	*(Headcount)*
Grade 3	2.0	3.5	3.5	4	3.5	4
Grade 7	55.5	61.5	73.0	80	74.0	87
Executive officer	521.5	472.5	482.5	500	471.5	499
Administrative officer	932.5	926.0	883.5	943	848.0	924
Administrative assistant	859.0	830.0	829.0	880	817.5	862
Total women	2,689.5	2,623.5	2,627.0	2,792	2,595.0	2,774

Arable Aid Payments

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hectares of land established as grassland or soft or bush fruit during the years 1987 to 1991 which were initially ineligible for arable aid payments were subsequently deemed eligible by the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department after farmers had submitted completed HCAP 009.114 forms.

Sir Hector Monro: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Lockerbie

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Crown Office was first informed by the United States authorities of the possible involvement of Ayatollah Mohtashami in the Lockerbie bombing as suggested in the US Air Force Intelligence Agency de-classified documents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Crown Office was aware of allegations of involvement of the former Iranian Interior Minister in the Lockerbie bombing at an early stage of the investigation. The allegations were examined by the competent authorities but no evidence has so far been found to substantiate them.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what evidence the United States legal authorities gave to the Crown Office to support the indictment of Libyan suspects in connection with the Lockerbie bombing; when the evidence was received; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Lockerbie investigation was carried out in close co-operation with the United States authorities. Criminal proceedings are pending and it would be improper to give details of evidence in the case.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date the Crown Office first learned of the existence of the de-classified US Air Force Intelligence Agency files which refer to the bombing of the Pan Am 103 at Lockerbie; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Crown Office first learned of the existence of this report from a press enquiry on 23 January 1995.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date the Crown Office received a copy of the de-classified United States Air Force Intelligence Agency files which refer to the bombing of the Pan Am 103 at Lockerbie; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Crown Office received a copy of the report on 24 January 1995.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date the Crown Office was first informed of the contents of the de-classified United States Air Force intelligence Agency files which refer to the bombing of the Pan Am 103 at Lockerbie; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Crown Office was first informed of the contents of the report on 23 January 1995 but was already well aware of allegations which are set out in that document.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the dates of the meetings which have been held between the Crown Office and the United States Air Force Intelligence Agency to discuss the contents of United States Air Force Intelligence Agency de-classified files which refer to the bombing of the Pan Am 103 at Lockerbie, the names of the individuals present and in what capacity they attended; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: No such meetings have been held.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the dates of the telephone discussions which have been held between the Crown Office and the United States Air Force Intelligence Agency to discuss the contents of United States Air Force Intelligence Agency de-classified files which refer to the bombing of the Pan Am 103 at Lockerbie; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: No such discussions have taken place.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish details of delegations involving United States law officers and representatives of US Air Force Intelligence Agency to the United Kingdom to discuss the investigation into the Lockerbie bombing, the meetings they attended and the matters discussed.

Mr. Lang: No delegations involving United States Air Force Intelligence Agency representatives have taken part in discussions in the United Kingdom concerning the investigation into the Lockerbie bombing. United States law enforcement officers, based in the United States and in the United Kingdom, have met Scottish police and prosecution authorities frequently during the Lockerbie investigation and a liaison officer of the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation was based at Lockerbie during much of the most active period of the Lockerbie investigation. The discussions of such officers were confidential.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish details of trips involving representatives of the Crown Office to the United States of America as part of the investigation into the Lockerbie bombing, the meetings they attended and the matters discussed.

Mr. Lang: Representatives of the Crown Office have visited the United States on a number of occasions for confidential discussions concerning the Lockerbie investigation, which was carried out in close co-operation with the United States authorities. It would be inappropriate to give details of these meetings and discussions.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment the Crown Office has made of the relevance of the de-classified US Air Force Intelligence Agency documents for the investigation into the Lockerbie bombing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The report quotes an untried source relying on "second and third party information" as stating that the former Iranian Interior Minister paid $10 million to have the Lockerbie bombing carried out. It contains no evidence to substantiate a story which was already well known and has not so far been otherwise substantiated. It has, accordingly, no present relevance to the investigation.

Instruments of Torture

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assurances are sought from United Kingdom companies active in the manufacture, marketing and supply of *(a)* electro-shock weapons and *(b)* instruments of torture that such assistance as is given to them will not be used to facilitate trade in and support the marketing of electro-shock weapons.

Mr. Stewart: In considering applications for licenses for the export of such equipment the DTI, together with advisers in other Government Departments, take special care and consider very carefully the political and military implications of allowing consignments to go overseas. Particular attention is paid to proposed exports to countries with poor human rights records, where the equipment might be used for internal repression.

I understand that ICL Technical Plastics has now confirmed that its company's export records show that no such equipment was ever sold or export licenses sought or approved by the DTI.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received on the manufacture, marketing and supply of *(a)* electro-shock weapons and *(b)* instruments of torture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: My Department has received a small number of letters from members of the public on this matter.

ICL Technical Plastics

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions were held between his Department and ICL Technical Plastics in order to promote its products in the foreign market place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Scottish Trade International, the export arm of the Scottish Office and Scottish Enterprise, had some discussions in 1993 with the company about the marketing of a range of conventional riot gear which had been already sold to police forces within the United Kingdom. No mention of electro-shock weapons or similar products has ever been made to officials.

The Scottish Office has conducted extensive investigation and is satisfied that the allegations made against the Department by the Channel 4 "Dispatches" programme are unsubstantiated.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial assistance was given to ICL Technical Plastics in Glasgow for sponsoring sales trips abroad; and what sum was involved.

Mr. Stewart: Scottish Trade International, the export arm of the Scottish Office and Scottish Enterprise, has given no financial assistance to ICL Technical Plastics, Glasgow, either for sponsoring sales trips abroad or indeed for any other business activities.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all sites in Scotland where depleted uranium is stored in any form; what is the quantity stored in each case; and what measures are taken to protect the public from any potential dangers.

Sir Hector Monro: In Scotland, depleted uranium is stored on nuclear sites at UKAEA Dounreay and British Nuclear Fuels plc, Chapelcross.

Tonnages stored at these sites are:

Dounreay: 110 tonnes

Chapelcross: 5,000 tonnes

At these sites, similar controls are applied to depleted uranium as for all other nuclear materials.

From time to time the Ministry of Defence stores small quantities of depleted uranium at the test and evaluation establishment at Kirkcudbright. They are stored in accordance with current licensing regulations, arrangements are overseen by the Health and Safety Executive, and Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate is aware of them. It is also held at other munitions stores and depots, but it is not the Ministry of Defence's practice to disclose the quantities of or locations where, specific types of ammunition are stored. However, all such material is held in safe and secure facilities in accordance with the requirements for radioactive materials.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidelines are operated by his Department as regards the use of executive search agencies to fill vacancies within his Department and his Department's executive agencies; and in what circumstances his Department employs executive search agencies instead of relying fully on Departmental resources to fill vacant posts.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* Executive search agencies are used in cases where my Department and its agencies consider posts will be difficult to fill and where suitable candidates are probably currently in employment and therefore unlikely to apply simply on the basis of an advertisement in the press.

Students

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discretion exists under current Scottish Office Education Department regulations and guidelines to allow institutions to make payments from access funds to students who are eligible for, but have not applied for, a student loan.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* The guidance issued to institutions indicates that if an eligible student has not taken out a loan, and there are no exceptional circumstances, it would be reasonable to conclude that his or her circumstances were not sufficiently difficult to warrant assistance from the access funds.

We therefore expect the provision of assistance from the access funds to such students, other than on a short-term immediate need basis, to be very much the exception.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many students applied for assistance from the access funds in Scotland for the academic year 1993–94; and how many received payments;

(2) what was the amount disbursed to students from access funds in respect of fees, books, equipment, accommodation, child care, or other needs for each higher and further education institution in Scotland for the academic year 1993–94.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* A full breakdown is not available since not all institutions have been able to provide the information requested. The table sets out the available information by institutional sector based on returns submitted to date.

Access funds 1993–94

	Higher education institutions	*Further education colleges*	*Total*
Number of students applying[1]	13,500	4,600	18,100
Number of students assisted[1]	8,600	3,800	12,400
Amounts disbursed[1]	£1.9 million	£0.7 million	£2.6 million
Amounts available to all institutions	£2.7 million	£1.1 million	£3.8 million

[1] No adjustments have been made for outstanding returns.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the percentage changes in the number of students applying for assistance from access funds between each year since the system began and the academic year 1993–94.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* The available information, based on returns received to date, is set out in the table.

Figures for 1993–94 are not comparable with earlier years due to inclusion of returns from Scottish universities which, prior to that session, received their access funds resources from the then Universities Funding Council.

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Number of students applying	11,000	12,600	12,700	18,100
Percentage increase on previous year	—	14 per cent.	1 per cent.	42 per cent.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the results of the monitoring returns for Scotland and higher education institutions on the use of discretionary funds for 1993–94.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* I assume that the hon. Member is referring to access funds.

The detailed information so far available for academic year 1993-94 is not sufficiently comprehensive to justify publication. We will consider how best to disseminate the information when we have a more complete picture.

Cardiac Surgery

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make it his policy that no patients awaiting cardiac surgery in the Borders health board area will be put under pressure to accept referral to Health Care International in Clydebank unless they and their general practitioners are convinced that it is in the patients' best interests to do so;

(2) what consideration he or his ministerial colleagues have given to the waiting list initiative taken by the Borders health board in respect of the referral of Borders patients waiting for cardiac surgery to Health Care International in Clydebank; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what discussion was held between the NHS Executive in Scotland and the Borders health board before the recent initiative to refer Border patients awaiting cardiac surgery to HCI in Clydebank; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what assessment he has made of the standard of cardiac surgery in HCI in Clydebank relative to the range of treatment available at the Royal infirmary in Edinburgh; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* This is a matter for Borders health board. It is appropriate for NHS purchasers to buy services from independent hospitals, in order to reduce waiting times for patients. The NHS in Scotland Management Executive was aware of Borders health board's proposal to purchase cardiac surgery services from HCI.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Pucklechurch Remand Centre

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of whether security at the Pucklechurch remand centre is adequate for the custody of category A prisoners.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyles dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about security at Pucklechurch prison.

An assessment has been made of the security arrangements needed to hold a category A prisoner at Pucklechurch prison and appropriate arrangements have been put into effect.

Prison Escapes

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convicted category A prisoners have escaped in each year since 1965.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mr. Jack Straw, dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about how many convicted category A prisoners have escaped in each year since 1965.

Category A was introduced in June 1967. The following table shows the number of convicted category A prisoners who escaped in each calendar year since then.

Year	*Number of prisoners*	*Year*	*Number of prisoners*
1967	0	1987	2
1968	1	1988	0
1969	0	1989	1
1970	1	1990	1
1971	0	1991	1
1972	4	1992	1
1973	1	1993	0
1974 and 1975	0	1994	6
1976	3	1995	2
1977–1986 (inclusive)	0	—	—

In addition, in 1980 there were three escapes, and in 1991 two escapes, by remand/unconvicted category A prisoners.

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category A, category B and category C prisoners have escaped from custody in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. John Hutton, dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, to reply to your recent Question about how many Category A, B and C prisoners escaped from custody in each year since 1979.

The information is not available in exactly the form you request. Information about escapes of category A prisoners is in the following table:

Category A escapes

Type of establishment	*20 June 1988–31 March 1989*	*1 April 1989–31 March 1990*	*1 April 1990–31 March 1991*	*1 April 1991–31 March 1992*	*1 April 1992–31 March 1993*	*1 April 1993–31 March 94*	*1 April 1994–9 January 95*
Dispersal	0	0	0	1	1	0	8
Local	0	2	0	2	0	0	0
Escorts	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Total	0	2	0	4	2	0	8

Incidents of escape from custody of other than prisoners in category A are recorded according to the security category of the prison from which the prisoner escapes and not by the security category of the prisoner.

Information about these escapes has only been recorded centrally since 20 June 1988. During the period 20 June 1988 to 9 January 1995, the number of prisoners who escaped from dispersal prisons and category B and C prisons is as follows:

Type of Establishment	20 June 1988–31 March 1989	1 April 1989–31 March 1990	1 April 1990–31 March 1991	1 April 1991–31 March 1992	1 April 1992–31 March 1993	1 April 1993–31 March 1994	1 April 1994–31 March 1995
Dispersal	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Category B	49	15	34	50	45	24	23
Category C	82	99	153	170	126	104	77
Closed Young Offender	10	29	37	75	58	50	23
Closed Female	—	—	1	10	7	1	5
Escorts (Male)	95	106	107	140	138	116	51
Escorts (Female)	7	5	4	14	13	9	7
Total	243	255	336	459	387	296	187

The above information also includes escapes from closed young offender establishments and those escapes form closed female establishments during this period. Young offenders and female prisoners are not classified as Category B or C, but as suitable for either closed or open conditions.

Prisoners (Private Cash)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the weekly limit of private cash that a prison inmate in prisons in England and Wales is allowed to spend.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the weekly limit which prisoners are allowed to spend from private cash.

The private cash limit for convicted prisoners is expressed in annual rather than weekly terms. The basic national limit, set in 1987, is £115 and excludes phonecards and newspapers. Higher levels can be set by governors with their area managers' agreement and some establishments have separate allowances for items such as hobbies materials and food. There are no such limits applying in general to unconvicted prisoners.

In his statement to the House on 19 December 1994 about the Woodcock enquiry into events at Whitemoor, the Home Secretary announced that amounts of private cash that prisoners are permitted to spend will be reduced, and in time the use of unearned private cash will be eliminated altogether.

Prison Security

Mr. Cox : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what salary has been or will be paid to the person or persons who will advise his Department on United States prison security; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the salary of prison security advisors from the United States.

No decisions have been taken on the appointment or remuneration of a prison security advisor from the United States. A former warden of a maximum security prison in the United States has been invited to discuss the contribution that he might make to the Prison Service.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons have had their locks changed because of key compromises in the last three years; and what was the average cost for each such prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Margaret Hodge, dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisons where locks have been changed because of key compromises in the last three years.

Since January 1992 there have been 28 key compromises resulting in a change of locks. This includes the recent compromise at Parkhurst prison.

The cost of replacing the locks varies according to the size of the prison and the class of locks. Typical costs are in the range of between £40,000 and £64,000.

Prisoners (Self-inflicted Injuries)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give figures for the numbers of self-inflicted injuries in Her Majesty's prisons, according to prison category, in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this mater has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of self inflicted injuries during 1979, 1985 and the most recent available year.

In 1979 a total of 1,906 incidents of deliberate self injury were recorded. In 1984 reporting periods changed from calendar to financial years and therefore we do not have a specific figure for 1985. During the year 1985–86 a total of 1,567 incidents of deliberate self injury were recorded. The most recent available year 1993–94 had 4,187. Incidents of deliberate self injury are normally categorised as those with apparent suicidal intent and other less serious incidents. These are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of incidents of deliberate self injury

Year	Number of incidents of deliberate self injury: With apparent suicidal intent	Other less serious incidents	Total
1979	300	1,606	1,906
1985–86	256	1,311	1,567
1993–94	825	3,362	4,187

The significantly higher figures for 1993–94 result from the Prison Service introducing a revised strategy for caring for potentially suicidal prisoners in April 1994. This was designed to enable a high quality of care to be given to prisoners who are identified as being at possible risk of self-harm. It reflected a decision to move away from a primarily medical model of suicide prevention towards a more integrated approach which emphasises the responsibility of the whole of the prison community for the care of those in distress.

Included amongst the new procedures was a system for identifying those at risk of self-harm by the use of a new form (F2052SH), which was piloted in a number of establishments during 1993. The form acts as a basis for a team work, case-conference approach to dealing with those at risk. The new system encourages staff to consider the most appropriate location for potentially suicidal prisoners, be that within the Health Care Centre or on the residential unit, with appropriate levels of supervision and support in either case.

It is possible that the introduction of the new form together with the higher profile which the strategy affords to identification of and support for potentially suicidal prisoners has affected recording procedures. Staff may have become more disposed to ascribe suicidal intent or alternatively have become more attentive to signs of self-injurious behaviour.

Information on deliberate self injuries by prison type is not available for 1979 or 1985–86. Table 2 shows the breakdown for 1993–94.

Table 2: Number of incidents of deliberate self-harm by prison type for 1993–94

Prison type	Number of incidents	[1] per cent. of CNA
Category D Trainer	9	0.3
Category C Trainer	295	2.5
Category B Trainer	120	3.2
Dispersal	116	4.4
Young Offenders (Male)	907	12.0
Local	1,750	12.5
Female	990	66.4

Note:

[1] Percentage CNA refers to the number of incidents of deliberate self injury expressed as a percentage of certified normal accommodation (CNA).

Prison Officers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his Department's policy on the regular movement of prison officers who deal with category A prisoners in prisons in England and Wales.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the policy on the regular movement of prison officers who deal with category A prisoners.

Category A prisoners are located in prisons where the majority of prisoners are in lower security categories. Governors rotate staff as they perceive the need to do so.

In the case of category A prisoners located in Special Secure Units, the Woodcock enquiry into the escape from Whitemoor recommended that there should be a firm policy for the rotation of staff to reduce the threat of conditioning. The Home Secretary accepted all the Woodcock recommendations and intends to publish a detailed timetable for their implementation shortly.

Prisoners (Surveillance)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners who *(a)* are classified as a suicide risk and *(b)* are not so classified have 24-hour surveillance as of 3 January this year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners classified as a suicide risk and the number of prisoners under 24 hour surveillance.

During the period 3 - 18 January 1995 a total of 16 inmates spent periods of continuous observation in prisons in England and Wales. Of these, 15 had been identified at risk of suicide and one placed on observation on Headquarters instructions as a precautionary measure.

Establishment	Suicide risks on continuous watch	Continuous watch for other reasons
Pucklechurch	1	0
Guys Marsh	2	0
Swinfen Hall	2	0
Moorland	1	0
Wandsworth	1	0
Durham	1	0
Cookham Wood	1	1 (13/14) HQ Instruction
Birmingham	1	0
Pentonville	1	0
Highdown	2	0
Parkhurst	2	0

Mrs. Rosemary West

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who issued the instruction to keep open at all times the cell door of Mrs. Rosemary West, currently in custody at Pucklechurch remand centre, after the death of her husband on 2 January.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about who issued the instruction to keep open at all times the cell door of Mrs. Rosemary West, currently in custody at Pucklechurch Remand Centre, after the death of her husband on 2 January.

After the death of Frederick West on 1 January 1995 at Birmingham prison, the Directory of Custody, Phillipa Drew, in consultation with me, took the decision to place Rosemary West under observation by two members of staff on a twenty four hour basis, to prevent her from self harm.

Mrs. West's cell door is not kept open at all times. Her door is unlocked at approximately 20:45 and is locked again at 07.30. Every effort is being made to make the observation of Mrs. West as unobtrusive as possible.

Electro-shock Equipment

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the United Kingdom Prison Service has been equipped with, or trained with the use of, electro-shock devices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Llew Smith, dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about whether the United Kingdom Prison Service has been equipped with, or trained in the use of, electro-shock devices.

I can confirm that the Prison Service in England and Wales is not equipped with electro-shock devices nor are prison officers trained in the use of such devices.

It is for the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland to provide details for their own services.

Prison Governors

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prisons in England and Wales did not have a number one governor in post as of 16 January.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about which prisons in England and Wales did not have a number one governor in post as of the 16 January.

Our planning arrangements ensure that the majority of governor-in-charge posts are handed over by the outgoing governor to the incoming governor. Where there is an interregnum, arrangements are made for the post to be temporarily covered by another senior governor grade, usually from the same establishment.

On 16 January, the following prisons did not have a permanent governing governor in post:

HMP Canterbury: appointment pending.

HMP Coldingley: appointment made and new governor takes up post on 30 January.

HMP Lindholme: appointment pending.

HMP Long Lartin: appointment made and new governor takes up post on 30 January.

HMP Shrewsbury: appointment pending.

The new governor of HMP Parkhurst took up post on 16 January, which in turn created a vacant post to be filled at HMP Albany.

Life Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women who are classified as foreign nationals are currently serving a life prison sentence in a prison in England and Wales.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women who are classified as foreign nationals are currently serving a life prison sentence in a prison in England and Wales.

The latest available provisional information is for 30 November 1994. On that date there were 490 non-British citizens (474 males and 16 females) serving a life sentence in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales. This includes 56 male and 4 female nationals from the Irish Republic.

Leeds Prison

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 12 January, *Official Report*, column *202*, for the non-payment of which types of fine the 11 people in Leeds prison are jailed.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. John Battle, dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about fine defaulters at Leeds prison.

On 14 December there were 11 prisoners serving sentences for non-payment of fines imposed as follows:

Offence on warrant

assault on police

burglary

traffic offence (4)

criminal damage (2)

reckless driving

theft

drunk driving

Prisoners (Hospital Treatment)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the provision of security coverage to prisoners receiving outside hospital treatment; and who is responsible for the payment of costs incurred.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 30 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about security coverage during visits to outside hospitals.

The level of security coverage to be provided is a matter for the governor in each case. Guidance is contained in section 10 of the Security Manual, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

The cost of escorts to hospitals, as with other kinds of escort, is met by the prison.

MI5 (Headquarters)

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current annual cost per member of staff accommodated in the MI5 headquarters building at Millbank, London.

Mr. Howard: It is long-standing Government policy not to provide detailed information about the expenditure of the security and intelligence agencies.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the current version of the European Union's data protection directive contains provisions regarding personal data derived from DNA samples of the dead; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if the current version of the European Union's data protection directive contains provision about access by the data subject to non-automated personal data; and if he will make a statement;

(3) whether the current version of the European Union's data protection directive contains provision regarding the giving of consent by the data subject, in certain circumstances, to the use and disclosure of personal data; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if the current version of the European Union's data protection directive protects the individual by restricting the holding of sensitive personal data to those controllers authorised by the United Kingdom Parliament; and what plans he has to introduce such restrictions in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The most recent version of the draft data protection directive is an unpublished working document.

This version contains no reference to DNA. It provides for similar rights of subject access to both computerised data and data in manual filing systems. It allows processing to be carried out if any one of a number of conditions is met. These conditions include the giving of consent by the data subject.

The present text will not necessarily require the United Kingdom Parliament to authorise individual controllers to process sensitive personal data. If the directive is adopted, the Government will consider how to implement it in due course.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement concerning progress towards agreement on the European Union's data protection directive; if he will indicate those areas where the United Kingdom Government still have major concerns; if he expects to vote against parts of the directive at a forthcoming meeting of the Council of Ministers in February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Negotiations within Council on the draft data protection directive are likely to be concluded under the French presidency. The Government continue to have reservations about a number of aspects of the directive: their final position will be determined when negotiations within the Council are concluded.

Mr. John Marriott

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the salary paid to Mr. John Marriott when governor of Parkhurst prison; and what will be the salary paid to him in his new position.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 30 January 1995:

Mr. Marriott is Governor Grade 1 and was and is paid the salary for that grade within the range £46,986 and £48,025. His salary will not change as a result of taking up his new position.

Overseas Domestic Workers

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what procedures his Department has put in place for monitoring the success of the new arrangements for the entry of overseas domestic workers;

(2) what safeguards he has put in place to ensure that employers of overseas domestic workers honour agreements made to their workers under the new agreements announced on 9 December, once they have entered the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I do not believe that detailed monitoring of the new arrangements is necessary, but I shall keep them under general review.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the new arrangements for the admission of overseas domestic workers announced on 9 December will clearly set out standards of employment which conform to United Kingdom labour laws.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The new arrangements include a requirement for the employer to provide a written statement, setting out the main terms and conditions of employment, a copy of which must be given to the domestic worker, who must confirm that he or she agrees to them. Contractual employment terms are generally matters for the parties concerned and are not regulated by United Kingdom legislation.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what specific guidelines as to what constitutes adequate maintenance and accommodation will be included in the new arrangements announced on 9 December, *Official Report*, columns *379–80* for the admission of overseas domestic workers

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Entry clearance officers already have guidance on the application of the maintenance and accommodation requirements of the immigration rules. Separate guidance has not been issued in relation to overseas domestic workers. A domestic worker must be provided with a separate bedroom.

National Lottery

Mr. Worthington : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the disbursement of national lottery funds to charities.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Twenty per cent. of available national lottery proceeds has been allocated for disbursement to eligible bodies by the National Lottery Charities Board. The board is an independent body, which will devise its own policies, practices and procedures, within the framework of the legislation. I understand that its present aim is to issue guidelines to applicants during the course of the year and to begin considering applications and making grants towards the end of the year.

The other national lottery distributing bodies are also able to make grants to charities in their respective subject areas.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects charities to receive funds from the National Lottery Charities Board.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: This is a matter for the National Lottery Charities Board. I understand however that it hopes to begin making grants towards the end of this year.

Livestock (Cruelty)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions his Department has brought forward for cruelty to livestock in each month since 19 January 1994; and how many of the defendants in these cases used lawyers paid for from legal aid.

Mr. Maclean: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and not the Home Department is involved in proceedings for cruelty to livestock. No data for 1994 will be available until autumn 1995. The table shows the number of prosecutions under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 and Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 by type of proceedings and month for 1993. Information held centrally does not identify the individual summoning body, nor the number of cases receiving legal aid by offence type.

Number of prosecutions under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 (as amended)[1] and Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 by type of proceedings and month 1993

England and Wales

	Type of proceedings			
Offence/month	*Apprehension*	*Summons by police*	*Summons other than by police*	*Total*
Protection of Animals Act 1911[1]				
January	7	28	56	91
February	7	32	61	100
March	3	30	76	109
April	4	9	58	71
May	7	21	49	77
June	7	19	78	104
July	7	19	84	110
August	5	13	61	79
September	7	18	77	102
October	9	22	67	98
November	7	15	66	88
December	5	10	40	55
Annual	75	236	773	1,084
Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968—Sections 1, 2 and 6 (relating to welfare of livestock)				
January	—	—	2	2
February	—	3	2	5
March	—	—	7	7
April	—	1	2	3
May	—	—	1	1
June	—	2	1	3
July	1	—	4	5
August	—	—	1	1
September	—	—	—	—
October	—	—	2	2
November	—	—	2	2
December	—	—	4	4
Annual	1	6	28	35

[1] Cannot distinguish between offences involving livestock or other animals.

Note:

The statistics of court proceedings are based on returns made by the police to the Home Office and although these include offences where there has been no police involvement, such as those prosecutions instigated by government departments, private organisations and individuals, the reporting of these types of offence is known to be incomplete. Where proceedings involve more than one offence, the table records the principal offence.

Essex Police

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the cost of the use of video and still camera equipment by the Essex police at Brightlingsea in each month since October 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I understand from the chief constable of Essex that such equipment has only been used in Brightlingsea during January 1995. As at 27 January, the cost was estimated at £1,100 for video equipment and £280 for still cameras.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to end the policy of detaining asylum seekers in Britain pending decisions on their applications.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Court of Appeal is currently considering a case involving the power to detain certain people who have sought asylum and the court's judgment will be given very careful consideration once it is received. In the meantime, it is not proposed to change our current general practice which results in the detention of only a very small proportion of people who have sought asylum.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what international conventions govern the practice of restraining failed asylum seekers in flight, and withholding their documents and handing them to the authorities of their country of origin;

(2) what are the procedures when failed asylum seekers are returned under escort to *(a)* Angola, *(b)* Ghana, *(c)* Zaire, *(d)* Sierra Leone, *(e)* Sri Lanka, *(f)* Turkey and *(g)* Uganda;

(3) what are the procedures for returning refused asylum seekers under escort to their country of origin; and if the passenger together with his travel documents is handed over to the security services at the receiving airport;

(4) in what circumstances the tranquillising drug largactil or chlorpromazine is given in the forced removal of failed asylum seekers; who determines the dose; and who administers it.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The powers of the commander of an aircraft to authorise the use of restraints in flight flows from article 6 of the Tokyo convention 1963. I am not aware of any international convention governing the handling of travel documents in these circumstances. Escorted asylum seekers are normally invited to disembark at the country of destination in possession of their own documentation. The procedures for removing failed asylum seekers under escort are the same irrespective of the country of destination. The person would not normally be drawn to the attention of the authorities in the country of destination unless this was considered appropriate e.g. in relation to a criminal offence. The administration of medication is a matter for a medical practitioner to decide. Sedation is not used as a means to effect removal.

Employment Vetting

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he intends to publish his proposals on the disclosure of criminal records for employment vetting purposes; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what plans he has for the introduction of conviction certificates for employment vetting purposes.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: We plan to publish a White Paper outlining our proposals for new arrangements for the disclosure of criminal records in late spring. The White Paper may include the proposal that people should be able to apply for a certificate showing any convictions they may have which are unspent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. Employers could then ask to see such a certificate before making a firm job offer.

Police Grant

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends to allocate the police grant in 1995–96.

Mr. Howard *Further to his reply 1 December, Official Report, columns 844-45:* I have today laid before the House the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 1995–96. The report sets out the amount of police grant to be made available to individual police authorities in 1995–96. It should be read in conjunction with the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1995–96, the Limitation of Council Tax and Precepts (Relevant Notional Amounts) Report (England) 1995–96 and the Special Grant Report (No. 12), which was today laid before the House by my hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, and, for Welsh police forces, with the information being given to the House this afternoon by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

I am placing in the Library and in the Vote Office copies of a table showing by police force area the total effect of these announcements as they relate to police funding in England and Wales.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Consultants

30. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what conclusions the Church Commissioners have drawn from their independent actuaries' consultants reports.

Mr. Alison: The commissioners have accepted their actuaries' advice that in their endeavours to meet the commitments placed upon them they have been over distributing their income and that contributions should be collected from Church members to finance the cost of pension benefits accruing in the future.

Schools (Acts of Worship)

31. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners if *(a)* beneficed clergy, *(b)* other clergy, *(c)* bishops and *(d)* archbishops are to be asked to conduct acts of worship in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alison: This is not a matter for the Church Commissioners.

Churchgoers

32. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what assessment the Commission has made of the effect of changes in the average age of churchgoers on the finances of the Church of England.

Mr. Alison: None. The Central Board of Finance of the Church of England collects financial and membership information annually from the parishes, but does not hold data on the age profile of congregations.

Disestablishment

33. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what recent representations he has received about disestablishment.

Mr. Alison: None.

Investment (Arms Trade)

34. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what is the Church Commissioners' policy in respect of investing in companies engaged in the arms trade.

Mr. Alison: The Commissioners do not invest in any company whose main activity is in armaments. They have followed this policy for many years and monitor their investments accordingly.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Jobseekers Allowance

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received regarding the safety of Benefits Agency staff dealing with income support claims and the proposed jobseekers allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support and the benefit-related aspects of the proposed jobseeker's allowance is the responsibility of Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 27 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the safety of Benefits Agency staff dealing with Income Support claims and the proposed Jobseeker's Allowance.

From April 1996, Jobseeker's Allowance will replace Income Support and Unemployment Benefit for those customers who are required to be available or register for employment. Other customers will still be able to claim Income Support but there are no proposals to have claims by them dealt with by Benefits Agency staff in Employment Service Jobcentres and there have been no representations about the safety of staff dealing with Income Support claims.

Claims to Jobseeker's Allowance will be dealt with, as far as is possible, in Employment Service Jobcentres. To date, representations have been received from the Benefits Agency Trade Union Side about the safety of Benefits Agency staff working in Employment Service Jobcentres. Discussions are taking place with the Trade Union Side following a generic risk assessment of the effects of handling the Jobseeker's Allowance in Employment Service Jobcentres. This will be followed by local risk assessments in each Employment Service Jobcentre. Benefits Agency Trade Unions will be consulted about the results of the risk assessment.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Benefits Agency (Assaults)

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many assaults have been committed on Benefits Agency staff dealing with income support claims in each year since 1979 *(a)* nationally, *(b)* by region and *(c)* by individual social security office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of Income Support is a matter for Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Ian McCartney dated 27 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about assaults on Income Support staff in Benefits Agency Offices.

Statistics on assaults on Benefits Agency Staff dealing with Income Support are not readily available in the format requested. This is because when collating these statistics, no differentiation is made with regard to the type of benefit in question, other than at a national level. Information relating to regions and individual offices could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

National statistics on the total number of reported assaults related to Income Support claims and supplementary benefit, which preceded it, are reproduced on the attached schedule. Figures prior to 1992 relate to the Department of Health and Social Security and Department of Social Security. Those for 1992 and 1993 relate to the Benefits Agency only. Statistics for 1994 are not yet available.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Year	*Benefit*	*Total assaults*
Department of (Health and) Social Security		
1979	Supplementary Benefit	165
1980	Supplementary Benefit	173
1981	Supplementary Benefit	155
1982	Supplementary Benefit	179
1983	Supplementary Benefit	174
1984	Supplementary Benefit	150
1985	Supplementary Benefit	182
1986	Supplementary Benefit	225
1987	Supplementary Benefit	185
1988	Supplementary Benefit	175
1989	Income Support	148
1990	Income Support	146
1991	Income Support	112
Benefits Agency		
1992	Income Support	68
1993	Income Support	56

Child Support Agency

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to introduce proposals for the Child Support Agency which will enable a repayment or payments at once if an overpayment has been made to the Child Support Agency resulting from an error by the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Burt: We have been considering the current provisions in the Child Support Act and regulations relating to overpaid maintenance and have concluded that some changes are necessary. We propose to amend regulation 10 of the Arrears, Interest and Adjustment of Maintenance Assessment Regulations to give the child support officer greater discretion in setting the amount by which current maintenance can be reduced when maintenance has been over paid. The amendment will be tabled in March for introduction in April.

However, some cases will still remain where such an adjustment will not be possible or where it will give an unreasonable result. For example, there may be no current maintenance liability which could be reduced to take account of an overpayment, or only a small reduction will be possible meaning the overpayment would be repaid over an unreasonably long period. We therefore propose to include in the forthcoming Child Support Bill a measure to enable the Child Support Agency to reimburse the absent parent in such circumstances.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how the national insurance number can be used for purposes unconnected with the tax and benefits system; what legislation would be necessary to legitimise any new purpose; what plans he has to make the number more widely available for such purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave him on Tuesday 29 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *627*. The national insurance number can be used only for national insurance, tax and social security benefit-related purposes and we have no plans at present to introduce legislation to extend the use of the national insurance number.

Medical Appeals Consultants

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the total budget in each year since 1993 for training courses provided for medical consultants working with the medical appeals tribunals section of the Northern area of the independent tribunal service;

(2) if he will list for each year since 1993 and to the latest available date *(a)* all general training courses, their duration and numbers attending and *(b)* all specialist or medical training courses, their duration and numbers attending, which were provided for medical consultants working with the medical appeals tribunals section of the Northern area of the independent tribunal service;

(3) how many medical consultants are employed by the independent tribunal service in each region.

Mr. Hague: These are matters for the President of the independent tribunal service, his honour Judge Bassingthwaighte. I will ask him to write to the hon. Member.

Income Support

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applicants for income support have been refused owing to the habitual residence test per month since it was introduced; and of these how many were *(a)* British nationals and *(b)* non-British nationals.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Number of Income Support claimants recorded as having been refused benefit under the habitual residence test

1994	*British nationals*	*Non-British nationals*
August	237	758
September	372	2,028
October	454	2,724
November	585	2,741
December	439	2,234
Total	2,087	10,485

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the savings which will result from his proposals to *(a)* reduce the cap for income support for mortgage interest payments to £100,000 from April, *(b)* pay income support for mortgage interest only after nine months on benefit for new borrowers from October, *(c)* pay income support for mortgage interest only after two months on benefit for existing borrowers from October and *(d)* pay income support for mortgage interest at a standard rate to all claimants, (i) in 1995–96 and (ii) in a full year.

Mr. Roger Evans: The estimated saving of reducing the cap on mortgage interest payments from £125,000 to £100,000 for new claims from April is £2 million for the year to April 1996. This estimate is based on the 1993 annual statistical enquiry, uprated to 1995–96 levels. The financial effects of the other changes will depend on the outcome of the consultation and the final detail of the scheme.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what considerations underlay his proposals to adopt a standard rate of mortgage interest payments for income support.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the current scheme, which calculates each penny of interest due and reflects every change in interest rates, is extremely complex. It has been the subject of criticism by both the chief adjudication officer and the National Audit Office. A standard rate will significantly ease this administrative burden as well as reducing the cost to the taxpayer.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if it is his intention that income support should continue to provide long-term assistance to borrowers to cover mortgage interest payments.

Mr. Roger Evans: Yes.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many existing claimants of invalidity benefit transferring to incapacity benefit he estimates will fail the new test of incapacity *(a)* at a threshold score of 15 or *(b)* if the threshold score were reduced to (i) 14, (ii) 13, (iii) 12, (iv) 11 and (v) 10;

(2) how many existing claimants of invalidity benefit transferring to incapacity benefit he estimates will fail the new test of incapacity *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the age bands (i) 55 to 57, ii) 50 to 54, (iii) 45 to 49 and (iv) 40 to 44 years;

(3) what is his estimate of the cost of *(a)* setting the threshold score for incapacity benefit at 15 and *(b)* lowering the threshold score for eligibility to incapacity benefit to (i) 14, (ii) 13, (iii) 12, (iv) 11 and (v) 10;

(4) how many new claimants of incapacity benefit he estimates will fail the new test of incapacity *(a)* at a threshold score of 15 or *(b)* if the threshold score were reduced to (i) 14, (ii) 13, (iii) 12, (iv) 11 and (v) 10;

(5) how many new applicants for incapacity benefit he estimates will fail the new test of incapacity *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the age bands (i) over 58, (ii) 55 to 57, (iii) 50 to 54 (iv) 45 to 49 and (v) 40 to 44 years.

Mr. Hague: We estimate that in the next two years 220,000 existing invalidity benefit claimants will cease to be entitled to incapacity benefit earlier than they would under the current system due to the application of the new all work test. Around 55,000 new claimants each year who would have been entitled to invalidity benefit will be found capable of work under the new test. No information is available on a breakdown of these totals by age.

The threshold for benefit in the new test has been set at 15. It has been derived from the development work and set at the point where it would be unreasonable to expect someone to work. It would not be appropriate to set it at any other level. Accordingly we do not have estimates of the number of claimants who would be found capable if a lower threshold score was adopted and the associated costs.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of passporting invalidity benefit recipients to incapacity benefit at the age of *(a)* 58, *(b)* 55 and *(c)* 50 years.

Mr. Hague: We estimate that the savings from applying the new all work test to exciting invalidity benefit recipients for the year 1995–96 is £140 million. This is on the basis that all claimants aged 58 and over who have been continuously in receipt of invalidity benefit since 1 December 1993 are exempt from the test as well as those who are terminally ill, those in receipt of the highest rate care component of disability living allowance and those suffering from certain specified severe and chronic illnesses. If all claimants aged 50 or over were exempt from the test on the same basis this amount would be reduced by £45 million. If all claimants aged 55 or over were exempt, the savings would be reduced by £15 million. In subsequent years the savings would be reduced by larger amounts.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants in each category will have their entitlements reviewed in relation to the new incapacity benefit; and who will qualify for the new benefit, in both numerical and percentage terms.

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* An estimated 1.8 million people will be receiving invalidity benefit by the time it is replaced by incapacity benefit on 13 April 1995. They will automatically qualify for the new benefit. Around half will be exempt from the new medical test of incapacity. Around 220,000 people are expected to be found capable of work in the first two years. We estimate that an additional 55,000 new claimants a year, who would have qualified for invalidity benefit under the current rules, will be found capable of work as a result of the new test.

Child Care

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the total credit made to the national insurance fund each year by Her Majesty's Government on behalf of *(a)* women and *(b)* men each year as a result of their child caring responsibilities.

Mr. Arbuthnot: No actual sums of money are credited to the national insurance fund in these circumstances. The state pension position of people with child caring responsibilities can be protected by home responsibilities protection which works by reducing the number of years of contributions otherwise needed for the basic pension.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing (Spanish Vessels)

Mr. Allason: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many ships in Britain's registered fishing fleet are Spanish owned.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

This is an operational matter for the Marine Safety Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Rupert Allason, dated 30 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question, originally tabled for reply by the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, about Spanish-owned vessels in the British-registered fishing fleet.

I have to explain that this information is not available. Following the coming into force on 21 March 1994 of the Merchant Shipping (Registration Ships) Regulations 1993, the only eligibility requirement for companies wishing to register fishing vessels on the UK register is that they be incorporated in a member State of the European Economic Area with a place of business in the United Kingdom. Therefore it is no longer necessary for the Register of Ships and Seamen to know the nationality of shareholders and thus the information you require is not collected.

HEALTH

Administrative Staff

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* managerial staff and *(b)* administrative and clerical staff have been employed by (i) regional health authorities, (ii) district health authorities and (iii) family health services authorities in each of the last five years.

Mr. Malone: In the following figures, managers are defined as those staff directly employed on general and senior manager terms and administrative and clerical staff are those directly employed on A and C terms. At 30 September 1989, there were 360 managers and 8,630 administrative and clerical staff in regional health authority headquarters, there were 30 managers and 4,360 administrative and clerical staff in family health services authorities. At 30 September 1990, the figures were 1,010 and 8,080, and 640 and 4,350 respectively. At 30 September 1993, the figures were 1,400 and 5,330, and 1,060 and 4,800 respectively.

The increase in the number of managers is due largely to the reclassification of administrative and professional staff, including many senior nurses, as general and senior

managers. In FHSAs, the increase is also due to new or greater managerial responsibilities of FHSAs for primary care development, general practitioner contracts, medical audit advisory groups, budgetary control, health promotion monitoring—immunisation targets and increased roles in community care.

Data for 1991 and 1992 cannot be provided because the figures were collected on an aggregate basis and it is not possible to identify staff in regional and district health authorities and FHSAs separately. Data for DHAs cannot be provided for 1989, 1990 and 1993 because the aggregate figures collected for those years do not identify staff in DHA headquarters separately.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many managers and administrators were employed by the national health service *(a)* in 1989 and *(b)* at present.

Mr. Malone: At 30 September 1989 and 30 September 1993, the latest date for which figures are available, there were respectively 121,450 and 152,660 whole-time equivalent directly employed staff engaged on general and senior manager and administrative and clerical terms in the NHS. The figures are not directly comparable. Many professional staff including many senior nurses, and other staff have been reclassified as general and senior managers. In addition, certain NHS functions, including finance, personnel and information, have been strengthened. Over a quarter of administrative staff work in direct support to clinicians, allowing clinicians to concentrate their skills and experience on direct patient care.

Smoking

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many smoking-related deaths she estimates would be avoided by every 1 per cent. cut in the prevalence of cigarette smoking among the population.

Mr. Sackville: Estimates of the effect of reducing smoking on the number of smoking-related deaths are complicated by the fact that smoking attributable diseases develop at differing rates over long periods. In broad terms, it can be estimated that a 1 per cent. cut in smoking prevalence in the population could be expected to reduce the number of smoking-related deaths by 2,000 to 3,000 deaths per year in the long term.

Negligence Claims

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the number of negligence claims which will be made against the national health service in each of the next five years; andwhat was the total cost of negligence damages against the NHS in each of the last three years.

Mr. Malone: We do not make estimates of the numbers of future medical negligence claims. Total costs for each of the last three years are estimated as £80 million in 1991–92, £100 million in 1992–93 and £125 million in 1993–94.

Dental Services

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures she will take to ensure that patients presenting themselves for treatment at dental surgeries are made aware of the cost of the treatment before its commencement; and also made aware of whether this treatment is available under the NHS.

Mr. Malone: Dentists are required to provide patients with treatment plans which include details of costs of national health service treatment and any private treatment proposed. Dentists are also required to display in their surgeries information about NHS charges and about entitlement to exemption from and remission of such charges.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dental practices in each health authority area in England are *(a)* providing national health service treatment to existing patients and *(b)* willing to provide NHS treatment to new patients; and what percentage of the population in each area is registered for NHS treatment.

Mr. Malone: Information about general dental service practitioners under contract to family health services authorities will be placed in the Library. Information about dentists willing to take new national health service patients is not available centrally. Patients may register with dentists in FHSAs other than in the area where they are resident. Information is not available centrally therefore on the percentage of population of any FHSA which is registered.

Meningitis, Dover

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the three recent cases of meningitis in the Dover area and the risk to health in the area.

Mr. Sackville: Three cases of meningococcal meningitis-septicaemia were diagnosed in the Dover area from 28 December to 9 January. Each case was reported to and investigated by the consultant in communicable disease control at East Kent health authority. Immediate detailed tracing action was carried out and all those people who were contacts were given prophylactic treatment. Further preventative treatment was arranged via the local general practitioners.

There is no evidence of increased reporting of cases and there is no evidence of an outbreak. There are no known links between these cases. It is not unusual for three cases to occur within a short period of time, especially during winter months.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging Scanner

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the operational use of the Stoke Mandeville magnetic resonance imaging scanner is *(a)* for patients and *(b)* commercial; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The magnetic resonance imaging scanner at the hospital is owned not by the national health service but by the Jimmy Savile Hospital trust fund. It is therefore up to the trust fund to determine its operational use.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to increase prescription charges *(a)* in this financial year or *(b)* in the financial year 1995–96.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) on 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *1144*.

GP Charges

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the services for which general practitioners are able to make charges.

Mr. Malone: This information is contained in paragraph 38 of schedule 2 to the National Health Service (General Medical Services) Regulations 1992, copies of which are available in the Library.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she has taken to resolve the difference in the legal opinions obtained by her Department and the Data Protection Registrar as to whether the national health service number is protected by Crown copyright; if she will summarise her understanding of the registrar's position; if under current proposals other Government Departments will be able to use the national health service number for internal administration purposes not associated with health care; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Data Protection Registrar's position is that statutory control of access to and use of the new national health service number is appropriate. The Department remains of the view that unauthorised use can be pursued without resort to legislation: a view that would be tested in a case where evidence of actual abuse arose. There is no intention that the NHS number should be used by any Government Department for purposes not associated with health care.

National Register for Carers

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the representations she has received in support of the National Register for Carers; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: I have recently received a few letters from hon. Members about literature sent to them by the National Register for Carers. I have received no other recent representations on this matter.

Benzodiazepines

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each regional health authority, the number of patients in receipt of long-term benzodiazepines for the latest year she has figures; and what were the figures *(a)* five and *(b)* 10 years ago.

Mr. Bowis: Benzodiazepines are prescribed by general practitioners or hospital doctors on the basis of their diagnosis of a patient's condition and for whatever period the doctor considers appropriate. We do not require this information to be submitted to the Department.

Redundant Hospitals

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many redundant national health service hospitals following disposal have been returned to hospital or allied use by the new owners since 1979.

Mr. Sackville: No records are kept of the use put by purchasers of surplus national health service hospitals following sale.

Out-patients

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in which NHS trusts over the past 12 months it has been reported that first-time out-patients' appointments have not been available within 13 weeks.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Hospital Transport

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in which national health service trusts, over the past 12 months, it has been reported that patients have waited more than an hour after transport has been booked to take them home from hospital.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Blood

Mr Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to carry out examination of blood serum in order to detect hepatitis C *(a)* donors and *(b)* recipients, prior to current screening methods.

Mr. Sackville: I announced on 11 January a look-back exercise to trace, counsel and if necessary treat those who may have been inadvertently infected with hepatitis C through blood transfusions. A working party of experts is currently meeting to draw up guidance on the procedures for undertaking the look-back exercise, including procedures for testing of serum samples to detect hepatitis C in donors and receipients.

Testicular Cancer

Mr. Hincliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action and expenditure is undertaken to encourage me to self-examine for the onset of testicular cancer; and if she will will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Health Education Authority, which is funded by the Department of Health, provides information and advice about health direct to the public, and acts as a resource to health professions and others in the health education field. It has produced a booklet "Cancer: how to reduce your risks" which includes a section on testicular self-examination.

Skin Cancer

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* fatal or *(b)* non-fatal instances of skin cancer have been detected within the national health service, in each of the last 10 years; and what steps her Department is taking to combat this condition.

Mr. Sackville: The available information on cause of deaths is contained in Office of Population Censuses and Surveys publications available in the Library: Series MB1 cancer statistics—registrations, and series DH2 mortality statistics—death by cause. A commitment to halt the rising incidence of skin cancer is one of the key targets set out in "The Health of the Nation". The Department's strategy in this area includes a national public health

campaign on skin cancer in partnership with the Health Education Authority and a programme of activity involving the national health service, commercial and professional bodies and other Government Departments to encourage healthy attitudes to exposure to sunlight.

Headlice

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to assist health authorities to combat outbreaks of headlice in children; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Some health authorities have protocols for controlling this condition through co-operation between schools, school health service staff and parents. The voluntary organisation, Community Hygiene Concern, is also helping to raise awareness of the problem through its "Bug Busting" campaign. We will be making a contribution to the cost of this campaign for three years from 1995–96 and will also be referring to the work of CHC and other good practice in the national health service in guidance on child health care in the community which is currently in preparation.

Intensive Care Units

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the intensive care units which are currently facing closure in London.

Mr. Sackville: Provision of intensive treatment units is a matter for local health authorities in consultation with their hospitals.

GPs (Training)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she has plans to reform or abolish the post-graduate educational allowance for GPs; and if she will make a statement on post-graduate training for doctors;

(2) what steps she is taking to improve the standards of GP doctors training in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: We have no plans to abolish the postgraduate education allowance.

Ministers accepted in principle the improvements to postgraduate training for doctors recommended in the working group report on specialist medical training "Hospital Doctors: Training for the Future". Progress on implementation is outlined in EL(94)71 "Implementation of the Report of the Working Group on Specialist Medical Training" dated 22 September 1994; copies of which are available in the Library. Since then, substantial progress has been made with the medical profession through several working groups. The future arrangements for postgraduate training in general practice are likely to be significantly influenced by the recommendation of the general practice working group whose report will be published shortly for wide consultation.

GPs (Out-of-hours Cover)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring her Department is doing into the effectiveness of local GP out-of-hours cover co-operatives and their cost-efficiency; if she has plans to reimburse in full GPs who join such local experiments; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: Individual family health services authorities are responsible for monitoring the provision and standard of general medical services within their localities.

We are continuing to discuss the development of out-of-hours services with the profession, including appropriate reimbursement for providing those services.

Waiting Times

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the median and mean waiting times for urgent in-patient treatment over the last three years.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will implement a system which will routinely gather and analyse out-patient waiting time data in the National Health Service.

Mr. Malone: We have recently implemented a system to collect information on the waiting times for first out-patient appointments. This system records how long patients seen during a quarter had to wait. The first provisional results, for the quarter ending September 1994, were published on 18 January.

Mentally Ill People

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research she has conducted which compares the number and extent of injuries inflicted by mentally ill people on themselves against the level of injuries inflicted by mentally ill people on others; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what research she has conducted which compares the number and extent of injuries inflicted by mentally ill people on others against the level of injuries inflicted by all sectors of the population on others; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The Department has funded the Royal College of Psychiatrists to undertake a confidential inquiry into homicides and suicides involving mentally ill people in contact with or recently discharged from specialist psychiatric services. A preliminary report on homicides was published last year and copies are available in the Library. A full report on homicides and suicides will be published later this year.

The Department is aware of independent research studies, from this country and the United States, which have looked at the relationship between mental illness and violent behaviour and violent offending. The findings of these studies have been taken into account in the development of policies for the care of mentally ill people.

Ambulance Travel Times

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average time of travel from collection point to hospital by ambulance.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if *(a)* recent large-scale investment, *(b)* a proven community need and *(c)* substantial health care staff unemployment are criteria used by the Government to avert the closure of a hospital; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The decision to close a hospital is initially for the local health authority after full local consultation. When a proposal to close a hospital is referred to Ministers following objection by a community health council, they will consider all relevant factors in reaching their decision.

Orthopaedic Clinics

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of English and Welsh orthopaedic clinics are booking patients over a year in advance; and what assessment she has made of the reasons for this.

Mr. Malone: Information requested in respect of England is not available centrally. Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mrs. Roberta Gerardo

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the death of Roberta Gerardo.

Mr. Sackville: I shall write to the right hon. Member.

NHS Trusts (Sponsorship)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set out the advice which she has given national health service trusts on the subject of sponsorship.

Mr. Sackville: Advice on commercial sponsorship of posts and of attendance by staff at relevant conferences, courses and other events is contained in HSG (93) 5, "Standards of business conduct for NHS staff". Further advice is contained in "Income Generation: A Guide to Local Initiative", issued under cover of HN (89) 9. Copies of both documents are available in the Library.

Social Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to allow the purchasing of social care by fundholding general practitioners in pilot schemes on total purchasing.

Mr. Malone: Fundholding general practitioners in the total purchasing pilot schemes will be able to purchase all hospital and community health services on behalf of their patients.

Asphyxia (Deaths)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the recorded numbers of deaths by *(a)* age and *(b)* gender by asphyxiation from chewing gum in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Children (Divorce Proceedings)

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will review the workings of the Children Act 1989 in respect of children's rights during divorce proceedings.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

There are no plans to conduct such a review.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Listed Buildings, Leicester

7. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether he will carry out a review of listed buildings in the city of Leicester.

Mr. Dorrell: I have no plans for a comprehensive review. Several significant buildings in Leicester have recently been spot-listed, and I am always ready to consider the case for listing, particularly where buildings are under threat.

Disabled People

12. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress his Department is making towards full access for disabled people into sports venues.

Mr. Sproat: The Government are keen to ensure that people with disabilities are able to gain access to sports facilities in order to both watch and participate in sport. The Building Regulations 1991 already require all newly built and most extended public buildings to be accessible to people with disabilities. In addition, the Disability Discrimination Bill will introduce new rights of access for disabled people.

13. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions he has had with disability arts organisations about improving arts opportunities for the disabled.

Mr. Sproat: My Department is in regular contact with disability arts organisations.

23. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consideration he has given to the needs of disabled people in framing his proposals to restructure the Sports Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: Under the proposals I have announced, I shall expect the Sports Council, and its successors, to give full weight to the needs of sport for able-bodied people and people with disabilities.

Millennium Commission

20. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement about the progress being made by the Millennium Commission in achieving its objectives.

Mr. Dorrell: I am delighted with the Millennium Commission's progress to date. The commission issued detailed guidance for applicants in November. Applications for funding for capital projects, large and small are now being invited, and the commission is consulting with experts on a festival for the year 2000 and a bursary scheme. A national competition for ideas for the festival will be launched in the spring.

Arts, Yorkshire

24. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he last met the chairman of the Yorkshire and Humberside regional arts council to discuss the development of the arts in the Yorkshire region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I have had no such discussion with the chairman of Yorkshire and Humberside arts board. Development of the arts in the regions is primarily a matter for each of the 10 regional arts boards working with the Arts Council of England.

Information Super-highway

25. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement about his Department's involvement in developments for an information super-highway.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department of National Heritage is working with other Departments, such as the DTI, on a number of initiatives in this area. The Department is involved in the work on the Global Information Society; is interested in the areas of "electronic libraries" and "electronic museums and galleries"; and is reviewing developments as part of its responsibility for broadcasting and media. It is examining service information delivery over the Internet.

Fringe Theatre

26. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the planned level of spending on fringe theatre in London in 1995–96; and what is the figure for the current year.

Mr. Dorrell: This is a matter for the Arts Council and the London arts board. I understand that, in allocating money, these funding bodies do not distinguish "fringe theatre" from other forms of theatre.

Cross-media Ownership

27. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects to announce the conclusions of his review of the rules on cross-media ownership.

Mr. Dorrell: An announcement will be made once the Government have reached a view on the way forward.

Archaeological Sites, Yorkshire

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if he will assist the Yorkshire Dales national park authorities to preserve the remnants of Victorian lead mines in the Yorkshire dales; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what action his Department is taking to preserve 19th century industrial archaeological remains; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will take action to preserve the Old Gang smelt mills in Swaledale, north Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Old Gang smelt mill, Melbecks has been protected as a scheduled ancient monument since September 1978. For a number of years the Yorkshire Dales national park authority has been carrying out recording and consolidation works to the structure supported by grants from English Heritage, so far totalling £36,932. It is one of five mills in the Yorkshire dales which are scheduled, the others being Grinton Lead smelt fuel house and flue, Marrick lead smelt mill, Surrender smelt mill and lead cupola, flue and chimney at Grassington. Grants for essential repairs have been made or remedial action has been taken by English Heritage to ensure proper repair in respect of all of these structures in the last 10 years.

The Royal Commission on the historical monuments of England, together with English Heritage and the county and national park authorities, have since 1989 undertaken a major survey of archaeological sites throughout the dales. English Heritage is also currently carrying out a national survey of the remains of the lead mining industry which will lead to proposals for scheduling and listing an appropriate sample of nationally important remains. This is one of a number of surveys of the physical remains of the late 18th, 19th and 20th century industrial processes undertaken as part of the monuments protection programme which aims to evaluate all known archaeological remains in England.

Tourism

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what initiatives he is taking to promote tourism in the rural areas.

Mr. Dorrell: Grant in aid to the English tourist board is used to support a range of development and marketing programmes including programmes which benefit tourism in rural areas. Many of these are delivered by the regional tourist boards, which receive substantial funding from the English tourist board. Examples in the Yorkshire and Humberside region include the walking holidays in the Wolds initiative and, in the North York Moors national park, the regional routes initiative.

Rural tourism also benefits from the promotional activities of the British Tourist Authority, since the beauty of the countryside is a key element of Britain's appeal to overseas visitors.

Regional Orchestras

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement concerning his policy on regional orchestras and their funding.

Mr. Dorrell: The Arts Council and the BBC are responsible for formulating policy on regional orchestras. They are collaborating on a joint review of orchestral provision. Both bodies are awaiting the response to a discussion document that has been the subject of public consultation.

WALES

Local Government Finance

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will announce his decision on the 1995–96 local government revenue settlement.

Mr. Redwood: I have given careful consideration to the representations I have received on the provisional settlement proposals for local authorities and police

authorities in Wales, which I announced on 29 November, *Official Report*, column *59*, and 1 December, *Official Report*, column *815*. The Minister with responsibilities for local government in Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), has met representatives of Dyfed Powys and North Wales police authorities, and I chaired a meeting of the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance, at which settlement matters were discussed.

Having taken account of all representations, I remain of the view that my proposals provide local authorities with an adequate level of funding for 1995–96, given the low level of inflation and opportunities for improving efficiency. Local authorities will need to assess their budget priorities carefully, but my plans ask no more of them than is being required of central Government and other public sector organisations.

I have considered carefully the representations that I have received about my provisional settlement proposals for police authorities. In the light of those representations, I have decided to provide an additional £15.1 million in funding for Welsh police forces. This will bring the total available for police services in 1995–96 to £315.8 million. Of this, £156 million will be paid by the Home Secretary as police grant and I will provide £159.8 million as standard spending assessments. My plans clearly demonstrate the Government's determination to support the police and tackle crime. They provide the new police authorities with a strong financial base which will enable them to continue to provide a high standard of service to the communities they serve.

To take account of the additional funding I am making available for policing, I have decided to set total standard spending at £2,782.1 million and aggregate external finance at £2,466.0 million for 1995–96. The settlement will increase the level of resources available to local and police authorities by over £87 million compared with 1994–95.

Aggregate external finance will comprise £1,718.3 million in revenue support grant, £520 million in distributable non-domestic rates, and £227.7 million in specific and supplementary grants. My decisions are subject to approval by the House.

The total standard spending I have announced for 1995–96 represents an increase of 3.2 per cent. on 1994–95, including £124.4 million for care in the community. My plans mean that 89 per cent. of total local and police authority revenue expenditure in Wales would be met by central Government, and should ensure a reasonable level of council tax for local taxpayers.

I trust that local authorities will continue to budget prudently and play their part in restraining public expenditure.

I propose to lay the Local Government Finance Report (Wales) 1995–96 before the House, for its approval, later this week.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are on waiting lists for council houses in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* Alyn and Deeside; and what steps he is taking to provide housing for them.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not available for Wales on a consistent basis. Authorities compile their waiting lists in different ways and some are moving towards common waiting lists with housing associations. In its housing strategy and operational plan, Alyn and Deeside district council recorded 2,140 applicants on its general waiting list and 739 tenants on its transfer waiting list as at 1 April 1994. These figures represent a reduction of 24 per cent. on the previous year's. Authorities are encouraged to use their enabling role to secure housing to meet local needs and to make best use of their stock by for example reducing voids and under-occupation.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many empty council houses there are in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of empty council houses in Wales is published in table 6.9 of Welsh Housing Statistics No. 14, 1994, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Empty council houses represent 1.1 per cent. of total council housing stock. I look for further improvement.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* Alyn and Deeside were provided with council house tenancies in 1994.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of local authority dwellings let to new tenants is published annually in table 6.8 of "Welsh Housing Statistics", No. 14, 1994. A copy of the publication is in the Library of the House.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of households in Wales who lost their home through repossession because of mortgage arrears in the latest available year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In 1994, county courts in Wales made 1,485 mortgage possession orders together with 2,253 suspended orders, whereby the mortgagors are given an opportunity to clear their debts. Information is not recorded centrally on the number of cases in which mortgage possession orders led to warrants to have defendants evicted.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many students are enrolled at each college of further education in Wales.

Mr. Richards: The number of students at each college of further education in Wales in 1993–94, the latest available year, is set out in the table.

Students at publicly funded Further Education Institutions in Wales in 1993–94 [1]

Institution	[2]*Student number*
Llandrillo Technical College	7,228
Welsh College of Horticulture	533
Llysfasi College of Agriculture	896
Yale Sixth Form College	3,625
Deeside College	4,647
Carmarthen College of Technology and Art	4,612
Pembrokeshire College	2,404
Ceredigion College of Further Education	1,380
Gwent Tertiary College	14,485
Gwynedd Technical College	3,455
Coleg Pencraig	1,272

Students at publicly funded Further Education Institutions in Wales in 1993–94 [1]

Institution	[2]*Student number*
Coleg Merion-Dwyfor	1,558
Coleg Harlech	149
Merthyr Tydfil College	2,112
Aberdare College	1,420
Bridgend College	3,989
Rhondda College	1,287
Ystrad Mynach College	2,838
Pontypridd College	3,623
Pencoed College	557
Coleg Powys	4,137
Coleg Glan Hafren	5,197
Barry College	3,413
St. Davids Sixth Form College	736
Swansea College	5,789
Gorseinon College	2,276
Neath College	4,134
Afan College	1,962
Total	89,714

[1] Excludes link students. Data are provisional pending publication.
[2] Student numbers include students on both higher and further education courses and for all modes of attendance.

Local Authority Employees

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women who are employed by county boroughs and district councils in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of people employed by local authorities in Wales is compiled by the Local Government Management Board. It is not immediately available in the form requested, but I will write to the hon. Member when the figures are available and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Home Renovation Grants

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* Alyn and Deeside received home renovation grants in 1994.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The numbers of completed home renovation grants made in the first nine months of 1994 are given in the table.

	Mandatory renovation grants	*Discretionary renovation grants*
Wales	4,585	318
Alyn and Deeside	61	2

Information for the last three months of 1994 is not yet available.

Prescribing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the percentage figures for *(a)* brand name and *(b)* generic prescribing for (i) general practitioner fundholders and (ii) non-general practitioner fundholders in each family health service authority in Wales for each of the past three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Redwood *[pursuant to his reply, 26 January 1995, c. 379-80]:* The figure for South Glamorgan Fundholders, for October 1993 should have read 53.53.

Sewage Discharge Outfalls

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list those sewage discharge outfalls on Welsh tidal estuaries and the coastline which have *(a)* primary treatment, *(b)* secondary treatment and *(c)* tertiary treatment;

(2) if he will list those sewage discharge outfalls on Welsh tidal estuaries and the coastline which are planned for upgrading to *(a)* secondary treatment and *(b)* tertiary treatment.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Quarries

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will examine the implications for local environmental protection in Wales of the effect upon mineral planning authorities of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 in respect of the working of minerals in surface quarries; what representations he has received on this subject *(a)* from members of the public and *(b)* from local authorities; and if he will make a statement on quarrying policy.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Since 1 January 1994, my right hon. Friend has received, in relation to those provisions of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 relevant to interim development order permissions, one representation from a local authority about the operation of those provisions, and one representation from a local authority and 13 representations from members of the public in respect of IDO registrations and appeals. My right hon. Friend is considering the response to consultation proposals on the reform of old mineral permissions grated between 1948 and 1981.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many schools in Wales are grant-maintained; and what is this figure expressed as a percentage of Welsh local education authority schools.

Mr. Richards: Sixteen and 0.8 per cent. respectively.

Trade Delegations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many trade delegations are expected by his Department in the forthcoming six months; where they are visiting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Trade delegations into the United Kingdom are hosted by appropriate trade associations and it is for these organisations to decide on a delegation's itinerary in conjunction with the overseas organiser. The Welsh Office is not involved in this process.

Students (Council Tax)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to ensure that students sharing private sector accommodation with non-students are not held liable for the unpaid council tax of such non-students.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I do not propose to change the rules on residents' joint and several liability for the payment of council tax. It is for the members of a

household to determine how the council tax bill should be paid.

Student Grants

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average grant paid to students in higher education at constant prices in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The average net maintenance grant, excluding any payment for fees paid by local education authorities in Wales to mandatory award holders in the academic years 1988–89 to 1992–93, the latest year available, is as follows. Since 1990–91, eligible students have been able to apply for a student loan to supplement their grant; loans have increased the resources available to students for their living costs.

Average maintenance grants in constant prices [1] to holders of mandatory awards:

Wales: 1988–89 to 1992–93

Academic year	*£*
1988–89	1,830
1989–90	1,850
1990–91	1,740
1991–92	1,690
1992–93	1,690

[1] Based on the September retail prices index, excluding mortgage interest payments, at the beginning of each academic year.

Mineral Planning Authorities

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will consider amending section 22 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 in order to assist mineral planning authorities in the exercise of their duties.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Section 22 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 provides for the registration of interim development order permissions—granted between July 1943 and July 1948—and the submission of schemes of operating and restoration for approval by the mineral planning authority. These measures ensure that the extent and terms of IDO permissions are known and that active sites are operated up to modern standards. We have no plans to amend this section of the act.

NHS Waiting Lists

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will carry out a study to determine the influence that private practice in the same unit or specialty has on the waiting list and waiting time for treatment in the NHS.

Mr. Richards: I have no plans at present for such study.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will implement a system which will routinely gather and analyse out-patient waiting time data in the NHS.

Mr. Richards: This already exists. The NHS provides information on a quarterly basis about the number of people waiting more than six months and one year for a first out-patient appointment, and this is published regularly by the Welsh Office.

Consultants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the definition of reasonable as used in deciding how many half-days a consultant may take off for private practice if he or she is full time or maximum part time in the NHS.

Mr. Richards: NHS consultants are able to undertake private work as well as NHS work under their national terms and conditions of service. Whole-time consultants may not earn more than 10 per cent. of their gross NHS earnings from private work. Maximum part-time practitioners can carry on private practice but with a salary reduced to 10/11 of that of a whole-time consultant. Consultants employed on NHS trust contracts may have different provisions.

Cardiff Bay

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning the contribution agreed on 11 May 1989 by Associated British Ports towards the costs of infrastructure in Cardiff bay; and if he will list such payments as have been paid or are anticipated.

Mr. Redwood: None. A development agreement between the corporation and Associated British Ports was signed in March 1991. There is no agreement requiring ABP to make payments to CBDC in respect of infrastructure, but under the terms of the agreement the company is required to carry out development on its land. The chief executive of Cardiff Bay development corporation will write to the hon. Member giving details of the investments which have been made to date.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of his consultations with the Cardiff Bay development corporation into the promotion of Cardiff as a media centre.

Mr. Redwood: I made it clear to the corporation in February 1994 that promotion of Cardiff as a media centre should have a high priority.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from Sir David Attenborough concerning the implications of reduced budget allocations to the Countryside Council for Wales on the ability of the Government to meet their international obligations under *(a)* the bio-diversity convention of the Rio treaty, *(b)* the habitats and species directive and *(c)* the European Union NATURA 2000 programme and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have not received any representations from Sir David Attenborough, although I understand he did refer to the matter in a recent speech.

South Glamorgan Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the full membership of office holders on the board of the South Glamorgan training and enterprise council; if he will show in which way they met his criteria for TEC board membership; and on what date he approved their *(a)* membership and *(b)* any offices held.

Mr. Redwood: The following are members of the board of directors of South Glamorgan training and enterprise council;

P Rich (Chair): Managing Director, Allied Steel and Wire Holdings, plc.

J P Sainsbury (V Chair): Partner, Pannell Kerr Forster

R Helliwell: Group Director, William Cowlin and Son

R W Peterson: Chairman, Peterson Partnership

M Davies: Managing Director, VIP Advertising Photography

J Mclean: General Manager, Marks and Spencer

R Forster: Managing Director, Biomet Ltd

P Sheldon: Chief Executive, South Glamorgan TEC

M Goodyear: General Manager, Marriott hotel

Councillor R B Goodway: Leader, South Glamorgan county council

I Spence: Wales General Secretary, GMB Union

T Wilmore: Chief Executive, Barry College

Eligibility requirements for TEC board membership are that at least two thirds of the directors—exclusive of the chief executive of the TEC who is the sole executive director—must hold the office of chairman or chief executive of a company or top-level operational manager at local level of a company or senior partner of a professional partnership within, in each case, the private sector. The remaining directors are required to be chief executives or equivalent from education, economic development, trade unions, voluntary organisations or the public sector.

The directors of South Glamorgan TEC meet the above requirements and the chairman, Mr. Paul Rich, meets the additional requirement for chairing a TEC in that he is managing director of a large company of more than three years' standing.

As private companies, limited by guarantee, I do not approve appointments to the boards of TECs.

EMPLOYMENT

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will now list the contractors to the South Thames TEC to whom letters of comfort have not been sent.

Mr. Paice: As the information is contained in a large list, I will write to the hon. Member with employer investment in people contractors who have been sent a letter of comfort and place a copy in the Library.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how the Health and Safety Executive determined what part of the work of the field consultant groups was suitable for contracting out; and what factors made it possible to undertake this work separately from other duties at no extra cost to the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive reviewed the range of work carried out by the field consultant groups to determine what part of the work was suitable for contracting out. An important factor was to identify what functions required the powers and discretion of an inspector. The process of tendering for the remaining functions will determine what level of savings can be achieved.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans exist for the Health and Safety Executive to cut clerical and administrative posts in the field operations division following the introduction of laptop computers for inspectorial staff.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive is now beginning the development of a project to equip field staff with portable computers and, as part of that development, will assess the scale of extra efficiencies which will be achieved.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the cost of the Health and Safety Executive's staffing budget between 1 September 1993 and 1 September 1994.

Mr. Oppenheim: The amount spent on Health and Safety Executive staffing between 1 September 1993 and 1 September 1994 was £117.6 million.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what work is currently done by the scientists who work within the Health and Safety Executive's field consultant groups; and if he will make a statement on the place of this work in the investigation of workplace ill health, accidents and incidents.

Mr. Oppenheim: Scientists in the Health and Safety Executive's field consultant groups are mainly concerned with chemical substance sampling and analysis, scientific measurements and surveys as a service to inspectors in HSE's field operations division who undertake the investigation of workplace ill health, accidents and incidents.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of the Health and Safety Executive's professional and specialist staff have less than three years' service with the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Oppenheim: There are 1,857 professional and specialist staff in the Health and Safety Executive of whom 408 have less than three years service with HSE.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment why the Health and Safety Executive has found the need to consider an early retirement scheme for its specialists grades; how many posts it intends to lose by 1 April 1995; and how much money it expects to save on the payroll budget.

Mr. Oppenheim: The voluntary early retirement scheme for the Health and Safety Executive managed grades and scientists was introduced to help restructure HSE management. Eighty-five management posts will be lost by 1 April 1995 through this scheme.

The money from these posts will be used for a range of purposes including the recruitment of front-line inspectors. At this stage, it is impossible to predict what the net effect on payroll spend will be.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the total net savings in *(a)* costs and *(b)* staff years resulting from market-testing exercises in the Health and Safety Executive since April 1992.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive completed five market tests since April 1992. These have resulted in a net saving of 92 posts and a net cash saving of £560,000. The answer gives the number of posts saved rather than staff years as market tests are completed at

various times in the year and the HSE does not record fractions of staff years.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what reviews of the Health and Safety Executive's national interest groups are currently under way; when these reviews expect to report; and when recommendations are likely to be implemented.

Mr. Oppenheim: A review of national interest groups in the Health and Safety Executive's field operations division began in autumn 1994. The review is examining the purpose and function of NIGs; their staffing and location and the allocation of industry or topic responsibilities between them. A report is due to be submitted to HSE senior management in July 1995. Any recommendations are likely to be implemented during the following two years.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what workload formulae are being used by the Health and Safety Executive and for what purposes; and if he will provide full details of how they were calculated.

Mr. Oppenheim: Workload formulae are used within the Health and Safety Executive as an aid to management judgments especially in deploying inspectors as between geographical areas, industrial sectors and types of risks.

Such formulae are used, for example, to take account of real and perceived risks in different sectors and to assess the relative priorities in inspections, technical and policy work. They are managerial tools to be employed with discretion and not fixed indicators, and I see no advantage in their publication.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff the Health and Safety Executive has lost, and expects to lose, as a result of public expenditure survey settlements in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1996–97.

Mr. Oppenheim: I am informed that the Health and Safety Executive made no changes to its staffing in 1993–94 because of the PES 1992 settlement, in which the Health and Safety Commission's bid for resources was met in full. The PES 1992 settlement provided for 4,661 staff in 1993–94. The PES 1993 settlement provided for 4,599 staff in 1994–95. Staffing levels for 1996–97 are currently being considered in the context of the forthcoming PES 1995 round.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what amounts of money the Health and Safety Executive has spent in employing consultants in relation to market-testing exercises since 1 April 1992.

Mr. Oppenheim: Since 1 April 1992, the Health and Safety Executive has spent a total of £199,000 on consultancy in relation to market-testing exercises.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current annual cost of employing scientists to work within the Health and Safety Executive's field consultant groups.

Mr. Oppenheim: The estimated current annual cost at 1994–95 prices to the Health and Safety Executive of employing scientists in its field consultant groups is £891,000.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what response he has given to the Health and Safety Executive's director general on the subject of agency status for the Health and Safety Executive's health and safety laboratory.

Mr. Oppenhiem: I have written to the chairman of the Health and Safety Commission, on whose behalf the Health and Safety Executive acts, asking that work to make the health and safety laboratory an agency of the executive should be undertaken swiftly. The necessary work is in hand for the health and safety laboratory to become an agency from April 1995.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many inspectors employed in the Health and Safety Executive's field operations division have less than *(a)* three years' service and *(b)* five years' service for the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Oppenhiem: There are 914 inspectors employed by the Health and Safety Executive's field operation division. Of these inspectors, 153 have less than three years service and 336 less than five years' service in working for HSE.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what work is undertaken by the specialist inspectors who work within the Health and Safety Executive's field consultant groups.

Mr. Oppenhiem: Specialist inspector work is regulatory in character and involves applying expert health and safety knowledge of engineering and occupational hygiene to inspection, accident and incident investigation, standard setting and enforcement.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the Health and Safety Executive's salary budget for each year since 1988–89; and what is the proposed figure for *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97.

Mr. Oppenheim: The available information which relates to the civil service pay bill of the Health and Safety Executive is given in the table:

Year	*Civil Service pay bill outturn £s millions*
1988–89	70
1989–90	77
1990–91	86
1991–92	98
1992–93	112
1993–94	117

The final pay bill for 1994–95, and the pay bill for subsequent years, will depend among other things on the outcome of pay negotiations which have yet to be concluded.

Employment Medical Advisory Service

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many doctors the Health and Safety Executive plans to employ within the employment medical advisory service in 1995 and 1996.

Mr. Oppenheim: Plans for the staffing of the employment medical advisory service at 1 April 1995 were published in the Health and Safety Commission "Plan of Work 1994–95", which is available in the Library. Annexe 1, table 2 of the plan gives the figure of 90 staff for EMAS, of which 45 were doctors. The figure for 1 April 1996 will be set out in the Health and Safety Commission "Plan of Work 1995–96", due to be published in the early summer.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many nurses the Health and Safety Executive plans to employ within the employment medical advisory service in the years 1995 and 1996.

Mr. Oppenheim: Plans for the staffing of the employment medical advisory service at 1 April 1995 were published in the Health and Safety Commission "Plan of Work 1994–95", which is available in the Library. Annexe 1, table 2 of the plan gives the figure of 90 staff for EMAS, of which 45 were nurses. The figure for 1 April 1996 will be set out in the Health and Safety "Commission Plan of Work 1995–96", due to be published in the early summer.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposal he has to ensure that the training and enterprise councils swiftly conclude their contracts for the next financial year with AST training.

Mr. Paice: None. It is for individual training and enterprise councils to determine with whom they contract.

Health and Safety (Prosecutions)

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average fine imposed by magistrates courts as a consequence of prosecutions taken by the Health and Safety Executive under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Oppenheim: The provisional figure for average fines imposed in 1993–94 by magistrates courts following prosecutions taken by the field operations division inspectorates of the Health and Safety Executive is £1,874.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money was gathered in fines and costs, between 1 September 1993 and 1 September 1994 from cases taken by the Health and Safety Executive, as a result of the enforcement of health and safety law, in *(a)* magistrates courts and *(b)* Crown courts.

Mr. Oppenheim: Between 1 September 1993 and 31 August 1994, the Health and Safety Executive received a total of £818,162 in costs following prosecutions by HSE inspectorates. Of this £319,464 resulted from prosecutions taken in the Crown courts and £498,698 from magistrates courts. Information is not available on fines gathered as a result of prosecutions taken by HSE.

Work-related Illnesses

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what initiatives the Health and Safety Executive is currently taking to reduce the levels of occupational ill health.

Mr. Oppenheim: Much of the Health and Safety Executive's everyday activity, such as modernising the framework of health and safety law, inspection of workplaces, provision of advice and formal enforcement action is aimed at reducing occupational ill health. HSE is giving priority in 1994–95 to implementing a coherent programme of action based on the conclusions of its recent strategic review of the 10 main occupational health risks—toxic substances, biohazards, noise, vibration, ionising and non-ionising radiation, manual handling, upper limb disorders, sick building syndrome and stress. Action includes: obtaining better information on the scale and pattern of ill health; commissioning further research, for example on prevention techniques; and provision of practical guidance and publicity campaigns.

HSE is also now planning a major new campaign, "Good Health is Good Business", which will start in May and aims to encourage and help employers to act to manage health risks more effectively.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the Health and Safety Executive's current estimate of the number of people whose health is affected by work activity.

Mr. Oppenheim: From the responses to a special set of questions in the 1990 labour force survey of 60,000 households, it can be estimated that in the 12 months prior to the survey 2.2 million people in England and Wales suffered from an illness which they believe had been caused or made worse by their work.

Construction Design and Management Regulations

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the Health and Safety Commission first sent a draft of the Construction Design and Management Regulations to him; and what has been the reason for delay in their introduction.

Mr. Oppenheim: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 24 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *184*.

Focus Project

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current cost of the Health and Safety Executive's Focus project; what are the expected final costs; what was the original estimate for the cost of the project; and when it is expected to be fully implemented.

Mr. Oppenheim: The cost of the Focus project at 30 December 1994 was £6.221 million. The projected life cost is £9.758 million, compared with the original estimates of £10.026 million. The major part of the project is expected to be completed in late summer 1995. Further enhancements will be incorporated in the development of a project to equip staff with portable computers.

Staff Safety

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received regarding the safety of his Department's staff dealing with unemployment benefit claims, income support and the proposed jobseeker's allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* Representations on this issue have been made to the Employment Service central health committee, by its trade union members. Their views are being taken into account in a generic risk assessment of the effect of the proposed introduction of a jobseeker's allowance on the safety of people working in Employment Service local offices.

DEFENCE

UN Peacekeeping Force (Somalia)

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to contribute to the operation to withdraw the UN peacekeeping force from Somalia.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom is contributing a Royal Navy ship to the UN operation to withdraw peacekeeping forces from Somalia. HMS Exeter will arrive in the area later this week and will operate as part of a task group led by the United States navy. A RN presence will continue to be available to the United Nations for this purpose until mid-March.

Bullying

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many incidents involving allegations of bullying or brutality have been investigated in each of the armed forces in the last five years; how incidents were drawn to the attention of the authorities; and what was the result of the investigations.

Mr. Soames: Details of allegations of bullying or brutality which have been investigated in each of the armed forces in the last five years are not held in a readily available form. To obtain this information would require a search of records held by each ship and service establishment.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the representations he has received in the last two years regarding incidents of bullying in the armed forces.

Mr. Soames: No central record is maintained of representations regarding incidents of bullying in the armed forces and the information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what level in the armed forces investigations into complaints about bullying are held; what is the number of units at this level; and if his Department collates the information.

Mr. Soames: The level at which complaints of bullying are investigated by the services depends on the circumstances and seriousness of each case. Investigations may be undertaken at unit level or, in most cases, and always where a criminal offence is alleged, by the service police. Records are held centrally by the service police of all investigations undertaken by them.

Air Show (Bratislava)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *907*, what was the total number of RAF personnel present at the Bratislava airport display on 20 and 21 August 1994; and what payment was made by the organisers of the air show towards the costs of the outward and return transit flights by the aircraft from their bases to Slovakia.

Mr. Soames: Seventy-six RAF personnel were deployed to Bratislava for the whole or part of the display.

The costs of the outward flights were borne by my Department as the hours flown formed part of normal tasking. Fuel for the return flights was issued by the organisers without charge.

Mines, Firth of Clyde

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if all of the mines laid during recent mine-laying exercises in and nearby the Firth of Clyde have been recovered; if local fishermen have been made aware of the recovery programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Bad weather has delayed the recovery of exercise mines recently laid in and nearby the Firth of Clyde. Weather permitting, the mines will be recovered by mid-February. In accordance with normal procedures, local fishermen have been informed of planned recovery dates by means of a number of notices to fishermen.

"Competing for Quality"

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 January, *Official Report*, column *109*, if he will list those activities under the "Competing for Quality" programme for the period 1 April 1992 to 30 September 1994 which have been secured by *(a)* in-house bids and *(b)* private contractors; and if he will name the successful contractors.

Mr. Freeman: Listed are the activities which have been secured by *(a)* in-house bids and *(b)* private contractors, together with the names of the winning contractors, in the period April 1992 to September 1994.

a. *Activities secured by in-house bids*

Gardening at RM Units Poole, CTCRM Lympstone and COMMACHIO Group

RAOC Print Section—Northern Ireland

Air Weapon Range, RAF Cowden

Support Services—Gateway House, RAF Brize Norton

Aircraft Support Services, A and AEE Boscombe Down

Experimental Flying, Bedford/Boscombe Down

Mechanical Handling Equipment, repair and maintenance, Devonport

18 Base Workshops, Army Base Repair Organisation, Bovington

b. *Activities secured by private contractors*

Royal Navy Helicopters Maintenance and Engineering Support, HMS OSPREY, HMS HERON and HMS SEAHAWK

—Hunting A/C Ltd.

Aircraft Maintenance, HMS HERON

—Hunting A/C Ltd.

Works Services, HMS SEAHAWK

—PSA Building Management

Helicopter Simulator, HMS OSPREY

—Hunting A/C Ltd.

Works Services, HMS DOLPHIN

—PSA Building Management

Gardening at Royal Marine School of Music, Deal

—Oaklands plc

Central Engineer Reserve Plant Hire, Long Marston

—Various local contractors

Bielefeld Bakery, Germany

—NAAFI

Food Distribution in Rear Combat Zone, Germany

—NAAFI

Line of Communication Freight Service (Low Countries), Germany

—DEPAIRE

Food Distribution in BAOR (now UK Support Services), Germany

—NAAFI

Tailoring Service, Northern Ireland

—Private Individual

Ration Delivery Service in Northern Ireland

—NAAFI

Air Weapon Range, RAF Holbeach

—Siemens Plessey Assessment Services

Flight Checking, 115 Squadron, RAF Benson

—Hunting A/C Ltd.

Engineering and Supply, RAF Scampton

—Hunting A/C Ltd.

RAF/RN Elementary Flying Training, RAF Topcliffe

—Hunting A/C Ltd.

Inspectorate of Recruitment Exhibition Production Flight, RAF Henlow

—SERCO

Property Management of Buildings in Central London

—Planned Maintenance Engineering Ltd.

Information Technology Data Processing, Devizes

Hoskyns PLC

Domestic Services, MOD Police Training Centre

—Gardner Merchant

Works Services Maintenance, Belize, Cyprus, Gibraltar and Falkland Islands

—Turner (FM) Ltd./Balfour Beatty/ACO

Trident in Service Support

—Rolls Royce/Devonport Management Ltd./British Maritime Technology

Mess Catering, A and AEE Boscombe Down

—Gardener Merchant

Relocation Reconnaissance Visits for staff transferring to Bristol

—Peter Carol Executive Coaches

Security Guarding of Abbey Wood site, Bristol

—CHUBB Wardens Ltd.

Combat Systems Information Management Team

—EASAMS Ltd.

Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston

—Hunting-Brae Ltd.

Royal Navy Aircraft Second Line Engineering, Yeovilton

—FR Engineering/SERCO

Tri-Service Food Study

—NAAFI

Verbatim Court Recorders, Department of the Adjutant General

—Harry Counsell and Co

Catering at Mill Hill Industrial Mess, Defence Postal and Courier Service, London

—Gardner Merchant

Army Catering Strategy Study

—Various contractors across a range of sites Electronic Warfare Training Tasks, 360 Squadron, RAF Wyton

—FR Aviation Ltd.

Parachute Transport Flight, RAF Hullavington

—Hallett Silbermann

Operation of Air Weapons Range, Rosehearty

—Assessment Services Ltd.

Operation and maintenance of the Government Pipeline and Storage System

—Simon Storage Group, SERCO Gulf Engineering, Unipen

Maintenance Analysis and Computing Division, RAF Swanton Morley

—Bull Information Systems Ltd.

Airfield Services, Gibraltar

—SERCO Ltd.

Catering, cleaning and labouring activities, RAF Akrotiri

—Compass Catering Services (Cyprus) Ltd.

Support Services, Hong Kong

—SERCO/Gardner Merchant

Food Supply and Distribution, Hong Kong

—Various contractors

School Bus Service, Hong Kong

—Hoi Tai Tours Ltd.

Curtain Manufacture, Hong Kong

—FCO Procurement Unit

Furniture Repair, Hong Kong

—Wing Cheung and Co Ltd.

Data Entry, Meteorological Office, Bracknell

—Alpha Numeric

Animal Experiments

Mr. Fatchett: To as the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of experiments involving animals at Ministry of Defence establishments in each year from 1989.

Mr. Freeman: Animal experiments are an essential but small part of my Department's research and development programme, and as such the costs of these experiments are not recorded separately.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 13 December, *Official Report,* column *573,* if he will identify the country of origin and commercial source of the rats, mice, guinea pigs, rabbits, sheep, goats, pigs, miniature pigs, marmosets and rhesus monkeys used in animal experiments at Ministry of Defence establishments; and if he will give the average cost of each animal by type.

Mr. Freeman: All experimental work carried out by the Department using animals is in accordance with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Animals are used only when there is no acceptable alternative, and all the animals used are bred in the United Kingdom under conditions regulated by UK legislation. Animals are either bred on site, or purchased from suppliers at the prevailing commercial rate, and these costs are not separately recorded.

It is not in the public interest to disclose the identities of the specific suppliers.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State of Defence what consideration his Department has given to using alternatives to animal testing at Ministry of Defence establishments; how much is being spent on exploring these alternatives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Freeman: All experimental work with animals at Ministry of Defence establishments is regulated by the Home Office under the conditions of the Animals

(Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and related legislation. Before any project involving animals is begun, a project licence must be granted by the Home Office. A critical part of the project licence application is a closely argued justification of the proposed use of animals considering the ethical and scientific issues. At each stage, the use of non-animal alternatives has to be considered and the licence is granted only where none is possible. In some cases, in vitro methods which do not use living animals are scientifically superior. Such methods have been developed by my Department, and the results of the research published in scientific literature. Costs are not separately identified and recorded.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will define the categories of experiments carried out on living animals at Ministry of Defence establishments in each year from 1989; if he will identify the animals involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Animal experiments are carried out within the overall categories as defined by the project licences which are issued in accordance with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. The project licences currently in effect cover mild 7, moderate 15, substantial 4, and unclassified 1.

It would involve disproportionate cost to identify the animals involved and the categories of experiment in each year since 1989.

Equipment Exports (Human Rights)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, columns *690–91*, if he will list the equipment which he considers could be used to violate human rights.

Mr. Freeman: Part III, group 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended is a list of those military, security and para-military goods and arms, ammunition and related material which require export licences. The possible use for human rights violations is taken into account when applications for export licences are considered.

Support Helicopters

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what consideration he has made of the purchase of Chinook support helicopters for the RAF;

(2) how many support helicopters he expects to purchase to meet the RAF's requirements;

(3) when he expects to make a decision on the procurement of support helicopters for the Royal Air Force; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: As announced in the 1994 Statement on the Defence Estimates, we are considering the Boeing Chinook and Westland EH101 to meet our requirement for additional support helicopters. Price and performance data for the two aircraft have been received. Those data are currently being assessed. No decision has been taken as to how many helicopters or of what type to purchase. An announcement will be made as soon as our negotiations are complete.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is his policy to possess a mixed fleet of utility support helicopters for the RAF; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We recognise the potential advantages of a mixed fleet. Price is also a key consideration. Negotiations with industry are still continuing. No decision has yet been made.

Training Exercises (Injuries)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces serving in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Air Force and *(c)* the Royal Navy have been (i) killed and (ii) seriously injured while on training exercises (1) overseas and (2) in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years.

Mr. Soames: From the records available, it is not possible to differentiate between the seriousness of injuries. Numbers of service personnel killed and injured are as follows:

	RN		*RAF*		*Army*	
	United Kingdom	*Overseas*	*United Kingdom*	*Overseas*	*United Kingdom*	*Overseas*
Killed						
1989	1	—	3	—	6	13
1990	—	—	1	1	2	3
1991	1	—	—	—	4	4
1992	—	—	—	—	2	7
1993	2	4	—	—	1	1
Injured						
1989	118	14	672	17	84	533
1990	90	3	636	12	106	376
1991	82	11	508	16	104	328
1992	88	18	381	7	51	117
1993	71	22	367	6	39	188

Notes:
1. The figures for the United Kingdom include Northern Ireland.
2. The figures for RN personnel injured in the United Kingdom include the north Atlantic.

Exports (Indonesia)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what monitoring of the levels of British exported military equipment is undertaken in Indonesia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I have nothing to add to the reply given by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), on 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *894*.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 31 January 1995

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judicial Powers

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many times judges have used their power of arrest in cases of contempt of court in each of the last three years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department does not collect data about arrests which are made under the Contempt of Court Act 1981. Such information for the last three years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost and its accuracy could not be guaranteed.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There is no record that N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. has been involved in any privatisation programmes for the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

Mr. John M. Taylor: As far as I am able to ascertain, no officials of the Lord Chancellor's Department met representatives of Ian Greer Associates on 26 January, either formally or informally, to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

TREASURY

Nirex

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor to the Exchequer what will be the effect on the public sector borrowing requirement of the expenditure on the Nirex rock characterisation facility.

Mr. Aitken: Nirex's estimate of the cost of constructing the rock characterisation facility is approximately £120 million at 1992 prices. This will be funded by Nirex's public sector shareholders, whose external financing requirements are included within the PSBR.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Sir George Young: The table lists the sales conducted by the Treasury in which N. M. Rothschild was appointed and the roles to which it was appointed. The fees paid to firms appointed within the privatisation programme are commercially confidential.

Privatisation by Her Majesty's Treasury involving N. M. Rothschild

Company	*Year*	*N. M. Rothschild's role(s)*
Britoil	1985	Underwriter
BP	1987	Financial adviser Underwriter
BT	1991	French syndicate member
BT	1993	Global syndicate member

Public Expenditure Round

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the *(a)* exchange of letters between spending Departments and the Treasury, *(b)* official level bilateral meetings, *(c)* ministerial level bilateral meeting and *(d)* the EDX process—the Ministerial Committee on Public Expenditure—will take place during 1995 as part of the public expenditure round; and what part the representatives of local government will play in this public expenditure round.

Mr. Aitken: The detailed timetable for the 1995 public expenditure survey has not yet been set. The process starts in the spring, but Treasury and spending Departments are in regular contact throughout. Most of EDX's meetings take place in September and October.

Ministers from Departments with an interest in local government and their officials have regular discussions on service and expenditure issues with the local authority associations and individual authorities, and consider written representations from them. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and other interested Ministers meet the chairs of the local authority associations at the Central Council on Local Government Finance in July and October. Ministers take account of the views expressed by these means, along with those of other groups, in making public expenditure decisions.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support

staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them publish periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. Howard: I will write to the hon. Member.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers employed in the Metropolitan police area have been sacked for sexual or racial discrimination in each of the last three years.

Mr. Maclean: Sexual discrimination is not a specific disciplinary offence. One officer was dismissed in 1992 for discreditable conduct, following a series of allegations of sexual discrimination; there were no comparable cases in 1993 or 1994.

Racially discriminatory behaviour is an offence under paragraph 9 of schedule 1 to the Police (Discipline) Regulations 1985. No officers were dismissed on this ground in 1992, 1993 or 1994. From the information that has been collected, it is not possible to say whether an allegation of racially discriminatory behaviour may have been a contributory factor in some cases of dismissal on other grounds, such as discreditable conduct, misconduct towards a member of a police force, or abuse of authority.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in the months of *(a)* October, *(b)* November and *(c)* December 1994 officers of the Metropolitan police have been unable to attend magistrates courts in order to give evidence against those charged with offences due to budget limitations of the force; and on how many occasions in each month the persons concerned were discharged and no further proceedings taken.

Mr. Maclean: None, in each case.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints of sexual or racial discrimination have been made against *(a)* policemen and *(b)* policewomen employed in the Metropolitan police area in each of the last three years.

Mr. Maclean: The following figures refer to complaints for which investigations were completed. It is not possible to provide the information in the form requested during the year in question.

In 1992, 205 complaints of racially discriminating behaviour against Metropolitan police officers were investigated, and in 1993, 198 complaints. In some cases, the complaint may have involved more than one officer. It is not possible to identify the numbers of male and female officers involved.

In 1994, the latest figures available indicate that a total of 287 complaints of racially discriminating behaviour were the subject of completed investigations. These related to 315 officers, of whom 259 were male and 43 female. The sex of the remaining 13 officers has not been recorded.

Figures for complaints of sexually discriminating behaviour are not collected centrally.

Policing of Protests (Costs)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what compensation is available from EEC funds for the policing costs of enforcing EEC regulations against the protests in the United Kingdom; and if he will request support from EEC funds for police action at British ports in respect of *(a)* live calf exports and *(b)* fishermen's protests.

Mr. Maclean: Law enforcement is an area where the Community rightly has no competence and there is therefore no provision in the Community budget for such expenditure.

Policing, Shoreham

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what extra funds he will be making available to the West Sussex police authority for the extra policing required at Shoreham port; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) on 19 January, *Official Report*, column 672.

Prison Sentences

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of prison sentences given by the courts are of the statutory maximum.

Mr. Maclean: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Compensation Orders, Newcastle and Gateshead

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many compensation orders were made by *(a)* Gateshead magistrates court in 1993, *(b)* the Gateshead magistrates court in 1994, *(c)* the Central Newcastle magistrates court in 1993, *(d)* the Central Newcastle magistrates court in 1994, *(e)* the Newcastle Crown court in 1993 and *(f)* the Newcastle Crown court in 1994;

(2) what is the total value of compensation orders which remain unpaid made by *(a)* the Gateshead magistrates court in 1993, *(b)* the Gateshead magistrates court in 1994, *(c)* the Central Newcastle magistrates court in 1993, *(d)* the Central Newcastle magistrates court in 1994, *(e)* the Newcastle Crown court in 1993 and *(f)* the Newcastle Crown court in 1994;

(3) what was the total value of compensation orders made by *(a)* the Gateshead magistrates court in 1993, *(b)* the Gateshead magistrates court in 1994, *(c)* the Central Newcastle magistrates court in 1993, *(d)* the Central Newcastle magistrates court in 1994, *(e)* the Newcastle Crown court in 1993 and *(f)* the Newcastle Crown court in 1994;

(4) how many compensation orders remain unpaid made by *(a)* the Gateshead magistrates court in 1993, *(b)* the Gateshead magistrates court in 1994, *(c)* the Central Newcastle magistrates court in 1993, *(d)* the Central Newcastle magistrates court in 1994, *(e)* the Newcastle Crown court in 1993 and *(f)* the Newcastle Crown court in 1994.

Mr. Mclean: Information held centrally, which is given in the table, shows the number of compensation orders issued and the value of the amounts made for 1992 and 1993—the latest available figures. 1994 data will not be available until the autumn.

Information is not collected centrally on the number and amounts of compensation orders that remain unpaid. However, for further information I would refer the hon. Member to the footnotes of the table given in my reply on 17 January, column *377*.

Compensation order data for Gateshead and Newcastle magistrates courts and Newcastle Crown court 1992 and 1993

Court/Year	*Number of compensation orders*	*Amount issues £*
Gateshead Magistrates court		
1992	512	65,400
1993	467	63,600
Newcastle Magistrates court		
1992	1,094	125,600
1993	1,078	124,000
Newcastle Crown court		
1992	196	90,000
1993	136	99,700

Source: Home office.

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the Departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document "Focus on Ability".

Mr. Howard: On 25 January 1995, 229 members of staff in the Home Office and its agencies were registered disabled, representing 0.5 per cent. of all staff; a further 146—0.13 per cent. of staff—have declared themselves as disabled, but have not registered as such. There are likely to be others who have not responded to the Department's voluntary surveys.

Mr. Daya Pal Singh

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when a decision is going to be made on the asylum application first lodged in October 1986 by Mr. Daya Pal Singh, ref: IMG/94 330/972/1(S); when Mr. Singh was last interviewed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Mr. Singh was last interviewed on 19 October 1994 and produced a number of additional documents which required translation before the application could be fully and properly considered. We expect to make a decision shortly. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as Mr. Singh has been notified.

National Missing Persons Bureau

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children under the age of 16 years have been registered with the National Missing Persons Bureau since its opening.

Mr. Maclean: Information is not held in the form requested. From the opening of the bureau on 18 March 1994 to 31 December 1994, a total of 2,363 persons under the age of 18 years were reported missing. Of these, 115 were still missing at 31 December.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Mr. Howard: No work on a privatisation programme has been undertaken for the Home Office by N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Mahwood Hussein Mettan

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column, *695*, relating to the papers relating to Mahmood Mettan's execution at Cardiff gaol in 1952, if he will give further consideration to the explanation given for the routine destruction of the relevant papers in 1986, having regard to the discovery of the papers in the Public Record Office; and if he will place a copy of those papers in the Library;

(2) if he will supply a copy of all or part of the papers relating to the trial and execution of Mahmood Mattan in 1952 to solicitors acting on the family's behalf in pursuit of their request for a posthumous pardon.

Mr. Howard: No. Further inquiries within my Department and the Public Record Office have confirmed the destruction of Home Office records of this case.

I understand that copies of documents from the Lord Chancellor's Department file at the Public Record Office were sent to the solicitors acting for Mr. Mattan's widow in September 1994.

Betting

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to amend the law on betting licensing.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have today issued a consultation document on possible changes to the law on betting permits and licences and track betting licences in Great Britain.

Subject to the consultation, the Government intend to make an order under section 1 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 to implement these changes. It is hoped to bring the draft order before Parliament in spring 1995.

The purpose of the consultation document is to give details of the proposed changes and to seek the views of interested parties. Briefly, it is proposed to:

extend the duration of bookmakers permits and betting office licences from one year to three years,

simplify the procedure for renewal applications, and introduce a renewal procedure for the licensing of betting tracks.

Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Library.

Electro-shock Equipment

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his reply of 24 January,

Official Report, column *152*, when a company was last granted authority specifically to possess electric shock weapons; if he will name the company or companies involved; and for how long that permission was given.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* No company has been granted authority specifically to possess electric shock weapons in the last three years. Information about the granting of authority for that purpose in earlier years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Welsh: To aks the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what further steps he is taking to review the operation of guidelines relating to the manufacture, marketing and supply of *(a)* electro-shock weapons and *(b)* weapons of torture; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what assessment he has made that guidelines relating to the manufacture, marketing and supply of *(a)* electro-shock weapons and *(b)* instruments of torture are being fully complied with; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* Electric shock weapons are prohibited by section 5(1)(b) of the Firearms Act 1968, and cannot be possessed, manufactured or sold without the authority of the Secretary of State. The procedures for granting or refusing authority to possess prohibited weapons are kept under regular review.

It is not practicable to control trade in the wide range of goods which could be misused for the purposes of torture. The Government are willing to look at any tangible evidence of British companies knowingly involved in supplying materials and expertise for the purposes of repression.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Lord President of the Council on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

Mr. Newton: None.

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Ian Henderson

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the capacities in which Mr. Ian Henderson, currently head of Bahrain's security and intelligence services, has been employed by Her Majesty's Government.

The Prime Minister: Mr. Ian Henderson served in the colonial police service in Kenya from 1948 until Kenyan independence in 1963. In that capacity, he was an employee of Her Majesty's overseas civil service.

Standard Chartered Bank

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met the chairman of the Standard Chartered bank; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The chairman of the Standard Chartered bank was present at a lunch given in honour of the Indian Prime Minister on 14 March 1994.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met the Prime Minister of India; and if he discussed the position of the Standard Chartered bank.

The Prime Minister: I last met the Prime Minister of India when he visited the United Kingdom from 13 to 16 March 1994. We did not discuss the Standard Chartered bank.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 31 January.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 31 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Parliamentary Salaries (Deductions)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will support a proposal that all remuneration received by hon. Members for parliamentary duties from outside sources should be deducted from parliamentary salary in the same way that deductions are made from income support.

The Prime Minister: Hon. Members are entitled to the parliamentary salary as the remuneration payable to them as Members of this House. There are well-established procedures for determining this.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

The Prime Minister: None.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his letter of 25 January, whether in order to honour Her Majesty's Government's commitment in the letter to obtain justice for all the victims of the Lockerbie crime, he will discuss with Chancellor Kohl the possibility of the Scottish police interviewing Hafey Dalkamoni before such time as he is released.

The Prime Minister: There is no need for me to have such a discussion with Chancellor Kohl. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has repeatedly stated that he cannot make public details of what inquiries, including interviews, have been or may be carried out in this case. It would be a matter for him to request legal assistance from the competent German authorities, if the Scottish police and Crown Office did indeed consider it necessary for any one in Germany to be interviewed or re-interviewed.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

The Prime Minister: None.

DEFENCE

Bosnia

14. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the present position in respect of the deployment of UN forces in and around Tuzla in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Rifkind: The headquarters of UNPROFOR's sector north-east is located in Tuzla and a mechanised infantry battalion of some 1,200 Swedish and Danish soldiers, together with a Jordanian mortar-locating unit, are based in and around the town.

Future Large Aircraft

15. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning the development of the future large aircraft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I have discussed the future large aircraft with both British Aerospace and my French and German counterparts. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 16 December, *Official Report*, column *823*, we will rejoin the FLA programme at the end of the feasibility phase provided that it is managed on a commercial basis under the umbrella of the Airbus consortium. Resources will need to be available and our requirements on price and performance must also be met. A programme of work with our partners is in progress.

17. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the prospect of his Department purchasing the future large aircraft consequent upon his decision to purchase Lockheed Hercules aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 16 December, *Official Report*, column *823*, we will rejoin the FLA programme at the end of the feasibility phase provided that it is managed on a commercial basis under the umbrella of the Airbus consortium. Resources will need to be available and our requirements on price and performance must also be met. A programme of work with our partners is in progress.

Married Quarters Housing Stock

16. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department's budget has been affected by the lack of sales of married quarters housing stock.

Mr. Soames: The defence budget continues to assume a substantial receipt from the sale of married quarters in Great Britain. Although the original plans for a housing trust have been dropped, other options are being pursued.

Inhumane Weapons Convention

18. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new proposals he has to add new weapons to the inhumane weapons convention.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom has not proposed to add any weapons to the scope of the UN weaponry convention, but we are considering carefully those proposals made by others. Our main aim remains to strengthen restrictions on the use of anti-personnel land mines.

Attack Helicopters

19. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make a decision on the purchase of attack helicopters for the RAF.

Mr. Freeman: Evaluation of the bids received under the attack helicopter competition is in progress and we expect to make a decision on the purchase of this equipment for use by the Army Air Corps later in the year. I am, of course, conscious of the importance to industry of an early decision.

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will define the threat which he expects a new attack helicopter to meet or match.

Mr. Freeman: British defence policy, in common with that of our allies, is no longer based upon defending against a single specific threat or threats. Instead, we aim to provide forces with a flexible capability to undertake a range of operations, from general war to peace support operations, and to respond to the changing demands which may be placed upon them in the future. However, a fundamental part of our defence policy remains the ability of our armed forces to defend themselves against tanks and other armoured fighting vehicles.

We plan to procure an attack helicopter to replace Lynx in the anti-tank role for the early part of the next century. Its primary requirement will be to defeat any present and envisaged main battle tank which may be deployed against our armed forces. It will also be required to have a self-defence capability against enemy helicopters and ground to air threats.

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what review of capability requirements in respect of a new attack helicopter he has carried out to underpin the purchase together with what review of alternative investments he has made.

Mr. Freeman: We have a continuing requirement for a capability to engage in high-intensity conflict, including operations against armoured forces. A series of studies has been conducted to examine the relative cost and effectiveness of various weapon systems with an anti-tank capability. These included multiple-launched rocket systems, ground-launched missile systems, tanks, mines, fixed-wing aircraft and attack helicopters. The studies have shown that the most cost-effective mix of weapons to meet our anti-tank requirement entails the procurement of an attack helicopter.

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to decide which attack helicopter to purchase; from which aircraft he intends to choose; what will be the relevant factors in order of importance which will guide his choice; how many he intends to purchase together with the estimated total cost; whether the alternatives have flown or expect to fly; and if he will

make it his policy that the choice of machine will not be dominated by considerations of domestic employment.

Mr. Freeman: We expect to make a decision on the purchase of an attack helicopter later in the year. Bids were received from: Agusta—A129; Atlas Aviation—Rooivalk; Boeing-Sikorsky—Comanche; BAe/Eurocopter—Tiger; GEC/Bell-Textron—Cobra Venom; and Westland/McDonnell Douglas—Apache AH64/D. Tender assessment is based on four main parameters: operational effectiveness; life cycle costs; risk; and proposals for United Kingdom industrial participation. The precise number of helicopters to be procured will depend on affordability and on the solution chosen and, therefore, has yet to be determined. The estimated total cost of the programme is over £2 billion. Current versions of all the aircraft except Comanche have flown. It is our intention to equip the Army with the most cost-effective solution which fully meets its requirements. To that end, each bid will be considered on its merits.

Armed Forces (Injuries)

20. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have been disabled as a result of injury in the armed forces in each of the last three years.

Mr. Soames: There are varying degrees of disablement, not all of which are serious enough to cause the service man or woman to be medically discharged. Statistics are not maintained centrally of disabilities which do not result in discharge.

Falkland Islands

21. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the defence of the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Soames: The British Government are committed to defending the right of the Falkland Islanders to determine their own future. As long as Argentina maintains its claim to the Falkland Islands, the United Kingdom will keep forces there to deter, and if necessary counter, any possible aggression. Force levels are kept under review and, if the need arises, can be reinforced at very short notice using the airfield at Mount Pleasant.

Rescue Co-ordination

22. **Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of rescue co-ordination facilities.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 18 January, *Official Report*, column *547*.

European Army

23. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for a European army.

Mr. Soames: We have no plans for the creation of a European army.

Former Service Personnel

24. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he intends to make it his policy to make a single Minister responsible for all ex-service men's affairs.

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence is usually responsible for those issues relating to former service personnel with which the Department deals directly. The Government do not, however, propose to appoint a single Minister to co-ordinate matters concerning the ex-service community across the range of Government; I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on 22 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *461–62*.

Bombs, Llandwrog Airfield

25. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress he has made in the investigation being undertaken by his Department into potentially dangerous German chemical bombs which were buried at Llandwrog airfield, near Dinas Dinlle in Gwynedd after the second world war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State wrote to the hon. Member on 24 January.

Fishery Protection

26. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the adequacy of naval forces to carry out fishery protection duties.

Mr. Soames: The Royal Navy's Fishery Protection Squadron comprises nine vessels. The requirements for the provision of fishery protection services are reviewed annually with the fisheries Department. During this financial year, 1994–95, the squadron is contracted to provide these Departments with some 1,380 patrol days dedicated to fisheries work.

Aircraft Safety

27. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he had made of the current arrangements governing the separation of civilian helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft from low-flying military jets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My Department has a wide range of measures in place to minimise the risk of confliction between civil and military aircraft. These are kept under continuous review in consultation with the Civil Aviation Authority and civilian aircraft operators as part of an on-going programme of work to enhance flight safety.

Training Links

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to develop links between trainees in the armed services and other training initiatives outside the forces.

Mr. Soames: Whenever it is cost-effective and beneficial to do so, my Department is seeking to extend the close links which it already has with external training and education bodies and institutions. Unless there are operational reasons for retaining the work in-house, it is our aim to put as much of our training out to the private sector as is possible and draw on the considerable expertise which is available.

Fuel Servicing Trucks

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number, manufacturer, capacity and year of production of fuel servicing trucks currently held by (i) the RAF, (ii) the Royal Marines, (iii) the Army Air Corps and (iv) the Fleet Air Arm; what consideration he has given to *(a)* replacement of these vehicles and *(b)* leasing of commercial equipment; what factors led to the proposal to issue tenders for 12 fuel servicing trucks for the Royal Marines under tender No. SMC 31ARAF U15; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is as follows:

Service	*Quantity*	*Capacity*	*Year of Manufacture*	*Manufacturer*
Royal Air Force	176	18000 ltr	1987–1993	AEC,
	166	13000 ltr	1970–1982	Leyland/DAF,
	54	4500 ltr (Tactical)	1980–1989	Bedford,
	83	4500 ltr	1981–1991	Scammell
Royal Marines	12	9000 ltr	1987	Bedford
Army Air Corps	122	4500 ltr	1965–1985	Bedford
	6	4500 ltr	1987–1988	Leyland
Fleet Air Arm	33	9000 ltr	1988–1993	Leyland
	20	18000 ltr	1990	Leyland

The majority of fuel servicing vehicles in service will be considered for refurbishment or replacement—either by purchase of lease—over the next 10 years. The leasing of equipment is routinely considered as part of the replacement decision. In general, however, there is no commercial equipment which meets the specific requirements for military aircraft refuellers, and the leasing of purpose-built refuellers has been shown to be uneconomic.

The operational requirements for 12 fuel servicing trucks for the Royal Marines commando operations and support cell dictates that vehicles must be of a specialised type, particularly in respect of their ability to operate in such extremes of climate as the Arctic and the Gulf. Furthermore, the operational requirement includes provision of a high degree of corrosion protection. The specialist nature of these vehicles ruled out leasing of commercially available types, and the high cost of refurbishment of existing vehicles precluded that option. Purchase was assessed to be the most economic means of meeting this operational requirement.

Training (Sudanese Students)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) of 29 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *618*, how many foreign students from Sudan who have visited the United Kingdom for military training, were sponsored *(a)* by the Sudanese Government or *(b)* by the rebel forces in that country.

Mr. Soames: The details of training provided for overseas military personnel, including numbers, are not normally disclosed as they are confidential between Governments. The inclusion of Sudan in the answer I gave the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 29 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *618*, referred to two civilians who attended aviation medicine courses. Both students were sponsored by the Government of Sudan.

Tornado

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Tornado mid-life update will be complete.

Mr. Freeman: Delivery of the last aircraft to the upgraded standard is expected about the end of 2002.

Employees, Salisbury

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by establishment, including agencies, the numbers of *(a)* military and *(b)* civilian employees of his Department in the Salisbury constituency in (i) 1990, (ii) 1994 and (iii) an estimate for 1998.

Mr. Soames: It is not our normal policy to divulge the number of employees at individual Ministry of Defence establishments. Although my Department keeps no record of military and civilian employees by parliamentary constituency, we are able to provide the numbers of service and civilian personnel within the Salisbury local authority area. At 1 July 1990, there were 5,187 service and 3,765 full-time equivalent civilian personnel employed in the local authority area. The corresponding figures for 1 July 1994 were 4,923 service and 3,920 civilian personnel. It is too early to make accurate estimates of the corresponding figures for 1998.

Mess Costs

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the estimated cost of messing for United Kingdom armed forces during the past year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: During the financial year 1993–94, some £142 million, inclusive of VAT, was spent feeding regular and reserve armed forces personnel in the United Kingdom and overseas. As well as food served in messes, this figure also includes operational ration packs and allowances paid to personnel who were not able to eat in messes owing to the nature of their duties.

Personnel (Civil Rights)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether service men and women and their families enjoy the same rights as other citizens to make representations during public consultations and public inquiries and to make complaints under the citizens charter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The families of service personnel enjoy the same rights as other citizens to make representations during public consultations and public inquiries and to make complaints under the citizens charter. The same rights apply to service personnel provided that the impartiality of the armed forces is not compromised, and that such representations do not involve the disclosure, without permission, of information obtained in the course of their official duties.

Vehicles

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many vehicles are owned by his Department for use by *(a)* the Royal Navy, *(b)* the Army and *(c)* the Royal Air Force and issued with (i) civil vehicle registration marks and (ii) service vehicle registration marks by the Directorate General (Supplies and Transport (Naval)) for the Royal Navy and by the Directorate of Supply Management (Army) for the Army and for the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Soames: My Department owns 6,225 vehicles for use by the Royal Navy, 87,238 for use by the Army and 151,816 for use by the Royal Air Force. These figures include both operational and administrative vehicle types.

Both service and civilian vehicle registration marks are issued by the Army on behalf of all three services. Of the 19,279 vehicles owned, 11,365 show civilian registration markings; the remainder, service.

Atomic Weapons Establishment, Cardiff

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what quantities of defence nuclear material are stored in south Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The only nuclear material stored in south Wales is depleted uranium at the atomic weapons establishment, Cardiff.

Although it has not been the practice of this or previous Governments to reveal quantities of nuclear material stored at the AWE sites, in accordance with our policy of greater openness, my Department is seeking to revoke this restriction in respect of depleted uranium.

Details of the depleted uranium wastes arising at and discharged from AWE Cardiff are already in the public domain.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, to the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr Butler), *Official Report*, column *751*, what are the principal details of the decision-making process relating to the decommissioning and subsequent disposal of the site of the atomic weapons establishment, Llanishen, Cardiff; what consultations he has had with the management of the Atomic Weapons Establishment in relation to this decision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We are prepared to consider any proposal for the future use of the AWE Cardiff site. If no such acceptable proposal is received, and if there is no alternative defence use which arises in the period before then, the site will close in 1997 as soon as work on Trident components is completed. These proposals have been developed in close consultation between Hunting-BRAE Ltd. and the MOD.

The Ministry of Defence will then be responsible for the immediate decommissioning of the site and it will be disposed of in the normal way.

There is no statutory requirement fully to restore land offered for sale, but it is my Department's policy to seek to identify instances of contamination on sites allocated for disposal. This information is made available to prospective purchasers and taken into account in agreeing the sale price. Decontamination work is generally limited to the removal of ordnance and other contaminants such as explosives, radioactive and microbiological materials.

Sea King Helicopters

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Sea King helicopters will be in the search and rescue fleet in September 1996.

Mr. Soames: On present plans, there will be 25 RAF Sea King helicopters in the search and rescue role in September 1996. This includes two RAF Sea Kings based in the Falkland Islands. No Royal Navy Sea Kings are dedicated to search and rescue.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their client's interests.

Mr. Freeman: To the best of my knowledge, no officials from my Department met representatives of Ian Greer Associates on 26 January 1995 to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests, either formally or informally.

European Integration

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Britain's involvement in greater European defence integration.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom is fully involved in efforts to develop the Western European Union as the means to strengthen the European pillar of NATO and as the defence component of the European Union.

Army Base Repair Organisation

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he can report on the outcome of the consultation process for the Army Base Repair Organisation, Old Dalby.

Mr. Freeman: Following my 27 October 1994 announcement, *Official Report*, column *732*, of plans to withdraw MOD activity from the Army Base Repair Organisation workshop at Old Dalby and to change the agency's market-testing programme to include tests for base and district workshops only after such reorganisation, I have received a wide range of comments from a number of MPs and local authorities. In addition, the trade union representatives of staff at the workshop have submitted detailed comments on the plans and

provided counter-proposals with a view to continuing operations at the site.

The formal consultation period ended on 23 December. Since then, a detailed evaluation of the comments received and, in particular, the proposals from the workshop has been undertaken. In parallel, I have taken the opportunity to visit the workshop to understand better the local impact. I have also had discussions with representatives from the Donnington workshop, which would import the bulk of the work from Old Dalby.

As a result of the consultation period, changes have been made to assumptions used in the analysis of various options for the future of Old Dalby.

Having now considered all of the proposals, counter-proposals and their implications, I am convinced that the only viable option is to proceed with the withdrawal of MOD activity from the workshop and to implement the restructured market-testing programme which I announced on 27 October. None of the suggestions or counter-proposals resulting from the consultation process can deliver the necessary restructuring or offer of an equivalent level of savings to the taxpayer while preserving service to the Army. Any attempt to maintain MOD activity at the Old Dalby workshop would result in the Army continuing to have excess capacity beyond all foreseeable requirements. The resultant inefficiencies would inevitably be reflected in the costs passed on to the Army and ultimately to the taxpayer. Excess capacity would also disadvantage the agency teams in their attempts to prepare for the forthcoming market-testing process and could undermine their chances of making most cost-effective use of the facilities.

The final version of the analysis undertaken changed the net benefit of withdrawal from Old Dalby rather than Donnington, but did not change the preference for withdrawing from the former. I am accordingly instructing the agency to proceed with planning for the withdrawal of MOD work from the Old Dalby workshop. I must emphasise, however, that I recognise the skill and success of the Old Dalby work force and their interest in continuing to undertake ABRO work. Prior to the implementation of the planned move of MOD work later this year, I have asked that, for each discrete package of work at the Old Dalby workshop, an evaluation be undertaken to ascertain whether these should be placed with the private sector, using either their own facilities or by taking over the workshop facilities at Old Dalby, or with other MOD units. Any decision to place work with such facilities must, however, show an improvement over the savings which would be achieved by placing such work at ABRO Donnington. No irrevocable action will be taken by ABRO until at least July 1995 which would prevent the successful placement of such packages of work elsewhere than Donnington.

Representations made have clearly identified the potential effects of these changes on the local community and economy. Given that my Department is no longer able to make effective use of the modern, high-technology facilities at the site, every effort will be made to encourage the private sector to put forward innovative proposals for alternative uses which can capitalise on the skills and expertise of the work force. My Department intends to work closely on this with the local authorities and other employers in the area. An early start will be made to obtain appropriate advice within and outside the MOD to market the skills of the work force and the existing facilities for alternative private sector usage in parallel with the cost evaluation of the individual work packages referred to.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by them on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Mr. Freeman: N. M. Rothschild and Sons provided advice to my Department in respect of the privatisation of Royal Ordnance, which was achieved in 1986 and 1987. The fees paid to firms appointed within the privatisation programme are commercially confidential.

ENVIRONMENT

Planning Inspectorate

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what steps he is taking in the current review of pay and grading in the Planning Inspectorate executive agency to ensure that he meets the requirement set out in the first report to him of the advisory panel on standards for the Planning Inspectorate executive agency in respect of the need for planning inspectors to be of the highest quality and drawn from a variety of appropriate professional backgrounds; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many person-days of work were, or are planned to be carried out by *(a)* contract inspectors and *(b)* all consultant inspectors in the Planning Inspectorate executive agency in each year from 1993 to 1996; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how many staff in the Planning Inspectorate executive agency he expects will be given early retirement *(a)* in 1995 and *(b)* in 1996; from what professional planning inspector or other grades they will be drawn; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: I have delegated responsibility for all these matters to the Planning Inspectorate executive agency. I have therefore asked Mr. Chris Shepley, the agency's chief executive, to reply.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. Neil Gerrard, dated 26 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to provide the replies to your Parliamentary Questions about:

the Planning Inspectorate's pay and grading review (PQ/903/94/95);

work carried out by the Inspectorate's contract and consultant Inspectors (PQ/904/94/95);

the number of staff expected to take early retirement in 1995 and 1996 (PQ/907/94/95); as these are all matters which have been delegated to the Executive Agency.

(903)

The purpose of our pay and grading review is to ensure that all staff are properly rewarded for their skills and their contributions to the work of the Agency. It is my intention to ensure the Agency

will continue to employ Planning Inspectors of the highest quality and of appropriate backgrounds to meet its needs.

(904)

On the question of work carried out by contract and consultant Inspectors, records are not kept in a form that allows us to find the information in the precise form you request. The figures given below are estimates based on our financial records and include not only days employed on casework but also attendance at the office for training, etc.

	Contract Inspector days	*Consultant Inspector days*
1993–94	12,800	11,200
1994–95 (forecast)	11,100	8,750

The use we make of these resources in 1995–96 will depend on the financial allocation we receive and the targets we are set for the coming year.

(907)

We expect two Inspectors to leave the Agency in 1995 following approval of their applications under our 1994 Voluntary Early Retirement scheme. There may also be departures following applications for early retirement on medical grounds. Currently we have no plans to run any further early retirement schemes. No staff have been asked to leave the Agency.

Council Houses

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a league table of councils' efficiency in letting council houses.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: On 11 January, I said, in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), *Official Report*, column *134*, that I was placing in the Library a list of local authorities ranked on the basis of numbers of management vacants as at 1 April 1994.

The Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales requires local authorities to publish information annually about the number and percentage of dwellings that are empty and the average time taken to relet dwellings available for letting or awaiting minor repairs. The commission will publish comparative data for 1993-1994 at the end of March this year.

Business Rates

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against business rates increases are outstanding at valuation offices in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* England.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Appeals may be made against the entries in the non-domestic rating list for a variety of reasons. As at 31 December 1994, there were 8,788 appeals outstanding in the offices which cover Lancashire and 293,644 in total in England. Only a small proportion of these will have resulted from an increase in the rateable value of a particular hereditament, and these figures are not collected separately.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will detail in the form of a table similar to that provided on 1 November 1994 to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West, (Mr. Butcher) *Official Report*, columns *1005–6*, showing the estimated increase or decrease in business rate bills for properties in each region in England between 1994–95 and 1995–96 as a result of the 1995 revaluation, in the absence of transitional relief.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I am placing this information in the Library of the House.

Common Land

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent consultations he has undertaken concerning common land; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Over the last 18 months, officials of the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office have held informal discussions with the major bodies concerned with common land. Those discussions confirmed the Government's view that there was a need to investigate practical ways in which improvements in both the registration process and the management of common land might be achieved. Officials have since been looking at what needs to be done to achieve those objectives, and I hope to report our conclusions to the House shortly.

Footpaths

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been spent or grant aided, in each of the last three years for which figures are available, on the repair of eroded footpaths by the Countryside Commission for England.

Mr. Atkins: Repair of the surface of footpaths is the legal responsibility of the highway authority, the landowner or the occupier, depending on the cause of the damage to the path surface. The Countryside Commission does not contribute grant aid towards this statutory duty, except in the case of national trails.

In the last three years, the commission has spent the following on the surface restoration of trails:

Year	*£*
1991–92	700,000
1992–93	1,000,000
1993–94	850,000

These sums were spent mainly on restoring paths crossing peat in upland area, particularly the Cleveland and Pennine ways.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the areas in Great Britain most affected by the erosion of footpaths.

Mr. Atkins: In 1993–94, the Countryside Commission conducted a sample public rights of way condition survey in England. Walkers found that only 14 out of 11,847 links—a section of path between two junctions—surveyed were "impassable/unusable" on account of erosion. Some 103 links were "impassable/unusable" because they were muddy, boggy or flooded, but the causes for this will be varied. The full results of the survey are due to be published in the summer.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful bids for moneys from the single regeneration budget that exceeded in their submissions the recommended number of pages set out in the

Department's bidding guidance; and if he will specify (i) the numbers of pages and (ii) the length of any appendices.

Mr. Curry: Guidance on the preparation of bids for single regeneration budget funding was contained in annexe B of the SRB bidding guidance issued in April 1994, copies of which are in the Library of the House. Access to the 469 individual bids, plus supporting material, is available from the relevant Government office for the region. Copies of individual bids are available at a charge. Information about the numbers of pages and length of appendices of bids is not held centrally, and could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to require local authorities and other bodies submitting second round bids for moneys from the single regeneration budget to indicate the cost or preparing the submission, the number of staff allocated to its preparation and the number of person hours involved.

Mr. Curry: No.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful bids for moneys from the single regeneration budget were (i) thematic in nature covering the entire area of the local authority and (ii) for a small area covering a discrete part of the local authority.

Mr. Curry: Guidance on the area coverage of bids for single regeneration budget resources was set out in paragraphs 15 to 25, annexe A and annexe B of the SRB bidding guidance issued in April 1994, copies of which are in the Library of the House. Information on the thematic coverage of bids by reference to geographical area is not held centrally. Of the 201 successful bids under the first bidding round, about 35 per cent. related to a small area—under 25,000 population—about 29 per cent. related to a local authority district, about 19 per cent. related to an area greater than a local authority district, about 10 per cent were county-wide and about 7 per cent. were region-wide. These figures are subject to the final agreement of delivery plans between the individual SRB partnerships and the Government offices for the regions.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *206*, if he will list the five local authorities which made unsuccessful bids for single regeneration budget moneys and the relevant regional offices.

Mr. Curry: The five local authorities are Cleethorpes, Great Grimsby, Halton, Nottingham and Pendle.

Local Authorities (Internal Markets)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on Government policy with regard to internal markets for local authorities.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Government welcome the focus on the efficient delivery of cost-effective services which stems from the creation of an internal market for local authority services. From 1995–96, local authorities will be required to prepare and publish a statement of support service costs, setting out the full cost of support services. Making costs transparent through the framework of this statement will further stimulate the development of internal markets.

Local Government, London

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the non-collection of service charges on ex-local authority properties in Westminster.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Representations have been received from Councillor Andrew Dismore, the leader of the opposition, Westminster city council.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the future of local government in London; and what plans he has for a London-wide elected authority.

Sir Paul Beresford: Londoners' responses to the consultation paper "London: Making the Best Better", published in November 1993, showed little support for a London-wide elected authority. I am unaware of any formal representations made since then. The Government have no plans for an additional elected authority for London.

Cabinet Sub-Committee for London

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will now make it his practice to give details of the agenda of meetings of the Cabinet Sub-Committee for London;

(2) if he will now make it his practice to give dates of the meetings of the Cabinet Sub-Committee.

Sir Paul Beresford: I do not propose to give details of the timing of meetings or the topics discussed by the Cabinet Sub-Committee for London. The Government will continue to make their decisions known to Parliament and the public in the usual ways.

Licensed Premises

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of licensed premises have smoking free areas; and what studies his Department is conducting into the benefits of such areas.

Mr. Atkins: My Department has no information on the numbers of licensed premises with smoking free areas. The benefits of smoking-free areas in public places, including licensed premises, are outlined in the Government's code of practice on smoking in public places.

Local Authorities (Social Index)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in rank order all English local authorities according to where they fall in the social index.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The requested information has been placed in the Library.

Nirex

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce the appointment of an inspector for the public inquiry into the proposed Nirex rock characterisation facility in Cumbria; and what the terms of reference will be for the public inquiry.

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State expects to make an announcement about these matters within the next two weeks.

Rates, Nottinghamshire

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each property type in Nottinghamshire the percentage increase in rateable values as a result of the 1995 revaluation compared with the 1990 list.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Draft rateable values in Nottinghamshire have increased by 28 per cent. overall. The rateable value for shops has increased by 32 per cent., offices by 40 per cent., warehouses by 37 per cent., factories by 27 per cent., and other properties by 21 per cent.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will produce a table in the same form as provided to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) on 1 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *1005–6*, showing the increase in rate bills for properties in Nottinghamshire between 1994–95 and 1995–96 as a result of the 1995 revaluation, in the absence of transitional relief.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Estimates for Nottinghamshire based on the draft 1995 rating lists are shown in the table. I have also given the change in bills once transitional relief has been taken into account.

Estimated increases or decrease in rate bills in England between 1994–95 and 1995–96 as a result of the 1995 revaluation in the absence of transitional relief—Nottinghamshire

1995–96 bill as a percentage of 1994–95 bill	*Small properties*		*Large properties*		*All*	
	Number (000s)	*Change £ millions*	*Number (000s)*	*Change £ millions*	*Number (000s)*	*Change £ millions*
<50 per cent.	—	—	—	—	—	—
50 per cent.–80 per cent.	—	—	—	–1	—	-1
80 per cent.—120 per cent.	6	+1	1	+2	7	+3
120 per cent.—200 per cent.	16	+16	5	+28	21	+43
200 per cent.—500 per cent	2	+3	–1	+3	2	+6
>500 per cent.	–1	–1	–1	+1	–1	+1
All	24	+20	6	+33	30	+52
All (after transitional relief)	24	+5	6	+10	30	+15

Source: Inland Revenue.

Notes:

1. Totals may not sum due to rounding.
2. Small properties have a 1 April 1990 rateable value less than £10,000.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Sir Paul Beresford: None.

Commission for the New Towns

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce the pension he has determined for the retiring chairman of the Commission for the New Towns.

Sir Paul Beresford: In accordance with the provisions of schedule 9 to the New Towns Act 1981, I am today placing a statement in the Library of the House.

Waterborne Viruses

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many coastal or estuarial sewage discharges under construction or planned include treatment to reduce or eliminate viral content;

(2) how many sewage discharges receive treatment to reduce or eliminate viruses; and what percentage that represents of the total coastal discharges.

Mr. Atkins: Sewage treatment which is at primary level or above will reduce the levels of viruses in discharges. The current and planned levels of treatment for sewage discharges into coastal and estuarial discharges under the urban waste water treatment directive are set out in the United Kingdom's report under article 17. A copy of this is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research has been carried out by his Department into the health impacts of viruses in sea and river water.

Mr. Atkins: The Government funded an extensive four year research programme into the health effects of sea-bathing, which was published in January 1994.

Copies of the full report have been placed in the Library.

Homelessness

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what financial effect the inclusion of homelessness as an indicator has had on the grant settlement this year for *(a)* Coventry, *(b)* Wandsworth and *(c)* Westminster councils.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: There is no specific amount for homelessness within standard spending assessments. However, homelessness is one of a large number of general indicators that are included within composite

indices in the personal social services and all other services service blocks. They serve as an adjustment to increase or reduce the SSA, depending on the position of the authority relative to the average for all authorities. For the specified authorities, these homelessness indicators contribute the following adjustment:

	£ million
Coventry City Council	-1,790
London Borough of Wandsworth	+1,684
Westminster City Council	+3,519

It is the overall value of an index which is important in determining an authority's SSA and not the value of an individual indicator within an index.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which 10 councils gained most in this year's grant distribution as a result of homelessness being a factor in the standard spending assessment system.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: There is no specific amount for homelessness within standard spending assessments. However, homelessness is one of a large number of general indicators that are included within composite indices in the personal social services and all other services service blocks. The 10 authorities which have the highest contribution from homelessness indicators are:

Birmingham City Council
Manchester City Council
London Borough of Lambeth
London Borough of Hackney
London Borough of Southwark
London Borough of Islington
London Borough of Walsall
Bradford City Council
London Borough of Haringey
London Borough of Westminster

It is the overall value of an index which is important in determining an authority's SSA and not the value of an individual indicator within an index.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those authorities which have made oral representations to Ministers as part of the consultation on his proposals for local government finance for 1995–96, showing in each case the Minister seen by the authority, the duration of the meeting and the main topics raised.

Mr. Gummer: The table lists authorities which made oral representations to myself and other Ministers in my Department on the proposed local government finance settlement for England for 1995–96. In addition, Home Office Ministers met a number of police authorities. The main topics raised in meetings with DOE Ministers are listed in the table. No note was made of the duration of meetings, but I and other Ministers have sought to make time available for the fullest consultation.

Class of Authority	Minister	Main topics
Shire Districts		
Barrow in Furness	Robert B. Jones	Benefits, Remoteness
Blackpool	Sir Paul Beresford	Data, rent allowances, credit approvals, capping
Bristol	Sir Paul Beresford	Regional status, SSA methodology
Burnley	David Curry	Data, capping, superannuation
Castle Point	Robert B. Jones	Capping, Other Services
Dartford	Robert B. Jones	Growth pressures
Halton	Robert B. Jones	Benefit case load
Harlow	Sir Paul Beresford	Other Services Block, debt, SSA Reduction Grant, capping
Havant	Sir Paul Beresford	Population data, commuters
Hyndburn	Sir Paul Beresford	Capital financing, capping, housing benefit, Other Services
Ipswich	Sir Paul Beresford	Debt, data, capping
Leicester	Robert B. Jones	Capping, SSA Reduction Grant
Milton Keynes	Robert B. Jones	Growth factors
Norwich	Viscount Ullswater	Capping, regional status
Nottingham City	Sir Paul Beresford	SSA Reduction Grant, external support, data, SSA methodology, housing benefits
Pendle	Robert B. Jones	Capping, housing benefits
Ribble Valley	Sir Paul Beresford	Other Services Block
Rushmoor	Sir Paul Beresford	Area Cost Adjustment, population
South Norfolk	Robert B. Jones	Other Services Block
Stevenage	Sir Paul Beresford	Area Cost Adjustment, New Town status
Thanet	David Curry	Housing benefit
Thurrock	Viscount Ullswater	Debt, Area Cost Adjustment
Wear Valley	Sir Paul Beresford	Capital financing, capping
Welwyn Hatfield	Robert B. Jones	Capping, benefits, other services
York	Robert B. Jones	SSA Reduction Grant, sparsity, unemployment, homelessness
Shire counties		
Cumbria	David Curry	National parks, SSA methodology, Area Cost Adjustment, fire
Derbyshire	David Curry	Resource levels, capping limits
Devon	Robert B. Jones	Area Cost Adjustment, community care education
East Midlands Counties	David Curry	Area Cost Adjustment, capping, credit controls
Gloucestershire	David Curry	Education, capping, Area Cost Adjustment

Class of Authority	Minister	Main topics
Hampshire	Robert B. Jones	Fire, Education, Other Services, Fire, Area Cost Adjustment
Hereford and Worcester	David Curry	Capping, SSA methodology, data, community care
Lancashire	David Curry	Area Cost Adjustment, SSA methodology
Lincolnshire	David Curry	Capping, education, Area Cost Adjustment, sparsity, fire
Norfolk County Council	David Curry	Fire, Area Cost Adjustment, community care, education, capping
Northamptonshire	Secretary of State	Area Cost Adjustment, education, capping
Northumberland	Viscount Ullswater	Sparsity, National Parks, Area Cost Adjustment, capping
Nottinghamshire	David Curry	Area Cost Adjustment, fire capital financing
Oxfordshire	Robert B. Jones	Area Cost Adjustment, Education, Fire, new burdens
Shropshire	David Curry	Area Cost Adjustment, SSA methodology, balances
South West Counties	David Curry	Data, community care, teachers pay, Area Cost Adjustment
Warwickshire	Robert B. Jones	Area Cost Adjustment, Fire, capping
Metropolitan Districts		
Barnsley	Viscount Ullswater	Capping, education, highways
Birmingham	Secretary of State	Data, capping, Area Cost Adjustment, debt, credit approvals
Bolton	David Curry	Education, capping, youth custody
Bradford	David Curry	Education, capping
Core Metropolitan Cities	David Curry	Area Cost Adjustment, Capital Financing, SSA methodology, capping
Coventry	David Curry	Capping, community care, capital financing, Area Cost Adjustment
Kirklees	David Curry	Area Cost Adjustment, education
Knowsley	Robert B. Jones	Population, SSA methodology, Area Cost Adjustment
Liverpool	David Curry	Capping, deprivation, debt, Area Cost Adjustment
Manchester	Secretary of State	SSA methodology, capital financing
Newcastle upon Tyne	David Curry	Education, social services, Area Cost adjustment, capital finance
Rotherham	Sir Paul Beresford	Capping, deprivation
Salford	Robert B. Jones	Data, education
Sandwell	Robert B. Jones	Deprivation, capping, SSA Education Grant
Sheffield	Robert B. Jones	Area Cost Adjustment, debt, highways
Solihull	Secretary of State	Recoupment in education, levies, capping
South Tyneside	Robert B. Jones	Deprivation, Area Cost Adjustment, capping
South Yorkshire Districts	Viscount Ullswater	Supertram
St. Helens	Robert B. Jones	Capital financing, area cost adjustment, education, community care
Tameside	Robert B. Jones	Area Cost Adjustment, capping, levies
Wigan	David Curry	Capping
Wirral	David Curry	Capping
Wolverhampton	David Curry	SSA methodology, SSA Reduction Grant
London Boroughs		
Bexley	Robert B. Jones	Education, community care, pay, housing benefit, Area Cost Adjustment
Brent	David Curry	SSA Reduction Grant, education, Area Cost Adjustment
Croydon	Robert B. Jones	Education, community care, benefit case load
Enfield	David Curry	Deprivation
Greenwich	Robert B. Jones	Pensions, highways, social services, other services
Hackney	Robert B. Jones	SSA Reduction Grant, data, community charge grant
Harrow	Viscount Ullswater	Capping, capital financing, refugees, Area Cost Adjustment
Havering	Robert B. Jones	Capping, capital receipts
Hillingdon	Robert B. Jones	Education, refugees, Area Cost Adjustment
Hounslow	David Curry	Education, refugees
Kingston upon Thames	Robert B. Jones	Area cost adjustment, personal social services, notional amount
Lambeth	David Curry	Capping, SSA Reduction Grant

Class of Authority	*Minister*	*Main topics*
Merton	David Curry	Education, SSA methodology, Area Cost Adjustment
Newham	Secretary of State	Resource levels, capping
Sutton	Robert B. Jones	Education, Social Services, Area Cost Adjustment.
Fire Authorities		
Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence	David Curry	Fire
South Yorkshire Fire and CD Authority	David Curry	Fire, pensions
Tyne and Wear Fire and Civil Defence	Sir Paul Beresford	Fire
West Midlands Fire Authority	Sir Paul Beresford	Fire, Capping
West Yorkshire Fire and Civil Defence	David Curry	Fire
Police Authorities		
Lancashire Police Authority	David Curry	Pensions, Police Funding Formula
Greater Manchester Police	Robert B. Jones	Pensions, Police Funding Formula
Northants Police Authority	Sir Paul Beresford	Pensions, capping
Suffolk Police	Sir Paul Beresford	Police Funding Formula
West Mercia Police Authority	David Curry	Police Funding Formula, pensions, data, capping
Unitary Authority		
Isle of Wight	David Curry	Reorganisation, Fire, Area Cost Adjustment
Local Authority Associations		
Consultative Council on Local Government Finance	Secretary of State David Curry	SSA Reduction Grant, Capping, level of Settlement, capital financing
90 Meetings in total with local authority delegations		

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions Departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their client's interests.

Sir Paul Beresford: Central records are not kept of meetings between departmental officials and external organisations, and the information requested could not be collected without disproportionate cost.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 5 December, reference G/BE/P50/27077/94.

Sir Paul Beresford: I wrote to the hon. Member on 27 January.

Planning Application Fees

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what decision he has reached on proposals to allow local planning authorities to set their own planning application fees; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: Last summer, we issued a consultation paper, "Planning Application Fees", which proposed giving local planning authorities the power to set their own fees for determining planning applications. Our intention was to enable authorities to recover the costs they incur in processing planning applications. We envisaged that fee increases would be subject to authorities meeting qualifying criteria—in relation to development plans and development control performance—and establishing, by 1996, an accounting system for identifying costs.

We received over 300 responses, all of which have been carefully considered. We have concluded that the particular package of proposals we put forward did not attract sufficient support to justify legislating now for the devolution of fee-setting responsibilities within the proposed time scale.

For the present, therefore, planning application fees will continue to be set centrally. However, we shall be giving further thought to refining the fees regime to see whether a better match can be achieved between the costs and price of the service provided by local planning authorities.

Council Tax

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in settling initial appeals against bandings for council tax in England; when he expects the remainder to be settled; and how quickly new appeals will be dealt with.

Mr. Curry: A year ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) announced that we expected the Valuation Office agency and the valuation tribunals to have settled four out of five of the initial council tax appeals in England by the end of 1994, *Official Report,* column *154.*

By 31 December last, 704,888 appeals had been settled—81.5 per cent. of those received during the initial period. The great majority of cases were resolved through discussion between the agency and the taxpayer.

Progress was commendably consistent across the country. The settlement rate had reached or exceeded 80 per cent. in over three quarters of all billing authority areas; only in 16 areas was the rate less than 75 per cent. I have today placed in the Library a list showing the numbers and proportions of initial appeals resolved in each billing authority area.

This has been an impressive achievement on the part of the agency, which has had other major tasks to carry out at the same time, including a rating revaluation of all non-domestic properties. The valuation tribunals have also had an important part to play. In the event, relatively few appeals have needed a tribunal hearing to resolve, but the readiness of tribunals to list cases for timely hearings has been invaluable in keeping up the pace of settlements. Tribunal members receive no payment for their services,

and I am extremely grateful to them and, above all, to their chairmen and presidents for their preparedness to give up so much of their time to help deal with this exceptional case load.

Future progress is harder to predict, since the proportion of cases still outstanding that are likely to be resolved in discussion is lower than before. However, I very much hope that around 90 per cent. of initial appeals will have been settled by the end of March, and the remainder, or all but a handful, by the summer.

Appeals can still be made in certain circumstances, for example following a change of taxpayer or a material reduction in the value of the dwelling. Once the bulk of the initial appeals have been disposed of, we expect that any such new appeals will generally be settled within 12 months from the date of the taxpayer's proposal.

Waste Strategy

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been with the plans for a waste strategy for England and Wales which he announced in July 1994 in response to the Royal Commission on environmental pollution report on incineration of waste.

Mr. Atkins: The Government are today issuing for public consultation a draft waste strategy for England and Wales. The strategy aims to use the principles of sustainable development to provide a coherent framework for waste management policy and practice throughout England and Wales. Copies of the document have been placed in the Library of the House.

However well managed, waste always has the potential to cause harm to the environment. We must give priority to reducing the amount we produce, and to adopting better waste management practices. Much can be done harnessing the power of the market to encourage more environmentally friendly waste management. The Chancellor's announcement in his Budget statement of the introduction of a landfill tax is one, very important, development in this direction.

Industry can do a great deal, and has a good incentive to do so because, as a number of demonstration projects have shown, better waste management frequently results in reduced operating costs. Good waste management practice is a competitiveness opportunity. Householders also have a major role to play by choosing not to buy over-packaged goods, by reusing goods and materials within the household, and by using the recycling facilities provided by their local councils.

We hope that this draft strategy will start a wide debate about future aims and direction of waste management policy, and the role of industry, the public sector, consumers and householders in achieving those objectives. We are allowing an extended consultation period until 28 April 1995 to enable proper consideration of the many significant issues which the strategy raises.

Property Holdings

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the establishment of the agency to be derived from Property Holdings when Departments take responsibility in 1996.

Mr. Gummer: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster announced on 26 May 1994, Property Holdings is to be replaced by a new next steps agency, *Official Report*, column *225*. The agency to be established from 1 April 1996, will be known as Property Advisers to the Civil Estate—PACE. It will be responsible for co-ordinating the Government's market activity on the civil estate; for promoting its rationalisation; and for providing Departments with advice and support in the management of their estates. It will be organised in accordance with the principles set out in the civil service White Paper—Cm 2627—with a flexible and non-hierarchical management structure, and with responsibility devolved to the lowest possible level. Its chief executive will be Mr. Neil Borrett, who has been director of Property Holdings since 1990. It will have a complement of about 200 staff, spread between six regional offices in London, Edinburgh, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Bristol, through which it will help keep in close touch with developments in local property markets.

Police Budgets

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the police authorities' base budgets for 1995–96.

Mr. Curry: The basis of comparison used for police authorities' 1995–96 budget requirements is the sum of their budget requirements and police specific grants for 1994–95. These figures are set out in the table.

	£
Avon and Somerset police authority	137,801,214
Bedfordshire police authority	50,079,634
Cambridgeshire police authority	57,721,920
Cheshire police authority	84,377,320
Cleveland police authority	66,568,912
Cumbria police authority	53,672,404
Derbyshire police authority	81,857,892
Devon and Cornwall police authority	137,955,135
Dorset police authority	63,943,960
Durham police authority	59,299,640
Essex police authority	144,223,316
Gloucestershire police authority	53,473,574
Greater Manchester police authority	314,507,593
Hampshire police authority	153,138,739
Hertfordshire police authority	78,575,516
Humberside police authority	90,113,658
Kent police authority	150,058,300
Lancashire police authority	145,649,262
Leicestershire police authority	78,315,062
Lincolnshire police authority	57,710,930
Merseyside police authority	213,231,625
Norfolk police authority	63,868,603
Northamptonshire police authority	58,313,439
Northumbria police authority	163,141,000
North Yorkshire police authority	61,631,113
Nottinghamshire police authority	99,867,903
South Yorkshire police authority	136,870,700
Staffordshire police authority	99,688,454
Suffolk police authority	55,866,441
Surrey police authority	82,052,000
Sussex police authority	125,569,887
Thames Valley police authority	189,675,443
Warwickshire police authority	45,252,617
West Mercia police authority	93,750,746
West Midlands police authority	315,741,174
West Yorkshire police authority	240,888,893
Wiltshire police authority	57,848,723

National Parks

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to make available the national parks circular which he has undertaken to issue in connection with the national parks provisions in the Environment Bill.

Mr. Atkins: My Department has today issued for consultation a national parks circular which contains guidance on matters which have arisen in the context of the Government's proposals for the future of the national parks. Copies of the draft circular have been placed in the Library.

Step-up Programme

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if new moneys will be found to ensure the step-up programme is available to people in the London borough of Lewisham from January 1995.

Mr. Curry *[holding answer Friday 27 January 1995]:* The step-up programme in South Thames training and enterprise council was funded from the business start-up scheme which has been incorporated into the single regeneration budget from 1 April 1994. All forward commitments arising from BSUS will be met, but funds for new start ups will depend on the implementation of successful SRB bids.

In preparation for these new arrangements, some TECs in London, including South Thames, have ceased recruitment to BSUS-funded schemes because allocated funds had been fully committed.

Arrangements to support future enterprise activity in the South Thames TEC area are currently under consideration.

Coventry Airport

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *98*, what assessment he has made of whether the arrangements for airports to consult nearby local authorities about matters relating to noise and nuisance are operating satisfactorily; and what representations he has received asking for the arrangements to be strengthened.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

The power to require local consultation at aerodromes designated for the purposes of section 35 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 was included in the review of powers to control aircraft noise in 1991. It was found to be working well and, after consultation, no changes were proposed when the Government announced their conclusions from the review in March 1993. We do not believe the position to have changed since then.

TRANSPORT

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the absenteeism rate for *(a)* his Department, *(b)* HM Coastguard, *(c)* the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, *(d)* the Driving Standards Authority, *(e)* the Highways Agency, *(f)* the Marine Safety Agency, *(g)* the Transport Research Laboratory, *(h)* the Vehicle Certification Agency and *(i)* the Vehicle Inspectorate in each year since 1991.

Mr. Norris: The table shows for each year the number of days lost through sick absence per member of staff and the percentage of the working days in the year which the days of absence represent.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Central Transport Group				
Average days lost	7.1	6.6	7.5	5.5
Percentage of days lost	3.2	3.0	3.3	2.5
Coastguard Agency				
Average days lost	(1)	(1)	(1)	4.7
Percentage of days lost	(1)	(1)	(1)	2.1
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency				
Average days lost	10.7	10.4	12.7	11.1
Percentage of days lost	4.7	4.6	5.6	4.9
Driving Standards Agency				
Average days lost	8.9	9.0	12.1	9.7
Percentage of days lost	3.9	4.0	5.4	4.3
Highways Agency				
Average days lost	(1)	(1)	(1)	6.2
Percentage days lost	(1)	(1)	(1)	2.8
Marine Safety Agency				
Average days lost	(1)	(1)	(1)	3.9
Percentage days lost	(1)	(1)	(1)	1.7
Transport Research Laboratory				
Average days lost	(1)	4.2	4.5	3.8
Percentage days lost	(1)	1.9	2	1.7
Vehicle Certification Agency				
Average days lost	3.9	5.1	5.0	3.8
Percentage days lost	1.7	2.3	2.2	1.6
Vehicle Inspectorate Executive Agency				
Average days lost	7.0	6.1	8.1	6.7
Percentage days lost	3.1	2.7	3.6	3.0
Department of Transport				
Average days lost	8.5	8.1	9.7	7.9
Percentage days lost	3.8	3.6	4.3	3.5

Notes:

(1) = Not an agency at this time. Figures included within Central Transport Group.

The figures are based upon data available to the Department's personnel information system at 26 January 1995 and relate only to staff currently employed by the Department. Information for staff who have left the Department during the period is not readily available.

Lifeguards

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the annual public expenditure for coastal lifeguards in the United Kingdom; what certification and training qualification are required by coastal lifeguards; and how many bathing beaches in the United Kingdom *(a)* possess and *(b)* do not possess trained lifeguards.

Mr. Norris: This is not a matter for the Department of Transport. The Royal Life Saving Society (UK), a registered charity, is responsible for the training of lifeguards.

Stagecoach

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the operations of Stagecoach in east London.

Mr. Norris: None.

Bull Bars

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now state the conclusions of the Transport Research Laboratory study into additional injuries in accidents to pedestrians and cyclists caused by bull and roo bars on motor vehicles referred to in his answer of 26 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *568*; and what action he intends to take in response to the conclusions of the study.

Mr. Norris: The Transport Research Laboratory study was a general study of pedestrian accidents, the sample for which contained insufficient data for any firm conclusions to be drawn about bull bars. However, impact tests using an instrumented child-size headform on a bull bar have shown that the severity of an impact on a bull bar appears significantly greater than on a flexible bonnet.

Pedestrian injury accidents involving bull bars are currently being identified by the police for investigation by the Transport Research Laboratory. We will have a fuller picture when the reports of these accidents have been analysed.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of state for Transport what current proposals he has to restrict the use of bull bars; and what reports he has received of fatal accidents attributed to bull bars.

Mr. Norris: Pedestrian injury accidents involving bull bars are currently being identified by the police for investigation by the Transport Research Laboratory. We will have a fuller picture when the reports of these accidents have been analysed.

Drivers (Eyesight)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from the British Medical Association about driving, glaucoma and the law; what response he has given; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: None.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends to review the effectiveness of the number plate test in the context of implementing the second driving licence directive of the European Union.

Mr. Norris: We will shortly be proposing regulations to implement the second driving licence directive, including the provisions on eyesight standards. These are unlikely to affect the number plate test.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what survey his Department has conducted of research which indicates poor vision as a causative factor or road accidents.

Mr. Norris: We know of no survey where research has established poor driver vision as a systematic causative factor in accidents.

Advertisements

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions and in what circumstances in the last five years advertisements have been placed in newspapers or periodicals which have been described as being issued by or on behalf of Ministers in his Department rather than on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Norris: There is no practical distinction between publicity described as being issued by a single Minister or Her Majesty's Government.

Many Government advertisements do not identify the sponsor but, whether explicit or implicit, all advertising is placed on behalf of a Secretary of State in pursuance of his or her powers on behalf of the Queen. The subject matter of the advertisement will determine which, if any, phrase is used.

Most Department of Transport advertisements in this category are for road improvement schemes.

Cradlewell Bypass

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reply has been given by him to representations to him on the accuracy and validity of cost benefit calculations on the Cradlewell bypass, Newcastle.

Mr. Norris: My predecessor, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), answered a number of questions on this topic in the last Session of Parliament, 19 January 1994, *Official Report*, columns *593–94*.

It is not practicable for the Department of Transport to verify in detail the accuracy and validity of all the supporting documentation prepared by local authorities seeking financial support for their transport proposals. The system relies on good practice by local authorities and the detailed scrutiny afforded by audit and public inquiries. The cost-benefit analysis that Newcastle city council submitted for Cradlewell bypass gave an indication of the scheme's value for money that was within the normal parameters for schemes of this type.

Coaches

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many lives annually he estimates will be saved if coaches are banned from the right-hand lane of carriageways with more than two lanes.

Mr. Norris: We shall be able to make a full assessment of the safety benefits of the coach outside lane ban at the end of the two-year trial period when accident data are available.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has a been published on the risks related to coaches in the right-hand lane of three and four lane carriageways.

Mr. Norris: A report by Wootton Jeffreys Consultants Ltd. commissioned by the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK and submitted to the Department, concluded that exposure to risk might be reduced because there would be fewer lane changes and cases of harsh braking.

London Bus Timetables

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to ensure that arrangements for the free supply of London bus timetables will remain in place.

Mr. Norris: This is a matter for London Transport. I understand that it has no plans to introduce charges for bus timetables.

Cyclists

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of *(a)* fatal and *(b)* non-fatal accidents to cyclists in each police authority area in 1983; and what is the latest available information.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the table.

PQ 719/94/95—Number of accidents involving a pedal cyclist, by severity of injury to the cyclist, and by Police Force: GB 1983 and 1993

Accidents

	1983		*1993*	
	Pedal cyclist—fatal	*Pedal cyclist—serious or slight injury*	*Pedal cyclist—fatal*	*Pedal cyclist—serious or slight injury*
Metropolitan Police	32	5,448	17	4,357
Cumbria	4	227	3	178
Lancashire	8	680	7	580
Merseyside	2	660	4	615
Greater Manchester	8	1,534	9	1,238
Cheshire	10	615	6	391
Northumbria	2	438	4	382
Durham	4	152	1	156
North Yorkshire	5	441	4	324
West Yorkshire	7	727	4	613
South Yorkshire	4	394	9	378
Humberside	10	733	8	674
Cleveland	2	252	2	205
West Midlands	8	1,162	4	863
Staffordshire	3	594	5	415
West Mercia	10	560	5	471
Warwickshire	7	314	0	224
Derbyshire	6	427	5	319
Nottinghamshire	6	646	3	469
Lincolnshire	9	393	2	308
Leicestershire	6	546	3	414
Northamptonshire	4	209	1	201
Cambridgeshire	7	623	7	715
Norfolk	6	483	2	396
Suffolk	11	400	6	268
Bedfordshire	5	338	2	194
Hertfordshire	7	467	4	327
Essex	10	809	4	611
Thames Valley	16	1,135	7	904
Hampshire	14	1,263	4	1,005
Surrey	3	623	0	400
Kent	7	777	4	548
Sussex	11	806	5	634
City of London	0	41	1	25
Devon and Cornwall	8	607	3	560
Avon and Somerset	9	637	0	486
Gloucestershire	7	355	4	247

PQ 719/94/95—Number of accidents involving a pedal cyclist, by severity of injury to the cyclist, and by Police Force: GB 1983 and 1993

Accidents

	1983		1993	
	Pedal cyclist—fatal	*Pedal cyclist—serious or slight injury*	*Pedal cyclist—fatal*	*Pedal cyclist—serious or slight injury*
Wiltshire	6	397	0	240
Dorset	7	392	2	319
North Wales	0	237	3	179
Gwent	2	131	0	115
South Wales	4	403	2	375
Dyfed-Powys	1	128	1	88
Northern	3	52	1	90
Grampian	3	201	2	139
Tayside	0	128	0	83
Fife	1	109	2	57
Lothian and Borders	2	335	3	289
Central	1	91	1	80
Strathclyde	10	645	9	405
Dumfries and Galloway	2	60	0	20
Total	320	29,825	185	23,574

Barking to Gospel Oak Line

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has formulated since his visit to the Barking to Gospel Oak line in December to improve the service to passengers on that line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The provision of services on the Barking to Gospel Oak line is a matter for North London Railways, one of British Rail's train operating units. I have agreed supplementary credit approvals through the transport policies programme towards a joint bid by local London boroughs for selective station improvements along the line.

Rail Franchises

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of state for Transport when the franchising director is going to publish his proposals for the first passenger service requirements for franchises; and if these will be subject to consultation.

Dr. Mawhinney: The franchising director is today publishing for consultation his proposals for passenger service requirement for the Gatwick Express, South West Trains, Great Western Trains and London, Tilbury and Southend Franchises. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings; and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them published periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Dr. Mawhinney: The chief executives of each of the Department's agencies have written to the right hon. Member with the specific information for each agency. In 1987–88, before the first departmental agency was established, the total number of staff in the Department was 15,286. In 1994–95 the equivalent figure for the Department, including agencies, is 13,755. Further reductions in staff are planned for 1995-96. The creation of agencies in the Department has led to improved performance through better targeting and clarification of responsibilities.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 30 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as this question deals with an operational matter, for which I have responsibility as Chief Executive.

The answers to the questions raised are as follows:

(1) The Coastguard Agency (TCA) HQ is located in Spring Place, Southampton. This property is shared with the Marine Safety Agency (MSA) HQ and the Southampton Marine Office. The move to this building has nothing to do with agency status. The Marine Emergencies Organisation (now TCA) HQ, the Surveyor General's Organisation (now MSA) HQ and the Southampton Marine Office were relocated from London to Southampton in May 1993 prior to Agency status. The annual rent on this property is £1.2 million, a saving of some £0.74 million on rented costs of previous accommodation.

(2) The Coastguard Agency has recruited 3 permanent and one temporary member of staff to deal with the additional requirements of Agency status.

(3) The Agency publishes a quarterly magazine "The Coastguard Magazine". This periodical predates the Agency having been published in a similar format for many years, and first produced in 1946. The current cost is £48,000 per annum.

(4) No fleets of executive cars or single executive cars have been purchased by the Agency.

(5) The costs of preparing a specially designed logo was £7,285.

(6) Her Majesty's Coastguard which is part of the Agency has 473 staff who have been in uniform for many years. The 12 Marine Pollution Control Unit staff who may have to attend the scene of an oil spill are provided with protective clothing. No other agency staff wear corporate clothing.

(7) Previous stocks of stationery were run down so that no additional costs were incurred for the design and printing of corporate stationery.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 30 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to provide details for the Marine Safety Agency (MSA) in response to your Question about Next Steps Agencies.

Headquarters building

The MSA Headquarters is co-located in Spring Place Southampton with the Coastguard Agency Headquarters. Spring Place is a leased property and is part of the Coastguard Agency estate and costs are borne on their budget.

Support staff

The Surveyor General's Organisation (from which MSA was formed) took over most of its own support function (personnel, finance, IT, etc) in 1991. There have been no changes in support staff as a result of the move to Agency status.

Periodical journals

The MSA issues a staff newsletter six times a year. The cost is small as it is copied and distributed in-house.

Cars

The MSA has no official vehicles and does not provide cars for any of its staff.

Logo

The MSA logo was designed in-house at no cost.

Corporate clothing

The only "corporate" clothing used by MSA is high visibility protective clothing for use by operational surveyors which incorporates the MSA logo. This cost £27k in 1993–94 and replaced previous protective clothing allowance.

MSA stationery

The MSA corporate stationery was designed in house by the Department's drawing office team and has replaced the Departmental stationery used by the SGO. The printing of the MSA stationery costs no more than the original DOT corporate printed stationery.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 30 January 1995:

With reference to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State of Transport about Next Steps Agencies in his Department the information requested in relation to the Highways Agency is as follows:

(i) The headquarters of this Agency has been brought together in St. Christopher House, Southwark Street, London, a building already on the Government's Common User Estate.

(ii) In general the staff of the Agency are those who were previously carrying out its functions in the Department of Transport. Two senior staff have been recruited from the private sector following open competitions, the Chief Executive and the Finance Director. The arrival of the latter will be offset by the departure of one of the original directors who will leave the Agency later in the year. Since the establishment of the Agency in April 1994 staff numbers have reduced and this will continue.

(iii) The Highways Agency has not instituted publication of a periodical journal.

(iv) The Highways Agency has not acquired any executive cars not has it provided corporate clothing.

(v) Revised stationery using Agency headings was introduced under standard supply and usage contracts.

(vi) The fee paid for the design of the Agency's logo was £1,250.

Letter from John Wootton to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 30 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question on the cost of the change to Agency status. The answers to the points raised in your question are set out below:

The setting up of TRL as an executive agency did not require the acquisition of new HQ buildings.

TRL does not have any executive cars nor does it supply staff with specific corporate clothing. Some work and protective clothing has had the TRL logo applied to it a minimal cost.

TRL publishes its research and findings widely as part of its dissemination role. Since becoming an agency these publications have been revised to include another, "TRL News", which costs £9,200 annually to produce.

Prior to establishment as an executive agency TRL was required to increase its Personnel section competence. One member of staff was seconded to TRL for approximately 6 months. Since then the number of support staff has been reduced in all areas of TRL operation in accordance with its published business plan.

TRL, formerly TRRL, commissioned a revision of its old logo and the production of a design manual at the cost of £9,000.

Letter from L. Manley to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 30 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question about certain operational matters concerning the Driving Standards Agency (DSA).

The information you requested is provided below:

HQ building: The annual rental for Stanley House, Nottingham is £341,614. This replaced existing accommodation at 2 Marsham Street, London. The cost of providing in–going services at Stanley House was £712,000. An evaluation carried out after DSA relocated showed a benefit in net present value terms of nearly £3 million over 10 years, with payback occurring within 3 years of the move. Payback has been achieved.

Support staff: DSA recruited 13 new staff to run the new building on relocation (including typists, support grades, office manager and deputy and administrative support). The costs were fully offset by a reduction in the charges made to DSA by Department of Transport (Central).

Periodical journal: DSA does not publish any periodical journals.

Executive cars: DSA does not have any executive cars.

Corporate logo: The DSA logo was chosen from suggestions put forward by staff.

Corporate clothing: DSA does not have corporate clothing.

Stationery: Over the last 12 months the cost of DSA stationery for use in HQ and DSA's Regional Offices was £5,357. This replaced previous use of Department of Transport paper.

Overall, there has been a substantial reduction in the level of on–costs paid to DOT(C) by DSA for services now provided in–house.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Gerald Kaufman, dated 30 January 1995:

Next Steps Agencies—Vehicle Inspectorate

Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question on Executive Agencies, on matters relating to the Vehicle Inspectorate (VI). Taking your points in turn:

(i) VI has 2 sites which are occupied by staff undertaking HQ or support-type services. Both of these properties were occupied prior to the Agency being set up and were purchased, or rental contracts entered into, when VI was within the Department.

(ii) The number of staff involved in support services has remained largely static since before the Agency was set up, though the activities undertaken have changed. Prior to its becoming an Agency, the Inspectorate had well-developed 'in house' Finance and Personnel functions.

(iii) The actual number of VI employees (calculated in whole staff years) has reduced from 1,869 in 1988/89 (this figure has been adjusted to include the Traffic Examiner organisation which merged with VI in 1992/93) to a figure of 1,618 currently.

(iv) VI does not publish periodical journals to customers, or to any other body, but does publish staff newsletters. These newsletters have an annual cost of approximately £10,000.

(v) VI does not have any "executive" cars but does have a fleet of 43 "pool" cars for use by all staff. Of these, 6 are based at the HQ offices and the remaining 37 are located at our enforcement offices across the country. Some vehicles were also provided prior to the Agency being set up.

(vi) The VI logo was modified at the time the Agency was established to incorporate the words "Executive Agency". This was undertaken at minimal cost.

(vii) VI does not provide corporate clothing. However the Inspectorate does provide, and did provide prior to the Agency's establishment, protective clothing to staff.

(viii) VI does use headed stationery incorporating the VI logo. This replaced the previous headed paper used by the Inspectorate prior to the Agency being set up.

Please contact me if you need further information.

Letter from Dr. S. J. Ford to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 30 January 1993:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question on Executive Agencies, on matters relating to the

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). Taking your points in turn:

(i) DVLA has not acquired its own HQ building as a consequence of becoming an agency.

(ii) Annual cost—not applicable.

(iii) No additional support staff have been required since becoming an agency: DVL Directorate already exercised a considerable degree of delegated authority before agency status.

(iv) DVLA publishes twice a year 'DVL Today' mainly to inform corporate customers such as the motor trade, the police and the courts about key developments and changes. Annual cost £35,000. DVLA also publishes a monthly staff journal "LICENCE" at an annual cost of £40,000. This was published before DVLA became an agency.

(v) DVLA now operates 1 official car compared with 2 before becoming an agency, and is about to surrender the remaining vehicle.

(vi) The DVLA logo was produced by a member of staff in an internal competition with professional assistance at a total cost of £1,000 for the final product.

(vii) The design of existing official clothing for messengers was changed and now costs £1,000 a year less than before agency.

(viii) There was no extra cost in incorporating the DVLA logo on specially designed and printed corporate stationery as existing stocks of stationery had to be replenished.

Letter from Peter Nicholl to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 30 January 1995:

In the absence of the Chief Executive on Agency business, I have been asked by the Secretary of State to reply to the questions you raised insofar as they relate to the Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA).

Taking your questions in order:

1. In April 1990, some 3 weeks after its establishment as an executive agency, VCA moved from a shared Government building in central Bristol to a new headquarters in rented single-occupier offices 2 miles from the centre. A study carried out at the time indicated that the move represented value for money. The current annual rent is £156,007.32.

2. VCA now has 11 staff providing support services which were previously provided centrally. (VCA's staff numbers were 73 in the year immediately prior to its establishment as an agency, 80 in its first year, and 75 by its fourth year 1993–94).

3. VCA does not publish any periodical journals.

4. VCA does not have a fleet of executive cars nor any single executive cars.

5. VCA's logo initially derived from an in-house competition. Its design was improved last year at relatively low cost. (Please see item 7 below).

6. VCA's staff do not have corporate clothing.

7. VCA's stationery was originally designed by HMSO at a cost which cannot now easily be traced. The design of the logo and stationery was upgraded last year at a cost of £1,163.25. Supplies of stationery in this form are obtained when needed at the most economical cost that can be found.

I would be happy to answer any other questions you may have about VCA's operations.

Road Schemes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has reviewed cost-benefit analysis procedures on road schemes; if conclusions have been reached; and if he will place a copy of any new guidance on such analysis in the Library.

Mr. Watts: Cost-benefit analysis procedures for road schemes are kept constantly under review. I refer the hon. Member also to my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) on 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *880–81*.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to its clients' interests.

Mr. Norris: (a) Once. I met with London Taxis International and one representative of Ian Greer Associates, to discuss taxi issues. Three officials of my Department were present.

(b) None.

Kent Coast Line

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has yet seen the British Railways Board's business case for the replacement, or otherwise, of rolling stock for the Kent coast line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: Establishing the business case for this investment is a matter for the British Railways Board. My Department has been sent, for information, some of the material on the basis of which BR made its decision not to accept the offer made last year by ABB Transportation.

Subsequently, BR has indicated a willingness to re-examine the commercial case if an improved offer were received from ABB.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Oil and Gas Development

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to ensure that floating production facilities for oil and gas developments are built in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: The industrial research and technology unit of the Department of Economic Development is in discussion with Harland and Wolff about possible Government support for the development of a floating production storage and offloading unit for the deep-water offshore oil industry. The company has been invited to submit a formal application to IRTU which will be subject to the normal rigours of a technical and financial appraisal.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to his Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Sir John Wheeler: From the information available in Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office, £1,142,112 was spent during 1994 in recruiting, 1,910 staff.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Mr. John Wheeler: N. M. Rothschild and Sons has been employed on only one privatisation programme—Northern Ireland Electricity. Details of the fees and expenses paid in respect of this contract cannot be released as it would breach commercial confidentiality.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

Sir John Wheeler: None.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Attorney-General if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

The Attorney-General: None of the Departments for which I am responsible has made payments to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any such work.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Attorney-General on how many occasions Departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

The Attorney-General: *(a)* None: *(b)* None.

EMPLOYMENT

Work-related Illnesses

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the Health and Safety Executive's estimate of the number of people who die each year as a result of ill health induced by work activity.

Mr. Oppenheim: It is not possible to state accurately the number of premature deaths which are the result of ill health cased by work. It is estimated there are at least 2,500 such deaths in Great Britain annually. Figures have been published in "Health and Safety Statistics: Statistical Supplement to the 1993–94 Annual Report of the Health and Safety Commission", a copy of which is in the Library.

Business Start-up Scheme

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which TEC areas *(a)* will and *(b)* will not provide business start-up programme type support in 1995–96; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: A list of training and enterprise council areas where there will be direct business start-up support in 1995–96 from the single regeneration budget is shown in the table.

Start-up support will also be available through the training for work programme, from TECs' own reserves and from the Prince's Youth Business Trust which receives funding from the Department, but the TEC areas concerned cannot readily be identified. For this reason, it is not possible to supply a list of any areas which may be entirely without such support.

The Areas with direct business start-up support from the single regeneration budget, 1995–96

Avon TEC
AZTEC (Kingston upon Thames)
Barnsley/Doncaster TEC
Bedfordshire TEC
Birmingham TEC
Bradford and District TEC
Calderdale and Kirklees TEC
CENTEC (Central London)
CEWTEC (Wirral)
CILNTEC (Inner London North)
County Durham TEC
Coventry and Warwickshire TEC
Cumbria TEC
Devon and Cornwall TEC
Dorset TEC
Dudley TEC
ELTEC (East Lancashire)
Gloucestershire TEC
Greater Peterborough TEC
Hampshire TEC
HAWTEC (Hereford and Worcester)
Hertfordshire TEC
Humberside TEC
LAWTEC (Lancashire West)
Leeds TEC
Lincolnshire TEC
London East TEC
Manchester TEC
Merseyside TEC
METROTEC (Wigan)
Norfolk and Waveney TEC
North Derbyshire TEC
North London TEC
North Nottinghamshire TEC
North West London TEC
North Yorkshire TEC
Northamptonshire TEC
Northumberland TEC
QUALITEC (St. Helens)
Rochdale TEC
Rotherham TEC
Sandwell TEC
Sheffield TEC
Shropshire TEC
SOLOTEC (Bromley)
Somerset TEC
South East Cheshire TEC
South Thames TEC
Southern Derbyshire TEC
Staffordshire TEC
Sunderland City TEC
Sussex TEC
Teesside TEC
Tyneside TEC
Wakefield TEC
West London TEC
Wolverhampton TEC

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans his Department has for ensuring that unemployed people who wish to start their own businesses have an equal opportunity to do so following the placing of the business start-up scheme in the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Paice: Support for unemployed people who wish to start their own business will continue. The single regeneration budget projects recently approved will provide over 18,000 start-up opportunities. Training and enterprise councils are being encouraged to take advantage of arrangements which allow people in training for work to pursue self-employment and TECs may fund further start-up help through their own reserves. We also continue to contribute to the work of the Prince's Youth Business Trust which helps young people set up in business through the provision of grants and/or loans.

Liquefied Petroleum Gas

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what powers are available to local authorities and to other agencies to regulate the storage, use and installation of liquefied petroleum gas cylinders *(a)* generally and *(b)* for use in permanent domestic central heating.

Mr. Oppenheim: The storage of 25 tonnes or more of liquefied petroleum gas requires consent from the hazardous substances authority—usually the local planning authority—under the Planning (Hazardous Substances) Act 1990.

By virtue of its powers under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, the Health and Safety Commission has introduced the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994 to control, among other things, the storage, use and installation of liquefied petroleum gas, both generally, and for use in permanent domestic central heating.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what responsibility suppliers of liquefied petroleum gas have towards purchasers of the product concerning its safe installation and use.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994 place duties on a gas supplier. Duties under the regulations include a requirement that liquefied petroleum gas storage tanks be sited in such a manner that they can be safely used, filled and refilled.

Health and Safety

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if Health and Safety Executive guidance note CS4 applies only to safety at work.

Mr. Oppenheim: No. Advice given in guidance note CS4 is to safeguard both people at work and members of the general public.

National Development Agenda

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress there has been with the national development agenda; how much money out of the total budget for 1994–95 has been spent; and if he will make a statement on its evaluation and plans for the future.

Mr. Paice: The 1994 national development agenda described key objectives towards which the Department's support for the development of the vocational education and training system is being directed. Examples include the standards programme, and action to encourage employers to see training as an investment.

There is no single budget for national development. The work is funded from a range of individual budgets voted for particular purposes. At 31 December 1994 £15.6 million had been spent out of available funds of £40.2 million for the current financial year.

Progress is being made in all the areas covered by the national development agenda, with a wide range of projects contracted.

It is a requirement that all projects are evaluated, and that where appropriate there should be evaluation of the performance of linked groups of projects.

The results of evaluation form an important part of the Department's dissemination activity for national development work. Project outputs are disseminated widely to relevant audiences through conferences, seminars, publicity and promotional events, reports and other publications.

For the future, a second edition of the national development agenda is planned for publication in February, taking account of the developments announced in the 1994 White Paper "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win".

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate the range of likely costs to public funds which will result from closure of and redundancies of providers at South Thames TEC.

Mr. Paice: I do not expect that any closures or redundancies will lead directly to costs to public funds. Consequential costs, for example any calls upon the national insurance fund, are not possible to estimate.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what he intends shall succeed South Thames TEC.

Mr. Paice: It is urgent to settle the arrangements for training and enterprise council coverage in London for 1995–96. I have today invited CENTEC to put proposals to me on how it would exercise the full range of TEC responsibilities in the London boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark, and SOLOTEC in the London boroughs of Greenwich and Lewisham, from the start of the 1995–96 contract. In the light of the views expressed about the future arrangements in the South Thames area, I expect this to lead to calls for a wider review of London TEC boundaries, and in particular to consideration of a central London TEC covering a broader area. I look forward to hearing the views of London TECs and other London interests on those issues in due course.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the Government take priority over training provider creditors for cash from the receivers of South Thames TEC.

Mr. Paice: Yes. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is a secured creditor by virtue of a debenture held with the training and enterprise council.

Jobcentres

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing for each region in the united Kingdom the number of vacancies in jobcentres that were *(a)* temporary and *(b)* permanent in each quarter since December 1990.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested is available monthly, but only for filled vacancies, from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Job Advertisements (European Commission)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 24 January *Official Report*, column *184*, if the recruitment process for United Kingdom-based European Commission staff, including job advertisements, is subject to *(a)* the Race Relations Act 1974 and *(b)* the Sex Discrimination Acts.

Mr. Oppenheim: No. The staff regulations of officials of the European Communities, which form part of a regulation made by the Council of the European Communities under the EC treaties, provide that an official may be appointed only if he or she is a national of a member state. However, the regulations also require that, subject to the nationality condition, officials be selected without reference to race, sex or creed.

Credit Guarantee Insurance

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he offers credit guarantee insurance to TEC training providers.

Mr. Paice: No.

Unemployment (Derbyshire)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the level of unemployment in Derbyshire in February 1986; and what is the latest figure.

Mr. Oppenheim: Unadjusted claimant unemployment in Derbyshire stood at 37,310 in December 1994 compared with 50,068 in February 1986. This represents a fall of 25 per cent.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people and what percentage of the labour force in each region for the United Kingdom as a whole were classified as being in temporary employment in each year since 1979.

Mr. Oppenheim: This information is not available as a consistent series from 1979. However, a consistent series for 1984 onwards is available from the labour force survey and can be obtained via the Quantime LFS service available in the Library.

Food Service Industry

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what number of students work *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in the food service industry; and what were the comparable figures for each year since 1989.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is given in the table:

Number of students[1] working in the food service industry (000's) in Great Britain

	Full-time	*Part-time*
Spring 1989	—	82
Spring 1990	—	104
Spring 1991	—	100
Spring 1992	—	118
Spring 1993	—	112
Spring 1994	—	132
Summer 1994	—	119

Source:
Labour force survey—not seasonally adjusted.
Notes:
—Less than 10,000 in cell; estimate not shown.
[1] Includes full-time students only.

Pneumoconiosis

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his latest estimate of the total sum of money paid out under the provisions of the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979; and what has been the number of beneficiaries.

Mr. Oppenheim: As at 31 December 1994, total expenditure under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979 amounted to around £38.1 million. Some 5,700 people have received a payment under the Act.

Work Permits

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the issuing of work permits to Japanese nationals, and on complaints made by employees of Quick Corp., London branch, 65 Clifton street, London EC2, about the overseas labour service section at his Department.

Mr. Oppenheim: Work permits are issued to Japanese nationals on the same basis as those issued to other nationalities.

The Department has not received complaints from employees of Quick Corp., London branch about the overseas labour service. OLS officials are considering representations from former employees of Quick Corp. about work permits issued to Japanese nationals employed by the company.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Miss Widdecombe: N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. has not been employed to undertake any work on the Department's privatisation programmes.

Employment Service

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will make a statement about the inspection service in the London and south-east region of the Employment Service;

(2) if he will make a statement about the financial status of the London and south-east region of the Employment Service;

(3) if he will make a statement about the London and south-east region of the Employment Service;

(4) if he will make a statement about the level of achievement in the inspection service of the London and south-east region of the Employment Service in relation to its annual performance agreement;

(5) if he will make a statement about redeployment of staff across the London and south-east region of the Employment Service and the reasons for it;

(6) if he will make a statement about staffing in the London and south-east region of the Employment Service.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Grover to Ms Harriet Harman, dated 31 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me, in the absence on leave of the Chief Executive, to reply to your questions about the London and South East Region (Region) of the Employment Service (ES).

Unemployment within the Region has fallen by almost 15% during the twelve months to December 1994. Indeed, in some locations such as Andover in Hampshire, the fall has been almost 35% Such falls indicate that the economy is in much better shape and, in part, reflect the success of ES initiatives to help people back into employment.

Falling unemployment means that the ES, whose staff deal directly with the payment of benefits as well as offering job and other opportunities, has experienced a fall in the number of people using its services. ES managers have reacted swiftly to these changes to ensure that they are staffed to meet need and that taxpayers' money is not wasted. Inevitably, at a time of falling unemployment, this has led to a reduction in staffing levels.

As regards staffing, you will appreciate that the ES receives funding for staffing on the basis of need, i.e. the level of unemployment. Falling unemployment means that we now need less staff and can anticipate lower staffing levels for the financial year ahead. We need to manage our budgets and staffing levels to meet this new need. There are over 300 Jobcentres across the Region and unemployment is falling at differing rates at particular locations, so balancing staffing levels to need is a particularly challenging task. It has been necessary to redeploy staff between offices and between functions to ensure that a balance is maintained between staffing levels and the needs of our clients. Inevitably, staff have undertaken work in different areas of ES activity in the short term to meet short term need.

The response to these changing needs from ES staff has been commendably high, as you will note from our continuing performance in the delivery of services to our customers. As regards finances, in the nine month period from April to December 1994, the Region had spent £267.1 million or 73.8% of its annual budget.

Performance across all areas of our business is strong. The help offered to unemployed people continues to increase; the Region has placed almost 380,000 people in employment (April–December 1994) and I estimate that this figure will have increased to approaching 500,000 people by the end of March. Over one in three of these placings are long-term unemployed clients. At this point in time, the Region are 12% above their unemployed placings target in this area. Indeed, in almost every area of work, the Region are ahead of their targets and continue to offer an improved service to jobseekers.

As regards the Inspection Service in the Region, as at December 1994 its targets for the full operational year (to April) for authorised prosecutions and claimants withdrawing claims had already been almost matched or exceeded.

I hope this is helpful.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

Miss Widdecombe: I have no knowledge of any such meetings.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Consultants

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many relatives of serving diplomats are currently employed by the Overseas Development Administration as consultants.

Mr. Baldry: We would not normally ask potential consultants about the occupation of their relatives. However, we are aware of two who are currently employed.

Recruitment

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many positions in the United Kingdom's overseas aid programme were filled from the Overseas Development Administration's own register of available personnel for each year since 1979; how many were advertised in the media; and how many were filled by outside recruitment agencies and consultancies.

Mr. Baldry: Information about the method of recruitment of the many thousands of overseas aid personnel appointed since 1979 is not available centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by his Department or agency.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer to the hon. Member to the answer given on 23 January 1995, *Official Report*, columns *25–26*.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N.M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation

programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Nil.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Officials in the Department for which I am responsible did not meet representatives of Ian Greer Associates either formally or informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them published periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 17 January, *Official Report*, column *400*. Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the chief executives of the nine agencies for which my Department is responsible. I have therefore asked Mr. John Hobday of the Account Services Agency; Mr. David Durham of Companies House; Mr. Peter Joyce of the Insolvency Service; Dr. Richard Worswick of the Laboratory of the Government Chemist; Mr. William Edgar of the National Engineering Laboratory; Dr. Peter Clapham of the National Physical Laboratory; Dr. Seton Bennett of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory; Dr. Paul Hartnack of the Patent Office; and Mr. Jim Norton of the Radiocommunications Agency to arrange for answers to be given.

Letter from W. Edgar to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 31 January 1995:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION No. 180

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question relating to various items of expenditure incurred by NEL as a Next Steps Agency. NEL has not acquired its headquarters building. Since achieving agency status it has reduced from 13 to 5 the number of principal buildings it uses. Since achieving agency status NEL has reduced its support staff by about 43%. The only periodical journal published by NEL is its annual report which, unlike its pre-agency status annual report, is also used as a marketing document. Pre-agency there were two vehicles which could have been described as executive cars now there are three, the additional annual cost being £7900 per annum. All of the vehicles are available for general laboratory duties as required. NEL uses the same logo as it has had for almost 40 years. The number of staff issued with corporate clothing has been reduced from 7 to 2 since NEL became an agency. There have been no costs incurred in the special design of stationery. As is normally the case, the stationery has been updated from time to time to add the symbols associated with the additional quality accreditations obtained by the establishment, no special design costs were incurred in incorporating these additions.

I trust you will find the above information to be satisfactory for your purposes.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 31 January 1995:

AGENCY MATTERS

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about certain Agency expenditure and resource requirements.

The Agency has not acquired a new headquarters building as a result of becoming an Agency. The Agency will be moving to a new building in Docklands later this year since the lease on Waterloo Bridge House is about to expire.

The Agency has 15 staff carrying out support functions which have been delegated to the Agency by the Department.

The Agency issues a number of periodical publications, including the Annual Report, at a total annual cost of £120k.

The Agency does not have any executive cars.

The design of the Agency corporate logo cost £5k.

The cost of corporate clothing is £12k per annum.

The cost of Agency stationery in 1994/95 will be around £80k. However this is no increase on the equivalent DTI stationery.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 31 January 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Question about the costs of a number of Insolvency Service operational matters.

The Service has not acquired any separate headquarters buildings since it was established as an agency in March 1990: both its London and Birmingham headquarters share buildings with Official Receivers' offices; its Edinburgh Disqualification Unit, set up prior to March 1990, shares a building with the Scottish Office.

There has been a continuing process of delegation of support functions previously undertaken by central divisions of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI): the effect on overall resources, so far as I have been informed, has been neutral—any additional resources have been at least matched by reductions in central divisions' staffing.

The Service is required to publish an Agency Annual Report: the publication cost for the last Report (1993–94) was some £13,000. It does not have or use executive cars. Its logo was designed in-house using ideas from staff; the cost was negligible. It does not have corporate clothing for any of its staff. It does not use specially designed and printed stationery beyond the incorporation of its logo on its letters etc, which is automatically produced by the word processing software, and where appropriate its corporate colour on its publications, replacing the DTI logo and colour.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 31 January 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about expenditure in Next Steps agencies.

Buildings

Prior to becoming an agency, NWML occupied a single building, part of DTI's estate, for which rent was paid. These arrangement were not been affected by NWML becoming an agency in 1989. The annual rent for the building is £239,000.

Support Staff

NWML currently has the same number of support staff as it had before it became an agency. The additional administrative duties associated with being an agency have been absorbed within the existing allocation of staff.

Journals

Between 1 April 1993 and 31 March 1994, NWML spent £8245.67 on publications distributed to UK industry and Local Authorities.

Executive Cars

No NWML staff have executive cars. Prior to becoming an agency, NWML owned one pool car. Since becoming an agency it has disposed of the car and replaced it with a lease arrangement for a smaller car.

Logos

The agency has not spent any money on logo design.

Clothing

The agency has spent £1414.52 on corporate clothing (150 ties, 50 scarves and umbrellas) since 1989.

Corporate Stationery

NWML has not changed the design of letterheads, compliment slips or business cards as a result of becoming an agency. Its expenditure on these items in 1993–94 was £2,310.58 which is approximately the same annual expenditure as before becoming an agency.

Letter from R. D. Worswick to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply in respect of the Laboratory of the Government Chemist (LGC) to your Parliamentary Question (No. 180) about certain costs incurred by Next Steps Agencies in the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

The position on the points you raise is as follows:

(i) LGC has not acquired any of its buildings. It has occupied premises, including its main laboratory, which form part of the DTI's estate at Teddington since 1988 (when it relocated from central London) and pays an annual rental to Property Holdings;

(ii) as a result of organisational and operational changes which have affected LGC since it became an Executive Agency in 1989 it is not possible to give a precise response to the changing requirements for support staff over the past five years or so. The Laboratory's total support staff has risen from a complement of 64 in 1989/90 to a total of 67 in the current financial year. This increase reflects the considerable additional administrative responsibilities which the Laboratory undertakes. A range of tasks previously carried out by DTI centrally are now covered by LGC's Human Resources, Accounts and Finance and IT Groups and a Business Development Group has been set up during this period. A Strategic Research Unit (five staff) to support our scientific activity has recently been created but this is not included in the figures for support staff above;

(iii) the Laboratory publishes an Annual Report and Accounts, and produces on average two issues of the Government Chemist bulletin a year. The cost of these in 1993/94 was approximately £30k;

(iv) the Laboratory has no executive cars;

(v) the Laboratory first used a logo in 1978/79 on headed stationery, publicity material etc. The design work was carried out within DTI;

(vi) the Laboratory has a long standing policy of issuing clothing to staff primarily for health and safety reasons (in some instances as a statutory requirement) e.g. laboratory coats and gloves, external site working equipment such as helmets, boots and overalls. In addition staff in the Laboratory's Post Room are issued with uniforms including safety shoes. The total cost of these items in 1993/94 was approximately £7k;

(vii) the cost of stationery (including letterheaded paper which incorporates an LGC logo) to the Laboratory in 1993/94 was approximately £4k.

I hope this meets with your requirements.

Letter from Dr. Peter Clapham to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 31 January 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Question concerning the cost of building etc., used by Next Step Agencies. This reply concerns the National Physical Laboratory.

Taking each of your questions in turn:

Headquarters Building: NPL has not acquired any additional buildings to those occupied prior to becoming an Agency.

Support Staff: While the balance of our support specialisms has changed, NPL has not acquired any net additional support staff since becoming an Agency. Such additional tasks as have been delegated to the Agency, eg wider personnel responsibilities, have been absorbed by existing staff.

Periodical Journals: NPL has continued to publish NPL News once or twice a year—there has been no significant change in cost since becoming an Agency.

Cars: NPL does not operate any executive cars.

Logos: NPL has always maintained its own 'house style' and has revised it from time to time for promotional reasons. The last occasion was just prior to becoming an Agency, and the design cost was borne by the Department (about £3,000).

Clothing: NPL has introduced no new corporate clothing, but a number of industrial staff now wear overalls bearing the current logo at negligible additional cost.

Stationery: NPL has its own printing facilities for technical reports etc, and most corporate stationery is printed in-house at marginal cost. The Agency's total stationery costs are about £25k per annum.

I hope this provides the information you were seeking.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 31 January 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to respond to your Question about costs incurred by Next Steps agencies in his Department.

The Patent Office became an executive agency in March 1990 and over the following two years we relocated from London to a new building in Newport, South Wales. In October 1991 we became a trading fund and acquired title to the new building at a cost of £17 million.

Over the last five years we have reduced our cost base by about £7 million a year, partly because of lower accommodation costs, partly by efficiency savings, and partly because staff numbers have reduced in line with a long-standing decline in demand for our services following the establishment of a European Patent Office in Munich in 1978. We currently have 963 staff in post including 218 support staff (ie staff who are in support of our core functions of granting patents and registering trade marks and designs) compared with 1179 staff in post, including 285 support staff, on 1 March 1990.

We publish a number of journals in line with statutory obligations: the Official Journal (Patents) at an annual cost of £77,890; the Trade Mark Journal at an annual cost of £78,528; and Reports of Patents, Design and Trade Mark Cases at an annual cost of £8,580. The cost of our Annual Report to Parliament for 1993–94 was £18,000. Non-statutory publications centre on free information about how to go about obtaining patents, trade marks and registered designs and we send out a total of nearly 250,000 information packs each year at a printing cost of £130,000. We also publish occasional material such as monographs on patent trends. Our total statutory and non-statutory printing costs are around £600,000 a year.

We have no fleet of executive cars, and we have no single executive cars.

Our logo (see heading of this letter) was created in 1986 by the DTI's Information Division at no cost to the Patent Office. The cost of overprinting standard stationery with the logo (1,500,000 sheets a year) is £4,000. We have a flag incorporating the logo which cost £268.

We have no corporate clothing and we do not have corporate stationery other than that described above.

Letter from John Hobday to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 27 January 1995:

Your recent Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade asked a number of questions about the costs incurred by

Next Steps Agencies in his Department in introducing their own corporate identities.

The Accounts Services Agency was created in October 1991. Since when:

(i) the Agency has acquired its one and only operational centre the rental for which for 1994–95 was £135,125

(ii) it has not been necessary to increase the number of support staff

(iii) ASA has not published any periodical journals other than its three Annual Reports the cost of which were £6,410.10 in total

(iv) the Agency does not possess any official cars

(v) the Agency's logo was designed at a cost of £100—the prize for an in-house staff competition

(vi) no corporate clothing is used

(vii) the costs of specially designed and printed corporate stationery was £19,147.15

The costs quoted include VAT. Some of these costs would be matched by savings on the equivalent Departmental budgets.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 31 January 1995:

You asked the President of the Board of Trade the following question: (PQ180)

"To ask the President of the Board of Trade, if he will set out for each of the Next Steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them published periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery."

I have been asked to respond direct to you as Chief Executive of Companies House Executive Agency.

Headquarters Building

Companies House headquarters occupies a property in Cardiff that has been a crown freehold since it was built in 1975. No change in ownership has occurred as a consequence of CH becoming an executive agency. The property's book value in CH's balance sheet for 31 March 1994 was £13.8 million.

Support Staff

It is now over 6 years since CH became an executive agency, and the many changes in the nature of our operations make comparisons between staff functions over this period of time difficult. The total number of staff in post (measured as full-time equivalents) has fallen from 1081 on 3 October 1988 (Agency Day) to 1006 at 31 December 1994. Of these, 156 were classified as "support staff" in October 1988, compared with 184 in December 1994. However the term "support" staff includes computer, accounting, and building service staff as well as other functions such as personnel, typing, training and customer service. The largest single category of support staff are computer staff, whose numbers increased from 43 to 58, reflecting the much greater use of information technology to deliver CH's services.

Periodicals

Companies House publishes a periodical called "The Register", which is used to disseminate information about changes in company law, current prices for our services and details of new services, and information about our performance against published targets. It is distributed free to anyone who wishes to receive it, and published four times a year. The present annual cost of publication, including postage, is approximately £70,000 for a circulation of 22,000 per issue.

Executive Cars

There are no cars provided for staff, executive or otherwise. The costs of official travel by car are reimbursed by means of Treasury and Inland Revenue approved mileage rates. In certain cases, involving longer journeys, staff are encouraged to use hire cars where this is cheaper than standard mileage rates.

Specially Designed Logos and Stationery

The present CH logo was part of a single, integrated corporate design exercise undertaken in 1990, which included corporate stationery designs as well as the logo itself. It is not possible to separate out the design cost of the logo alone. The total design cost was £30,000.

The great bulk of our stationery costs arise from the printing and distribution of statutory forms and notes for guidance for companies. To try to answer your question, we have looked at our costs for standard A4 corporate letterhead stationery. We presently pay £320 per 10,000 sheets of 80gm 1 side, 2 colour paper. We understand that this is in fact less than that paid for comparable items by our parent Department, DTI.

Corporate Clothing

CH provides uniform clothing for all staff working in areas open to the public. Clothing is provided for 64 staff at an average cost per person of £105.

Small Businesses

Mr. Shersby: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those Government measures of particular help for small businesses introduced since May 1992.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Government measures introduced since May 1992 focus on the establishment of a network of Business Links, to bring together in partnership and in one location, all the key local business support providers.

Business Links will provide a range of integrated support services including advice on exports, innovation and technology and design. Sixty-nine Business Links are now open, with around 200 planned by the end of 1995.

Other measures include:

A new consultancy service which will offer both a diagnostic and consultancy service and a consultancy brokerage service for smaller firms.

The small firms training loans scheme, launched in June 1994, will help very small businesses pay for both training consultancy and training related to business objectives. The training initiative for small firms, which will start in April this year will enable businesses to develop, in house, the training skills of key workers.

Budget measures over successive years have encouraged both investment through the enterprise investment scheme and venture capital and trusts, and re-investment, changes to capital gains tax in businesses.

The issue of late payment of debt has been addressed in a variety of ways including the development of proposals for a British standard for prompt payment and further prompt payment requirements on Government Departments and their agencies.

Changes were introduced to the small firms loan guarantee scheme in 1993 to improve access to finance. These included offering established businesses 85 per cent. guarantee on loans up to £250,000 and reducing the premiums paid by borrowers.

Many of the reforms introduced under the deregulation initiative—for example, the small firms litmus test to assess the impact of any legislative proposals on the sector—are of particular benefit to small firms.

A new three-year programme for the small firms merit award for research and technology programme, which provides grants to small firms to help them with the development of new innovative products was announced this month. The related support for products under research programme continues to be available.

Regional Electricity Companies

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what meetings he has had with the regional electricity companies to discuss regional investment.

Mr. Charles Wardle: DTI Ministers meet representatives of the regional electricity companies from time to time to discuss a wide range of issues.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to meet the Director General of the Office of Electricity Regulation to discuss proposals for the regulation of foreign owned the regional electricity companies.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My colleagues and I discuss a wide range of issues with the Director General of the Office of Electricity Regulation from time to time.

Arms Exhibitions

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report,* column *593,* to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), if he will list for each overseas defence exhibition listed, the number of export licences granted to British firms to permit the temporary export of military technology for display.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information requested could be extracted only by examining the original licence application papers for all the relevant countries of destination for the periods in question; and this could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what steps are being taken to quantify the market price of electricity to which renewables are expected to converge under the NFFO programme;

(2) what steps are being taken to ensure that projects which are offered power purchase agreements under the NFFO programme have had cash flow forecasts certified as financeable by a reputable organisation;

(3) what steps are being taken under the NFFO programme, to provide an initial market for new and renewable technologies awaiting demonstration in Britain;

(4) what steps are being taken to provide wood with a separate technology band within which to bid under the NFFO programme.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Renewable energy non-fossil fuel obligation orders for England and Wales have been laid before Parliament in 1990, 1991 and 1994, in order to facilitate an initial market for those renewable energy technologies which are both technically robust and can be deployed at a cost which, with the benefits of experience under successive NFFO orders, can be expected to converge towards the market price for electricity. The obligations under these NFFO orders were set at 103 MW, 457 MW and 627 MW respectively, that is, a total of 1186 MW, convering hydro, large and small-scale wind projects, sewage gas, landfill gas, municipal and industrial waste, energy crops and agricultural and forestry wastes.

However, a proportion of the contracts made to meet the obligations under the orders are not expected to go forward to commissioning, for reasons such as failure to secure planning permission or project finance. As a consequence, the level of the relevant obligation will be reduced by an amount corresponding to the capacity of the projects terminated.

The Government are working towards 1,500 MW of new renewables-based generation capacity in the UK by 2000, mainly through NFFO-type arrangements.

Specific provision was made under the third renewables order, requiring the regional electricity companies in England and Wales to secure capacity based on gasification by partial combustion of energy crops and agriculture waste. Three projects with an aggregate capacity of 19 MW were awarded contracts, each of which is expected to use wood grown specifically as a fuel.

Over the next few months, the Government will be considering the possible size, shape and timing of the prospective fourth renewables order for England and Wales, taking account of representations made to them, including those on the market price for electricity from renewable sources, technology banding and the specific issue of an obligation for wood grown as a fuel. That fourth renewables order would be expected to be laid before Parliament in 1996, with a fifth order in prospect for 1998.

Judgment of the commercial viability of individual projects is a matter for the Director General of Electricity Supply.

Sizewell

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions his Department has had with Nuclear Electric about the construction of a gas station at Sizewell C.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My Department has had no such discussions with the company.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the nuclear installations inspectorate will be publishing the results of the long-term safety review on Sizewell A.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand that the Health and Safety Executive expects to publish the findings of the nuclear installations inspectorate's assessment of the Sizewell A long-term safety review in early April 1995.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what timetable he set for the construction of Sizewell B.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The CEGB's committed programme envisaged commencement of fuel loading 72 months after first permanent structural concrete. This was achieved within 73 months, on 17 September 1994. The committed programme envisaged full commercial power six months after completion of fuel loading.

Nuclear Waste Shipments

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the number of shipments of high-level waste from the United Kingdom if the current proposal for substitutions *(a)* is and *(b)* is not adopted.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This is a matter for the management of British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Konver Funds

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made on the distribution of Konver funds.

Mr. Eggar: Konver I grants worth £17.9 million were allocated in 1993 to projects across the country. The introduction of Konver II, intended to cover the period 1994 to 1997, has, however, been delayed throughout the EU.

On 1 July 1994 the European Commission published a notice on Konver II asking member states to send by 1 August lists of areas eligible according to stated job loss criteria; it would then issue a list for the whole EU by 1 October. The Government and other member states duly sent their lists; but the Commission, finding them too long, decided to modify the criteria. I wrote to Commissioner Millan complaining about this procedure on 21 November.

Eventually, on 21 December, the Commission drew up a "provisional" list of eligible areas and invited member states to propose additional ones. A revised provisional list is expected to be published in the *Official Journal* shortly.

Also on 21 December, the Commission announced that the United Kingdom would receive £79 million from Konver II.

Member states' programmes for the use of Konver II, including their proposals for additional areas, are now to be sent to the Commission by 1 March. The first applications cannot be considered until programmes have been agreed with the Commission, probably in the summer of 1995. Allocations and payments will follow thereafter.

Electricity

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the ratio of United Kingdom imports to exports of electricity supply via the electricity supply link between the United Kingdom and France for the four quarters of 1994; and what were the amounts involved expressed in gigajoules.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Imports of electricity from France, expressed in gigawatt hours and gigajoules, for the four quarters of 1994 are as follows:

	Gigawatt hours	*Gigajoules*[1]
Q1	4,252	15,307,200
Q2	3,981	14,331,600
Q3	4,313	15,526,800
Q4	4,394	15,818,400
Total	16,940	60,984,000

[1] Assumes 1 gigawatt hour = 3,600 gigajoules.

There were no exports of electricity to France during 1994.

Conference

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has yet finalised plans for the British Government's contribution to the February G7 conference on the information society.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I shall be attending the G7 ministerial conference on the Information Society in Brussels on 24 to 26 February. Ministers will hold discussions on three broad themes: the regulatory framework and competition policy; development of information infrastructure; and social, societal and cultural aspects of the information society. The conference will also launch a number of pilot projects to demonstrate the scope for international collaboration in different areas of the information society. In my discussions I shall in particular be emphasising the importance of liberalisation of infrastructure in reducing prices, in order to encourage a wider range of services to be provided.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Department, and the Department of Energy, has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Mr. Eggar: The following table lists the sales conducted by my Department, and the former Department of Energy, in which N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. were appointed and the roles to which they were appointed. The fees paid to firms appointed within the privatisation programme are commercially confidential.

Table of appointments (year of sale in brackets)

Adviser to the Department of Trade and Industry:

Cable and Wireless—feasibility study (1981)

British Coal (1994)

Adviser to the former Department of Energy:

Amersham International Ltd. (1982)

British Gas Corporation (1986)

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many contracts involving Taylor Woodrow International Ltd. were supported by export credits guarantee between 1 August 1983 and December 1988; and what was their total value;

(2) how many contracts involving British Aerospace plc were supported by export credits guarantee between 1 August 1988 and December 1992; and what was their total value;

(3) how many contracts involving *(a)* Kleinwort Benson Group, *(b)* N. M. Rothschild and Sons, *(c)* TSB Group, *(d)* Balfour Beatty Ltd, *(e)* the Weir Group plc and *(f)* National Westminster bank were supported by export credits guarantee since 1991; and what was their total value for each company;

(4) how many contracts involving Trafalgar House plc were supported by export credits guarantee between 1 February 1988 and December 1994; and what was their total value;

(5) how many contracts involving *(a)* Hiscox Syndicates Ltd., *(b)* J. Henry Schroder Wagg and Co., *(c)* Foster Wheeler Ltd., *(d)* Bovis Construction Group and *(e)* GEC were supported by export credits guarantee since July 1993; and what was their total value for each company;

(6) how many contracts involving Hawker Siddeley Group were supported by export credits guarantee between 1 April and December 1990; and what was their total value.

Mr. Needham: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to disclose information about commercial relations between ECGD and individual companies unless the relevant parties have agreed to this.

Exports

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of United Kingdom exports, including services and invisibles, was exported to *(a)* Germany, *(b)* France, *(c)* Belgium, *(d)* Denmark, *(e)* Austria, *(f)* Holland and *(g)* Luxembourg in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Needham: The available information is given in the table.

Share of UK visible exports and invisible credits

Per cent.

Year	*Germany*	*France*	*Belgium and Luxembourg*	*Denmark*	*Holland*
1988	8.0	7.4	4.4	1.1	5.1
1989	8.1	7.7	4.4	1.1	5.4
1990	8.9	8.0	4.5	1.2	5.6
1991	9.9	8.3	4.6	1.2	5.8
1992	10.4	8.0	4.5	1.3	5.7

Radioactive Wastes

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide a list of the proposals put forward by British Nuclear Fuels plc to manage radioactive wastes in the United States.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* Proposals to manage radioactive waste in the United States are a commercial matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc and the other companies concerned.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if BNFL is negotiating for radioactive waste management services, including reprocessing contracts, with India.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* This is a matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what date Scottish Nuclear and Nuclear Electric have to finalise their reprocessing contracts with BNFL.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* This is a commercial matter for the companies concerned.

Patent Office

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will allow Patent Office staff to bid for the marketing services of the Patent Office on equal terms with private firms; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will allow Patent Office staff to bid for the information technology services of the Patent Office on equal terms with private firms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answers 30 January 1995]:* As my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Mr. Trend) on 14 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *657–58*, when he confirmed executive agency status for the Patent Office, new targets will encourage the office to contract out activities wherever this is compatible with its statutory role and good value for money. In areas identified as candidates for contractorisation, bids for managing contracted-out services will be evaluated against benchmarks for the forecast cost and quality of service from in-house provision. In principle, management and staff bids could be allowable, although not on the basis that management and staff would remain civil servants if their bid was successful.

Security Equipment

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the companies to which export licences were granted for the export of electronic batons in the last five years; what assistance his Department is giving to British firms selling security and paramilitary products to Peru, Colombia and other countries in south America in 1995; and if British Aerospace was assisted in the sale of electro-shock batons to Saudi Arabia in the mid-1980s.

Mr. Needham: The first part of this question could be answered only at disproportionate cost. British firms selling to south American countries are eligible for the DTI's range of export services, but it is not possible to isolate those operating in the general areas identified. British Aerospace has denied both publicly and to my officials that electro-batons have been supplied by the company to Saudi Arabia.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has for further regulating the sale of equipment which can be used for and has been designed for use against persons in repressive conditions.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* I have no such proposals.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what evidence he has received that Hiatts equipment, manufactured in the United Kingdom, restricting body movements has been sold by United Kingdom companies and used by countries in the middle east;

(2) what evidence the Government have that oversize handcuffs manufactured in Birmingham by Hiatts and modified at a later stage have been used in conditions of torture.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answers 24 January 1995]:* I am aware of the allegations made in the Channel 4 television programme "Dispatches", screened on 11 January. Hiatts of Birmingham has denied such practices, both publicly and to my officials.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he intends to promote legislation for the regulation of the co-ordinated purchase of sensitive military equipment throughout the world by United Kingdom registered companies.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* No.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions Ministers and civil servants have visited the covert and operational procurement exhibition, held annually in Esher, Surrey.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* Officials from my Department have visited the COPEX exhibition although precise figures on the number of visits are not available.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total annual value of exports which can be used as shackles and leg restraints.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* There is a wide variety of equipment that could theoretically be used as shackles and leg restraints and it is not possible to answer the question as posed. My Department would not issue export licences for leg-irons.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions officials from his Department met that person calling himself John Clarkson or that person calling himself Frank Davies to discuss matters relating to defence equipment exports.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* The persons referred to in this question are fictitious names used by journalists appearing on the Channel 4 "Dispatches" programme on 11 January 1995. The makers of the programme did not contact my Department before transmission and a statement was provided.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions he has acted to prevent the export of equipment that can be used in torture in each of the last 18 months.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* None. I have not received any information about any such proposed exports.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions representatives of his Department have met representatives of IPS and CAZ in the last five years.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* It is not possible to answer this question on the information provided.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial support was given to Mr. Frank Scott to enable him to visit the far east for the purpose of selling electro-shock equipment.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* There is no evidence of ICL Technical Plastics Ltd., or Mr. Frank Stott of that company, receiving financial support for this purpose.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the British Overseas Trade Board has used public money to subsidise covert and operational procurement exhibitions related exhibitions overseas in each of the last five years.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* Over the last five years contributions towards exhibitors' costs have been made under the DTI's trade fairs support scheme in respect of six COPEX exhibitions in the United States of America.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions in the last 10 years trade and investment representations of SAS have met officials or Ministers from his Department.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* It is not possible to answer this question on the information provided.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them publish periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. Dorrell: As indicated in the respective agency framework documents, it is for the chief executives to respond on operational and managerial matters and their respective replies are reproduced.

In 1993–94, Historic Royal Palaces met or exceeded all its key performance targets including achieving a 2 per cent. target for an efficiency gain on running costs. For the same year, Royal Parks met all but one of its key performance targets, including achieving a 1.5 per cent. target for an efficiency gain on running costs. The one missed target was due to circumstances beyond the Royal Parks' control.

Prior to the creation of these two agencies, central functions were provided by the Department of the Environment. In view of the expenditure transfers between Departments when my Department was established in April 1992 and the provision of some central services on an allied basis without repayment, details of these could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Letter from David Welsh to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 25 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for National Heritage has asked me to reply to your Question about the changes in the operations and costs of managing the Royal Parks that have become necessary since we became a Next Steps Agency.

The Agency moved into the Police Station in Hyde Park. Since this building belongs to the Royal Parks, no rental is involved.

We required eight staff to provide personnel, registry and reception functions that were previously provided by the Department of Environment.

The Agency's logo cost £16,000 to design, and we spend £7,500 on supplying stationery for a year. We produce a brochure each year informing the public of the programme of free entertainment available in the Royal Parks. This cost £9,000 to produce and is available free to the public.

The Agency has no corporate clothing and has no executive cars.

Letter from David Beeton to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 26 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for National Heritage has asked me to reply to your question about the changes in the operation and costs

of managing the Historic Royal Palaces that have become necessary since we became a Next Steps Agency.

We have not acquired any headquarters building and have not acquired any additional support staff. We do not publish periodical journals and have no executive cars.

Our identities for each palace are based on a relevant Royal Coat of Arms.

Staff uniforms cost £150,000 a year (including Yeoman Warders, Jewel House Warders at Hampton Court and Kensington Palace and shop and ticketing staff).

The annual cost of specially designed stationery is £17,000.

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document "Forces and Ability".

Mr. Dorrell: The latest available figures show that 17 non-industrial staff employed by my Department and associated agencies identified themselves as disabled. This represents 1.6 per cent. of all staff. Of this total, three are registered disabled and 14 are not registered.

Electricity Companies (Sponsorship)

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions he has had *(a)* with Northern Electric and *(b)* with the other regional electricity companies about their sponsorship of regional arts and sporting events.

Mr. Dorrell: I have had no discussions with either Northern Electric or any other regional electricity company regarding its sponsorship of regional arts and sporting events.

Library and Information Commission

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress he has made towards creating the new Library and Information Commission.

Mr. Dorrell: The reaction since my predecessor announced in July 1993 his intention to draw up proposals for a co-ordinating body to advise Government on library and information issues has been very positive. Responses to the consultation document issued in February 1994 showed broad support for the proposals in the library and information community. Having regard to this, I announced in October 1994 that the Government would be proceeding with the establishment of the Library and Information Commission.

I have now appointed as the commission's first chairman, Mr. Matthew Evans, chairman of Faber and Faber Ltd. His appointment will run for three years until 31 December 1997 and will be renewable by mutual consent. Among many other qualities, Mr. Evans combines the cultural and economic awareness the library and information sector must encompass if it is, as the Government intend, to make a significant contribution to the success of organisations and individuals as the United Kingdom moves into the next century.

After further consultation with my ministerial colleagues and with Mr. Evans, I shall in due course announce to the House the remainder of my appointments to the commission, which I envisage will number around a dozen.

I can now confirm the formal terms of reference for the new commission, which state that it will:

> advise Government Departments representing the United Kingdom in European Union and other international policy-making bodies on the implications of their activities for library and information services;
>
> develop, in association with the relevant Government Departments as far as necessary to achieve consonance with Government policy, a strategy for research and development requirements in the library and information field, having regard to the needs and interests of all areas of library and information activity and of all parts of the United Kingdom, and secure the disbursement of the available funds in accordance with that strategy;
>
> advise on, and where necessary to draw the Government's attention to, the implications for library and information services, including the commercial information sector, of particular policy or technological developments;
>
> as necessary advise on and assist the Government in developing and keeping up-to-date library and information policies and support activity which gives effect to such policies;
>
> provide independent expert advice as necessary on specific issues referred to it by Government Departments or other relevant bodies;
>
> advise Government Departments which so request on co-ordinating, and avoiding unnecessary duplication between, information services of different types and assume such executive activities in support of this aim as the Government may specify and resources permit; and
>
> co-operate as it and the Government see fit with other relevant bodies.

The Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland have carefully considered the proposals to establish a new body. My colleagues in Scotland and Wales have concluded that, in view of the different traditions, statutory provisions, where appropriate, and the present organisational arrangements applying to Scotland and Wales, as well as existing mechanisms for co-operation, the remit of the new commission should not for most purposes extend to those countries. In the areas of international representation and research strategy, however, the commission's remit will be United Kingdom-wide. For each of these functions, the commission will operate primarily through sub-committees. The arrangements for these sub-committees, including their terms of reference and their representation of Scottish and Welsh interests, will be determined in consultation with my right hon. friends.

I shall, as proposed in the consultation document, shortly wind up the existing Library and Information Services Council (England). At the same time, in close co-operation with the local authorities, I shall be establishing a new advisory council to advise me on my responsibilities under the terms of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and in particular on public libraries in England.

Welsh Rock and Folk Music Council

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, columns *115-16*, if he will place in the Library a copy of his report from the Association for

Business Sponsorship of the Arts on the circumstances of the award to the Welsh Rock and Folk Music Council.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* No. The report was prepared for the use of my Department. Its conclusions will be taken into account by the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts in determining its response to the matters under review.

Arts Grants, Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list those cultural organisations which have received grants from the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts in Wales under the business sponsorship incentive scheme, which also received a grant from the sponsorship scheme run by the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority, S4C, and the Independent Television Producers Association, TAC.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* The information requested is as follows:

Theatre Bara Caws
Y Faner
Dalier Sylw
Ewrosgol
Creu Cof
Cwmni Dawns Camre Cain
Welsh International Film Festival
Wales Actors Company
Arad Goch
Hwyl a Fflag
National Film and Video Archive of Wales
Clwyd Arts and Exhibition Service
Taliesin Trust
Theatr Gorllewin Morgannwg
Barddas: y Gymdeithas Gerdd Dafod
Theatr Had
Model House Llantrisant
Rhiniog

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority concerning the issuing of a new guidelines on the channel's relationship with the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* Any guidelines governing the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority's relationship with the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts are a matter for the authority in the first instance. My Department will be discussing this however in the light of my consideration of the reports to which I referred in my answer of 24 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *115–16*.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority and of the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts concerning the grant given by the authority to the Celtic Film Festival, Zeitgeist Film Productions and the Society of Independent Television Producers of Wales.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* My Department is in touch with both organisations on matters relating to the operation of the business sponsorship incentive scheme in Wales.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

World Summit for Social Development

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the final preparatory committee for the world summit for social development which ended in New York on 27 January.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The final preparatory committee of the world summit for social development took place in New York from 16 to 18 January. It made considerable progress on the draft declaration and programme of action covering the three core issues of the summit: *(a)* the enhancement of social integration; *(b)* alleviation and reduction of poverty; *(c)* generation of productive employment. The draft texts will be finalised at the summit in Copenhagen from 6 to 12 March.

Chechnya

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Russian Government concerning the invasion of Chechnya; what consideration he has given to suspension of economic aid and trade contracts with Russia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Russians are well are of our concerns about their handling of the intervention in Chechnya and, in particular, at the appalling civilian casualties. Most recently, on 24 January, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wrote to President Yeltsin recognising that there are no easy answers to this deep-rooted problem, but pressing President Yeltsin to put an early end to the fighting; allow humanitarian relief; and work for a political agreement which allows the Chechen people to express their identity within the Russian Federation.

We have encouraged Russia to assist the Organisation on Security and Co-operation in Europe in its efforts to help find a solution to this tragic conflict. We fully support the OSCE's involvement. A senior British official was a member of the OSCE team which has just visited Chechnya. We are also assisting humanitarian relief efforts. The ODA has committed £1 million.

Our aim remains to support democratic reform in Russia. At present, we believe it would be counterproductive to suspend our assistance programmes. Those that would be the most affected are reformers who are feeling most beleaguered at present.

United Nations

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration has been given by his Department to structural changes in the UN, including the Security Council, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In our continuing efforts to improve the performance of the UN, we look at all aspects of the organisation, including structures. For example, we have played a leading role in the restructuring of the UN's peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts. We support the proposed enlargement of the UN Security Council and are playing an active role in the debate in New York.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Mr. Goodlad: No payments have been made to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. by my Department for privatisation programmes since 1979.

Burma

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his current policy towards Burma.

Mr. Goodlad: The situation in Burma remains of great concern. Our policy and that of our European Union partners is one of critical dialogue with the State Law and Order Restoration Council. We have made it clear that normalisation of our relations depends on progress in key areas, including human rights and political and economic reform.

Algeria

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current establishment of the United Kingdom embassy in Algeria; and what safety precautions have been taken.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are currently four diplomats at the embassy in Algiers. The staffing situation is kept under regular review in the light of the security situation there. The diplomats are protected by a team of nine Royal Military police. Major improvements have been made to the physical security of the embassy and staff accommodation.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about his current policy towards Algeria.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We deplore the escalating violence on both sides. We call for a wider dialogue involving all those who reject violence with a view to holding genuine elections during the course of this year. We call on the Algerian Government to continue implementing its International Monetary Fund—approved programme of economic reforms.

Lockerbie

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek information from the US Government about the reason why the US air force intelligence document relating to Pan Am 103 produced in 1991 was provided to the parties in a legal dispute relating to the destruction of the aircraft.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand that the document was released following a request under the United States Freedom of Information Act.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations have been made to the Government of Iran to seek information about Ali Akbar Mohtashemi following the production of the US air force intelligence document relating to Pan Am 103 in 1991;

(2) what representations were made to the Government of the Republic of Syria to seek information about terrorist groups following the production of the US air force intelligence document relating to Pan Am 103 in 1991.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None. As I indicated in my reply to my hon. Friend of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *332*, the allegation contained in the document was first made at an early stage in the Lockerbie investigation, was examined at the time, but no evidence has been found to substantiate it.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Mr. Edwin Bollier of the Swiss Company Mebo sought the opportunity to see the circuit board relating to the timing device in Pan Am 103; and whether permission has been given.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has repeatedly made it clear that it would not be proper to discuss communications between the prosecuting authorities and a potential witness in pending criminal proceedings.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

Mr.Goodlad: To my knowledge, there have been none.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them publish periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. Hague: The Department of Social Security has six next steps agencies: the Benefits, Contributions, Resettlement, War Pensions, Information Technology Services and Child Support Agencies. Each agency is set demanding annual targets for efficiency and quality of

service, and running cost budgets are tightly controlled and subject to specific efficiency savings targets. Direct comparisons between pre and post-agency performance are difficult to make because of change in work loads and the introduction of new work such as that of the Child Support Agency. It is, however, clear that there have been significant improvements as illustrated, for example, in the published evaluation reports on the Resettlement and Contributions Agencies.

Because of changes in work loads and work organisations, it is not possible directly to compare the numbers of support staff before and after the establishment of agencies. The other information requested on agencies' expenditure is in the table.

	Benefits Agency	*Contributions Agency*	*Resettlement Agency*	*War Pensions Agency*	*Information Technology Services Agency*	*Child Support Agency*
Headquarters buildings	Quarry [1]House purchased at a cost of [2]£54 million. No.1 Treyelyan Square has an annual rent of [2]£485,623	[3]None	[3]None	The Agency is moving in February to a new building on the Norcross site, built at a cost of [2]£12 million	[3]None	[3]None
Periodical journals	£528,000p.a	£64,000p.a	None	£10,000p.a	£90,000p.a	None
Executive car(s)	None	None	None	None	None	None
Specially designed logos	£11,900	£19,800	None	£13,574	Designed in-house at minimal cost	£58,750
Corporate clothing	[4]£4,117,810	[4]£18,235	None	None	None	None
Specially designed and corporate stationery	[5]£255,377	[5]£29,204	[5]£264	[5]£9,364	[5]£14,305	[5]£32,930

[1] Quarry House is shared with the NHS executive.
[2] There was a good business case for moving to new premises, and the moves will result in long-term savings.
[3] The Contributions, Resettlement, Information Technology Services and Child Support Agencies headquarters occupy sites that were part of DSS before the agencies were created.
[4] Figure given is total to date.
[5] Figure given is expenditure to date in the current financial year.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 19 December, *Official Report,* columns *929–30,* which posts were filled as a result of the employment of executive search agencies; which executive search companies were involved in this exercise; and what were the values of the individual contracts involved.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table.

Name of post	*Name of Executive search Agency involved*
Pensions Ombudsman	Price Waterhouse
Director of Resource Management and Planning	Price Waterhouse
Director of Procurement (not yet finalised)	Purchasing and Materials Management Services [PMMS]

The value of individual contracts is confidential.

Civil Servants

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document "Focus on Ability."

Mr. Hague: On 1 July 1994, the number of registered disabled people in the Department was 1,574. This represented 1.8 per cent. of all staff. Figures for the number and proportion of all disabled people employed in the Department are not yet available. We are still conducting surveys, but indications at this stage are that there are at least as many non-registered disabled people in the Department as there are registered.

Child Support Agency

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many complaints have been received by the Child Support Agency since its inception; how many complaints have resulted in financial redress; on what basis financial redress has been made; and if he will give details of the individual and total payments that have been made.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Dr. Tony Wright, dated 31 January 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security on complaints about the Child Support Agency.

From 5 April 1993 to 30 November 1994 the Agency recorded 29,621 complaints. No distinction is made between complaints against the operations of the Agency and those concerning child support legislation.

A special payment will be considered where a clear and unambiguous error by the Agency has resulted in an actual financial loss to the client. To the end of November, 16 such payments had been paid, totalling £1,148.46. This figure includes single payments of £310.00, £300.00, £172.39, £105.91, £100.00, £65.80, £25.00; two payments of £15.00, and six payments for various amounts less than £10.00.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Pensioners

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's estimate of the number of women aged *(a)* 60 to 65, *(b)* 65 to 70, *(c)* 70 to 75, *(d)* 75 to 80 and *(e)* over 80 years who have access to (i) only state benefits, (ii) state benefits and state earnings-related pension scheme, (iii) own occupational pensions, (iv) own private pensions and (v) benefits from deceased partners.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The available information is in the tables.

Table 1: Numbers of women pensioners with only state benefits, by age

Age	*60 to 64*	*65 to 74*	*75 to 79*	*80 and over*
Number	200,000	300,000	200,000	250,000

N.B: these figures are for benefit units so that the husband's income is taken into account for married women.

Table 2: Numbers of women pensioners with an Occupational Pension, by age

Age	*60–64*	*65–69*	*70–74*	*75 and over*
Number	500,000	650,000	600,000	550,000

Notes:

1. Due to sample sizes it has been necessary to merge age ranges from those requested.
2. Estimates are rounded to the nearest 50,000, they are based on small sample sizes and should be treated with caution.
3. Estimates are derived from the 1992 family expenditure survey and the 1991 GAD survey of occupational pensions.
4. SERPS is a state benefit and is therefore included in table 1.
5. Information on the numbers of women receiving private pensions is not available.
6. Separate figures for women receiving occupational pensions and benefits by virtue of their deceased husbands are not available. They are included in the information in table 2.

Privatisation Programmes

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Mr. Hague: The Department of Social Security has not engaged N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. in any capacity.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to its clients' interests.

Mr. Hague: To my knowledge, there have been no such meetings.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 24 November, reference 5/3644/109.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I wrote to the hon. Member on Friday 27 January 1995.

Appeal Tribunal Cases

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in the Liverpool area have appealed to a social security appeal tribunal against a decision that they have been found fit for work or work within limits; what percentage of appellants was successful; and if he will give the figures for those who were represented and those who were not with the corresponding success rates.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. The available information is in the table.

Appeals on invalidity benefit in the North West Region Year ending 1993

Lodged	3,775
Heard and Decided	1,754
In Appellant's Favour	56 per cent.
Representative and/or Representative and Appellant Present	882
In Appellant's Favour	76 per cent.
No Representative Present	872
In Appellant's Favour	36 per cent.

Source: The annual social security appeal tribunal statistics 1993 produced by the Government Statistical Service.

Government Actuary's Report

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has received the report by the Government Actuary on the operation of the Social Security Acts since 1985.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have today laid before the House a report that the Government Actuary has made on the operation of Social Security Acts between April 1985 and April 1990 in accordance with section 137 of the Social Security Act 1975. The report provides a detailed forward look into the next century of the possible future costs of benefits paid out of the national insurance fund and the contributions likely to be needed to pay for them. The report also takes account of proposals in the Pensions Bill and I welcome the extra information it provides to the debate.

HEALTH

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will order a public inquiry into improper payments made to chief executives and senior managers of NHS trusts in the last three years.

Mr. Malone: No. National health service trusts have powers under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 to determine the terms of their staffs' employment contracts. However, the Department has issued guidance to trusts—TEL(94)3—which makes it clear that they are expected to use these powers responsibly with regard to probity and value for money. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Surgical Procedures

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the number of surgical procedures carried out by persons not legally qualified to operate on patients in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to require all meetings of NHS trusts to discuss tendering to be fully minuted; and what assessment she has made of NHS trusts' compliance with European Community tendering regulations.

Mr. Sackville: No. Paragraph 8 of section 10 of the Public Supply Contracts Regulations 1991 already requires national health service trusts to prepare a record in relation to the award of all contracts and sets out the information to be recorded. We are satisfied that NHS trusts are fully aware of their statutory obligations under those regulations.

Tranquillisers

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the mental hospitals in the northern region in which there are patients suffering from involuntary tranquilliser addiction.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Waiting Times

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will carry out a study to determine the influence that private practice in the same unit or speciality has on the waiting list and waiting time for treatment in the NHS.

Mr. Malone: We have no plans for such a study.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those NHS trusts where, over the past 12 months, waiting times in accident and emergency departments have been reported as being longer than five minutes for an initial assessment and longer than two hours for treatment.

Mr. Malone: Information on the percentage of patients at national health service trusts who are seen and assessed within five minutes of arrival and accident and emergency departments for the three months ended March 1994 was published in "The Patients Charter Hospital and Ambulance Services Comparative Performance Guide 1993–94", copies of which are available in the Library.

Information on patients waiting longer than two hours for treatment in accident and emergency departments is not available centrally.

Herbal Remedies

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what restrictions she proposes on the sale to members of the public of herbal remedies and other products currently available without restriction in health shops.

Mr. Sackville: The existing Medicines Act 1968 provisions governing the sale and supply of herbal remedies will continue to apply.

Herbal products not covered by medicines controls may fall under the provisions of food safety legislation; there are no plans to change this position.

Private Health Care

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many beds there are in private hospitals;

(2) how many people are currently employed in the private health sector;

(3) how many beds there are in private nursing homes;

(4) how many people are currently employed in private nursing homes.

Mr. Sackville: On 31 March 1994, there were 11,371 beds in private hospitals and 165,021 in private nursing homes. Figures are not available for the total number of people employed in the private health care sector and in private nursing homes, but the number of nursing staff in private nursing homes was 154,688—Source K036 returns.

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the Departments and agencies for which she has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document "Focus on Ability".

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 5 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *85–87*. No single definition of disability is given in the Cabinet Office document "Focus On Ability".

Asthma, Rotherham

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current incidence of asthma amongst children under 10 years of age in the Rotherham district health authority; and what the figures were *(a)* in 1985 and *(b)* in 1975.

Mr. Sackville: Information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. John Neill, chairman of Rotherham health authority, for details.

Special Transitional Grant

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those local authorities which have failed to meet the requirement to spend 85 per cent. of the transfer element of the special transitional grant in the independent sector.

Mr. Bowis: Audited returns detailing community care spending in the independent sector by local authorities in 1993–94 were due to be submitted to the Department by 31 December 1994. Some returns are still outstanding and are being followed up through the Audit Commission.

Trade Union-financed Facilities

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many beds there are in the trade union-financed hospitals;

(2) how many beds there are in trade union-financed nursing homes.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected by the Department.

Consultants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of whether consultants are complying with their NHS contracts and whether private practice interferes with the function of the NHS or disadvantage non-paying patients.

Mr. Malone: National health service consultants are able to undertake private practice work as well as NHS work provided that it is not to the disadvantage of the NHS or NHS patients. NHS employers are responsible for ensuring that consultants are fulfilling their contractual commitments.

Care Workers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she intends to implement a compulsory register for all paid care workers.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) on 25 January, *Official Report*, column *254*.

Operations (Cancellations)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in which NHS trusts, over the past 12 months, it has been reported that operations have been cancelled on the day they were due to take place; and where, in such circumstances, patients have not been readmitted within one month.

Mr. Sackville: Information on the number of patients at national health service trusts who, having suffered two last minute cancellations, were not admitted within a month thereafter, is published, for the three months ended March 1994, in "The Patient's Charter Hospital and Ambulance Services Comparative Performance Guide 1993–1994", copies of which are available in the Library.

Single-sex Wards

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS trusts do not currently admit patients to single-sex wards if that is their wish.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answers of 21 November to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshaw (Mr. Morris), *Official Report*, column *29*, and of 11 January to the hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Mr. Trend), *Official Report*, column *145*, how haemophiliacs who may have received blood contaminated with hepatitis C will be traced for counselling and treatment if information is not centrally available to identify them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Blood products used in the treatment of haemophilia patients have been virally inactivated since 1985. Doctors treating these patients are aware that prior to this date blood products carried the risk of transmission of hepatitis C. We understand that the majority of haemophilia patients have been counselled and tested as part of the management of their condition.

Nurses

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of whether a sufficient number of people are qualifying as nurses and of the Royal College of Nursing report "Opening the Door".

Mr. Sackville: The number of training commissions required to supply an adequate number of newly qualified staff is determined by local employers, to ensure a good balance between demand and supply of highly qualified trained nurses. Regional plans to commission training places are monitored and overseen by the national health service executive.

We welcome the publication of the Royal College of Nursing report "Opening the Door" as it shows a healthy majority of both newly qualified and experienced nurses gain considerable job satisfaction from their posts and do not wish to work outside nursing.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses were trained in 1994; how many are expected to be trained in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 1997; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: In 1993–94 22,829 students started courses of nurse education. Confirmed figures are not yet available for 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97. Final figures for these years will be provided in due course in the annual reports of the English National Board of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting.

Cot Deaths

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the total number of recorded cot deaths in England and Wales for each of the past five years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table:

Cot deaths to infants and children aged under 5, England and Wales 1989–3[3]

Year	*SIDS*[1]	*Sudden infant deaths*[2]
1989	1,261	1,367
1990	1,156	1,246
1991	935	1,051
1992	515	579
1993 (provisional)	422	457

[1] Deaths where sudden infant death syndrome—International classification of Diseases 9th Revision 798.0—is the only cause mentioned on the death certificate.

[2] Deaths where "SIDS", "Cot Death", or similar terms, was mentioned with other causes on the certificate.

[3] The figures for 1989–92 are based on annual registrations. The figures for 1993 are based on occurrences.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of all recorded cot deaths in England and Wales in the last five years were attributable to *(a)* colds and bronchial conditions, *(b)* emissions from plastic bedding and *(c)* urine and its reaction with bedding.

Mr. Sackville: The causes of sudden infant death syndrome remain unknown and substantial Government-funded and voluntary sector research continues in this area. It is not possible to attribute incidence by the categories mentioned.

Camden and Islington Health Authority

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is taking to reduce waiting lists for elective surgery in Camden and Islington health authority.

Mr. Malone: It is for Camden and Islington health authority to ensure that the shortest possible waiting times are available to its resident population from the hospitals with which it has contracts, and to ensure that at the very least the maximum waits guaranteed under the patients charter are not exceeded.

Under the new patients charter which comes into effect in April we have reduced the maximum time patients will have to wait for elective surgery from two years to 18 months from the date of their going on to a waiting list.

Cannabis

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what conclusions she has reached on the use of cannabis under the Medicines Acts for the relief of pain for sufferers of multiple sclerosis or glaucoma.

Mr. Bowis: None, but I have seen and heard representations on this issue.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which her Department has engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Mr. Sackville: There are no such sums to report.

Royal Northern Hospital

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what future plans her Department has for the Royal Northern hospital, Holloway road, N7; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: None. The hon. Member may wish to approach Sir William Staveley, chairman of North Thames regional health authority, for information about the future of this site.

Reversal of Status Forms

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in each regional health authority in each of the past three years are recorded as having signed reversal of status forms from *(a)* private to NHS and *(b)* NHS to private.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Capital Allocations

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *14*, on capital allocations, if she will set out the undershoot on external financing limits at November 1994 by region.

Mr. Sackville: The external financing limits set for each trust are annual targets. Performance against them is measured at the year end and reported in trust annual accounts. External financing limits are equivalent to a cash limit on both revenue and capital expenditure by trusts. There is therefore no direct relationship between under or overshooting the limit and capital expenditure.

Young Carers

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of the number of children and young persons who are currently providing a substantial amount of remedial care to a sick, elderly or disabled relative.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) on 17 January *Official Report*, column *387*.

Patient Anonymity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for health (1) what arrangements she has made to protect patient anonymity in the collection of medical records for statistical purposes in the area of *(a)* mental health, *(b)* cancer and *(c)* other categories;

(2) what consultations she has had with the Data Protection Registrar concerning the future protection of patient anonymity in the collection of data from medical records for statistical purposes in the area of *(a)* mental health, *(b)* cancer and *(c)* other categories.

Mr. Sackville: Patient information is confidential.

Information given by patients concerning their health and treatment is protected by the common law, the Data Protection Act 1984 and the ethical responsibilities of health professionals. This applies even when the information is anonymised and aggregated.

We have recently consulted on draft guidance for the national health service on "Confidentiality, Use and Disclosure of Personal Health Information" which includes advice on the use of anonymised/aggregated information. Prior to the consultation we had a number of meetings and discussions with the Data Protection Registrar.

We have since received comments from the Data Protection Registrar on the use and disclosure of personal health information, which are being considered.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* Informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

Mr. Sackville: Officials receive representations about a wide range of matters. Central records are not kept of meetings with external organisations, and to the best of our knowledge no such meetings have taken place.

Waterborne Viruses

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been carried out by her Department into the health impacts of viruses in sea and river water.

Mr Sackville: The Government funded an extensive four-year research programme into the health effects of sea-bathing, which was published in January 1994.

The study concluded that bathing in water that met the current bathing water directive standards was not associated with overt infection or serious illness.

Capital Schemes

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date each individual capital scheme received external financing limit approval; on what date it received final approval after being tested for private finance initiative funding; and what was its value for each region since April 1994.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide a list of capital schemes that received initial external financing limit approval but were rejected for final approval after failing to achieve private funding under the private finance initiative in each region since April 1994, indicating the value of each scheme.

Mr. Sackville: No capital schemes have been rejected for failing to secure funding under the private finance initiative.

Long-term Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response she has received to the draft guidance on long-term care; when she expects to issue new guidance; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on 10 January, *Official Report*, column *118*, and to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 26 January, *Official Report*, column *343*.

Children (Residential Care)

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made by the support force for children's residential care since September 1993; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The support force for children's residential care has recently reported on its progress in its first year. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

This report demonstrates the significant progress made by the support force in its first year. It has worked in partnership with over 50 authorities and independent sector providers to help bring about improvements in residential care for children and young people.

Private Dental and Medical Insurance

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her Department's estimate of the number of people with the cover of private dental insurance, and of private medical insurance.

Mr. Sackville *[pursuant to his reply, 20 January 1995, c. 765]:* I regret that my previous reply is incorrect. It should read:

"Information on the number of people with private dental insurance and medical insurance is not collected by the Department."

Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the length of time allowed for general practitioners to obtain adequate training to judge on applications under the chronic bronchitis and emphysema regulations, and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: I have been asked to reply.

This Department has no responsibility for the training of general practitioners.

Assessments of disablement for prescribed disease D12—chronic bronchitis and emphysema—are made by independent adjudicating medical practitioners, all of whom are fully registered medical practitioners.

Prior to the introduction of PD D12 on 13 September 1993, the AMPs were given a training package approved by the DSS's senior medical advisers.

The training package consisted of:

(1) an introductory course of one day given by an expert in respiratory medicine;

(2) half-day refresher training in spirometry—FEV1 test;

(3) training in reading X-rays over a four-month period;

(4) training manuals taking six hours to assimilate the information.

The AMPs who assess PD D12 all have considerable prior experience in the examination and assessment procedures for industrial injuries and prescribed diseases.

EDUCATION

Public Bodies

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *722*, if she will list the 28 boards, authorities, committees and other public bodies and the total amount of public spending relevant to each body.

Mr. Boswell: The information given is the latest available.

Grant allocations to public bodies in FY 1994–95

	(£ million)
Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit	4.699
Centre for Information on Language Teaching[1]	0.832
Education Assets Board	0.118
Fulbright Commission	0.389
Funding Agency for Schools	237.026 (net)
Further Education Unit[2]	—
Further Education Staff College[2]	—
Further Education Development Association[2]	—
Further Education Funding Council (including 9 regional committees)	2,847.058
Higher Education Funding Council in England	3,436.079
National Council for Education Technology	5.391
National Youth Agency	1.394
Royal Ballet School	2.200
School Curriculum Assessment Authority	34.000
Special Educational Needs Tribunal	0.220

Grant allocations to public bodies in FY 1994–95

	(£ million)
Student Loans Company	16.638
Teacher Training Agency[4]	2.000
University Commissioners[5]	—
Yehudi Menuhin School	0.450

[1] In addition to the DFE grant, CILT will receive grant of over £100,000 from other government departments.
[2] The further education unit and the Further Education staff college ceased to be supported by the Department for Education after the end of the 1992–93 financial year, Government funding now falls under the FEFC budget.
[3] Government funding for the Further Education Development Association falls under the FEFC budget.
[4] The expenditure total of £2 million includes a small amount—£68,000—of preparatory expenditure prior to the establishment of the agency.
[5] The university commissioners ceased to be supported by the Department for Education after the end of the 1993–94 financial year. In the 1994–95 financial year provision of £25,000 was made in the Department's running costs for the residual work of the commissioners.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 722, if she will list the appointees of each of the 28 boards, authorities, committees and other public bodies, and what the remuneration was of the appointees.

Mr. Boswell: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which her Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Mr. Boswell: The Department has not commissioned N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. to undertake any work on privatisation.

Postgraduate Support Scheme

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which institutions or students are to lose funding as a consequence of the reduction in the postgraduate support scheme funding; what the level of the reduction is in total; and how much will be lost by each institution or student affected.

Mr. Boswell: Provision for the Department's postgraduate awards scheme will be reduced by 10 per cent. from 1995–96 to a total of £4.3 million.

From the academic year 1995–96, bursary support will be withdrawn from postgraduate courses as follows:

Journalism
University College, Cardiff
City University

Tourism
University of Surrey

Language studies
University of Bath
University of Bradford
University of Kent
University of Westminster

Art gallery and museum studies
University of Manchester
University of Leicester

The number of bursaries for postgraduate studies in librarianship and information studies in the academic year 1995–96 will be reduced by 10 per cent. at the following institutions:

University College Wales Aberystwyth
University of Central England
Thames Valley University
Leeds Metropolitan University
Liverpool John Moores University
Loughborough University
Manchester Metropolitan University
University College London
University of Northumbria
University of North London.

Students already on courses will not be affected.

It is not possible to give figures in respect of the financial effect on individual institutions or students since bursaries are means-tested and the circumstances of individuals vary significantly.

Lay School Inspectors

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what vocational training grants are available to individuals following lay school inspector courses;

(2) what expenses may be claimed by individuals training to be lay school inspectors.

(3) how many individuals have undertaken training to be lay school inspectors in England and Wales.

Mr. Forth: These are matters for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the independent Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

Mr. Boswell: There were no meetings between departmental staff and representatives of Ian Greer Associates on 26 January.

WALES

South Gwynedd Partnership

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will be meeting the hon. Members for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy and a deputation from the South Gwynedd Partnership.

Mr. Redwood: 21 February.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends visiting Meirionnydd Nant Conwy.

Mr. Redwood: I visited the hon. Member's constituency in September last year, and have no other

immediate plans to visit Meirionnydd Nant Conwy again in the near future.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hours he has spent in Wales during 1995.

Mr. Redwood: Information on my visits to Wales is not held in this format.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales to which categories of employee of county and district councils in Wales he expects the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 to apply during the reorganisation of local government.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made in Standing Committee A on 17 May 1994.

Footpaths

Mrs. Anné Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been spent or grant aided in each of the last three years for which figures are available by the Countryside Commission for Wales on the repair of eroded footpaths.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Countryside Council for Wales does not grant aid routine maintenance of public rights of way unless they are of national trail status. It did, however, pay grants of £320,000 in both 1992–93 and 1993–94 on the enhancement of the public rights of way network.

In addition to this, grant of £150,000 in 1992–93 and £240,00 in 1993–94 was paid toward the maintenance of national trails. In 1993–94, a further £32,000 in grant was paid on the development of a possible additional national trail. It is anticipated that similar sums will be paid in the current year 1994–95.

Milk Industry

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives his Department is adopting to assist the milk industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The milk industry in Wales benefits from a variety of schemes designed to help business and industry and to promote the efficient marketing of agricultural products. No special initiative is required.

Staff Commission for Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many meetings he or other Ministers have had with the Staff Commission for Wales in the last nine months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: One. The Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), met the staff commission on 14 November 1994 for its annual review meeting.

Dental Services

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many dentists in each Welsh family health services authority have stopped treating NHS patients in each year since 1992;

(2) how many dentists in each Welsh family health services authority have closed NHS registers to new patients in each year since 1992.

Mr. Richards: The information requested is not held centrally.

Delegations

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the attendance list of all those who were members of delegations received in the past six months by him, his fellow Ministers and his senior civil servants.

Mr. Redwood: This information is available only at disproportionate cost.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has not paid any money to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. in connection with privatisation programmes.

Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority concerning the timetable for the running down of the stores service in Gwynedd and the establishment of the new service in Clwyd.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place copies in the Library of his departmental letter of 24 January to consultees on the future management arrangements of the clinical side of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

Mr. Redwood: Copies of DGM(95)4 consulting on the future management arrangements of these clinical services have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority concerning the increase in the share out of savings offered to the Gwynedd Hospitals NHS trust to secure its agreement to the closure of the Ysbyty Gwynedd site on 31 March.

Mr. Redwood: None. There are no plans to close Ysbyty Gwynedd.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the current review of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority Department of contracting and capital in north Wales; and when he expects the review's findings will be published.

Mr. Redwood: These matters are currently the subject of discussions between the Welsh Health Common Services Authority and its customers. The outcome of these discussions advising the future handling arrangements is expected in the autumn.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had and proposes to have with the British Limbless Ex-Servicemens Association

concerning the proposed changes in the management arrangements for the artificial limb and appliance service.

Mr. Redwood: The British Limbless Ex-Servicemens Association is one of the organisations currently being consulted about the proposed management arrangements for the artificial limb and appliance service.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place a copy in the Library of each of the service evaluations of the financial and non-financial implications of change in the future management arrangements of the clinical side of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority by each clinical branch of the authority.

Mr. Redwood: Copies of the evaluation reports produced by each of the clinical services have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the assets considered liable to transfer from the Welsh Health Common Services Authority under the proposed new management arrangements for the artificial limb and appliance service Wales and Breast Test Wales; what arrangements he is making for an independent valuation of those assets; and what estimate he has made to date of the fair valuation of any or all of such a list of assets.

Mr. Redwood: Established procedures governing the transfer of assets will be implemented once decisions are taken about the future management arrangements of BTW and ALAS.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he has given to the group director of the artificial limb and appliance service Wales and the director of Breast Test Wales concerning the applicability of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 to the proposed changes in management arrangements; what provisions he has had for expert legal advice to be given to them in the discharge of their personnel function following new management arrangements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: It is for the Welsh Health Common Services Authority to take legal and other advice at the appropriate time.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he is proposing for the publication of the views of the staff of the artificial limb and appliance service and Breast Test Wales concerning the proposed new manning arrangements.

Mr. Redwood: Subject to individual confidentiality and requests being received, arrangements can be made to publish responses to the consultation exercise.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what arrangements he has made for separating those aspects of the artificial limb and appliance service in Wales which are regarded as suitable *(a)* for separating into three area-based services located at Rookwood, Morriston and Wrexham-Maelor hospitals and *(b)* only for a single site all-Wales provision under the options review for the clinical side of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority;

(2) what consultations he is undertaking with respect to the arrangements for ring-fencing of the sums repatriated to the district health authorities equivalent to those currently allocated for purchasing by the artificial limb and appliance service in Wales;

(3) what consultations he is carrying out on the length of time and detailed arrangements for ring-fencing the resources to be repatriated to district health authorities for the purchase of breast screening services;

(4) what is his current estimate of the time for further guidance on contracting for artificial limb and appliance service and Breast Test Wales services;

(5) what consultations he has had with the management of Breast Test Wales concerning the required time period for ring-fencing of the funding for purchasing breast cancer screening services after repatriation of those funds to district health authorities, arising from the need to complete and evaluate the first round national screening programme; and how long he has given them and other consultees to express views on the suggested length and administration of the protection period for the funding of the service;

(6) what are the arrangements for health authorities to consult each other with a view to setting up consortium or lead-purchasing arrangements for the artificial limb and appliance service; what consultation he has had with the management at the artificial limb and appliance service in relation to the pooling of purchasing arrangements; and what evaluation he has made of its benefits.

Mr. Redwood: Decisions on these issues will be taken in the light of the results of consultation.

Reversal of Status Declarations

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients in each health authority area, or other convenient sub-division, signed reversal of status declarations from either private to NHS, or NHS to private in each of the last three years.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally.

Patient Anonymity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what arrangements he has made for the protection of patient anonymity in the collection of data from medical records for statistical purposes under the proposed new management arrangements for the Welsh Health Common Services Authority;

(2) what consultations he has had with the Data Protection Registrar concerning the protection of patient anonymity in the collection of data from medical records for statistical purposes in the area of *(a)* mental health, *(b)* cancer and *(c)* other categories.

Mr. Redwood: Information given by patients concerning their health and treatment is protected by the common law, the Data Protection Act 1984 and the ethical responsibilities of health professionals. This applies even when it is anonymised and aggregated.

We have recently consulted on draft guidance for the NHS, "Confidentiality, Use and Disclosure of Personal Health Information", which includes advice on the use of anonymised/aggregated information. Comments have been received from the Data Protection Registrar which are being considered by health Departments.

The management arrangements for the Welsh Health Common Services Authority are still under review.

Breast Test Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will specify the time period within which trusts and prospective trusts can apply to administer the management arrangements for Breast Test Wales; what arrangements he has made to permit trusts and prospective trusts not currently involved in carrying out biopsies for Breast Test Wales to have equal status with Llandough NHS trust in applying for approval to manage Breast Test Wales; and what criteria he will use in evaluating the bids to manage the service.

Mr. Redwood: The consultation period on the future management of clinical schemes ends on 23 February. No restrictions have been imposed on consultees; bids for the management of Breast Test Wales will be assessed against their ability to maintain the quality, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the service.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *718*, if he will list the external financing limit for each of the NHS trusts in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: The external financing limit for each of the NHS trusts in Wales in 1994–95 is shown in the following table:

NHS Trust	*£000*
Glan Clwyd Hospital	787
Wrexham Maelor Hospital	5,185
Gofal Cymuned Clwydian Community Care	9,116
Llanelli Dinefwr	334
Carmarthen and District	2,419
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	1,172
Derwen	947
Nevill Hall and District	(1,247)
Gwent Community	2,667
Glan Hafren	1,876
Gwynedd Hospital	1,562
Gwynedd Community	3,399
Bridgend and District	4,066
Rhondda	(650)
East Glamorgan	2,653
Pembrokeshire	(494)
Powys Health Care	1,412
Llandough	6,907
Velindre	(55)
Swansea	3,808
Morriston	6,038
South and East Wales Ambulance	407
North Wales Ambulance	321
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance	176

Note: Brackets denote a negative external financing limit—this means that no new borrowing is required.

Blood Transfusion Service

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the management of the National Blood Transfusion Service Wales concerning the ending of the ring-fencing for the purchase of tissue-typing services from the blood transfusion service by health authorities.

Mr. Redwood: The management of the NBTS(W) were consulted prior to the decision to end ring-fencing for tissue-typing services.

Hospital Supplies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure that the capacity to replenish hospital supplies at short notice will be maintained after the proposed closure of the stores at Ysbyty, Gwynedd on 31 March.

Mr. Redwood: These are matters for the Welsh Health Common Services Authority and its customers.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Health Service Forms

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the total number of forms collected by his Department for health service administrative purposes in each of the past five years, as measured by the *(a)* number of different forms and *(b)* volume and number of actual forms collected.

Mr. Redwood: Annual figures are not available for the period requested. However, in 1993–94, I ordered a comprehensive review of 106 financial and statistical forms sent to the NHS in Wales by the Welsh Office. These returns consisted of around 220 pages in total and, taking account of the frequency of collection and the number of respondents, an estimated 6,800 completed forms were collected in 1993–94. As a consequence of the first phase of the review, 35 forms—47 pages in total—equivalent to some 1,300 completed returns, were discontinued.

A second phase of the review is in train and I expect to announce a further reduction in the form–filling burden on the health service in the near future.

Breast Screening

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of state for Wales what consultations he has had regarding the Welsh contribution to the United Kingdom-wide evaluation of the effectiveness of the screening in the diagnosis and treatment of and reducing the incidence of breast cancer, arising from the options review of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

Mr. Redwood: None. My Department is represented on the Advisory Committee on Breast Cancer Screening which promulgates advice on the United Kingdom evaluation of the breast screening programme. Breast Test Wales' contribution to the UK screening and evaluation programme will continue unchanged.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Calves

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what he is doing to develop alternatives to export for surplus calves from dairy farms.

Mrs. Browning: I hope that, over time, farmers can have a greater opportunity of finding more markets at home for their animals and that as much as possible of the export trade can be in meat. I met the Meat and Livestock Commission on 19 January to discuss these possibilities.

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the Departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document "Focus on Ability".

Mrs. Browning: On 1 July 1994, there were 146 registered disabled people among the non-industrial civil servants in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, including its agencies, representing nearly 1.5 per cent. of the total staff in post. In 1993, a voluntary survey of all staff, which achieved a 60 per cent. response, showed that between three and four times that number considered that they had a disability.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will cut journey times allowed for transportation of live animals for slaughter to six hours.

Mrs. Browning: We have no such plans.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what account is taken of travel in British waters in the journey times allowed for the transportation of live animals for slaughter.

Mrs. Browning: Time at sea counts as part of the journey time under the Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1994, except where the animals can be fed and watered on board the vessel.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what provision was made for the feeding, watering and resting after 15 hours of the livestock held on a ship at Brightlingsea on 19 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: The ship used was a fitted livestock vessel and the sheep were fed, watered and rested in their pens once aboard. The animals were accompanied on their voyage by a Ministry veterinary inspector who was satisfied with the facilities available and the arrangements made for the welfare of the sheep during the sea journey.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the occasions since 1 October 1994 when livestock animals have died while awaiting export from the United Kingdom or during the crossing to the European mainland, giving in each instance *(a)* the dates, *(b)* the numbers of animals involved, *(c)* the types of animals involved, *(d)* the causes of death and *(e)* the location where the animals died.

Mrs. Browning: The information requested is not available. Those responsible for export consignments are not under any statutory obligation to provide it.

Fishing (Swap Arrangements)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what requirements exist for British consultation and consent in swap arrangements made between other EEC Governments in respect of British waters.

Mr. Jack: As my reply to the hon. Member on 20 January, *Official Report*, column *736*, explained, the Commission must be notified when a swap has been agreed. The Commission then notifies all member states. There is no requirement for prior consultation with the member states in whose waters the quota may be fished.

Fishing (Irish Box)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what extra funding is available from the EEC for the costs of additional fishery protection efforts to control Spanish access to the Irish box from 1996.

Mr. Jack: Decisions on the detailed arrangements to apply from 1 January 1996 have yet to be made.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *738*, to the hon. Member for Southend, East, (Sir T. Taylor), what assessment he has made of the relevant financial benefits accruing to *(a)* the Irish Government and *(b)* Her Majesty's Government in respect of the arrangements for the Irish box.

Mr. Jack: Discussions have not yet reached a stage at which such an assessment could be made.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of the Spanish fishing vessels to be admitted to the Irish box have been inspected by British fisheries protection vessels for secret fish holds.

Mr. Jack: As I indicated in the reply given to the hon. Member on 20 January, *Official Report*, columns *735-36*, under the agreement reached at the December Fisheries Council it is for each member state to inform the Commission, by the end of March this year, of its proposed reference list of named vessels which may have access to the fisheries covered by the agreement. Access to the Irish box—excluding VIIa and VIIf N of 50°30'N—for Spanish vessels will not be permitted before 1 January 1996. From that date they will be subject to possible inspection by British fishery protection vessels when they are in UK waters within the Irish box and elsewhere in western waters.

Fishing (Norway)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what study he has made of Norwegian methods of access control and discipline in respect of foreign fishing vessels into Norwegian waters; and if he will make it his policy to introduce similar measures in British waters and to press for their acceptance by the EEC as a common standard.

Mr. Jack: Norwegian fisheries management procedures were extensively considered during Norway's accession negotiations. Within the EU, Council regulation (EEC) No. 2847/93 provides the framework for the effective and non-discriminatory enforcement of the common fisheries policy. At the December Fisheries

Council, it was agreed that further control measures should be adopted for western waters including provisions relating to the communication of vessel movements—hailing in and out—and the declaration of catch, to both flag and coastal states. These provisions are similar to those in force in certain Norwegian fisheries.

Fisheries Council

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the nations which participate in the EEC Fisheries Council, indicating which of them presently fish in *(a)* the Irish box, *(b)* area VII, *(c)* the North sea, *(d)* the channel and *(e)* British waters as defined by the Fishery Limits Act 1976.

Mr. Jack: The Fisheries Council consists of the Ministers responsible for fisheries in each of the 15 member states of the EU.

The following member states have quotas which may currently be taken in all or part of the areas listed:

(a) The Irish box: United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands.

(b) Area VII: United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Spain.

(c) The North sea: United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden.

(d) The English channel: United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Spain.

(e) British waters as defined by the Fisheries Limits Act 1976: United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, Sweden, Portugal.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what experiments have been performed involving feeding calves with BSE infected milk; and what results have been obtained.

Mrs. Browning: None. Other experiments have revealed that bovine milk contains no detectable BSE infectivity.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the dates of birth of the last five confirmed BSE cases in Somerset.

Mrs. Browning: The information requested is as follows. The exact date of birth for four of the cases is unknown.

1987
7 September 1987
Spring 1988
April 1988
April 1989

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has available on the numbers and circumstances of confirmed BSE cases born after 18 July 1988.

Mrs. Browning: As at 23 January 1995, 15,771 cases of BSE had been confirmed in cattle born after 18 July 1988. Of these 8,955 were born in 1988, 5,995 in 1989, 812 in 1990 and nine in 1991. The great majority of the born after the ban cases have probably been exposed to ruminant protein in feed. The normal range of incubation period makes it inevitable that further cases will be confirmed in some animals exposed to infected feed and born in the months following the feed ban. Although it is still possible that BSE can occasionally be transmitted maternally or horizontally, there is no unequivocal evidence that either has actually occurred.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Southwood committee's report on BSE in 1989 took into account the numbers of confirmed BSE cattle from after the feeding ban of July 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: Paragraph 6.2 of the report of the working party on BSE dated February 1989, stated that the estimate of the numbers of future cases of BSE contained in the report

"Assume that no new infections have arisen or will arise after 18 July 1988, when the ban on ruminant protein in feed became operative."

The great majority of the born after the ban cases have probably been exposed to ruminant protein in feed. The normal range of incubation period makes it inevitable that further cases will be confirmed in some animals exposed to infected feed and born in the months following the feed ban. Although it is still possible that BSE can occasionally be transmitted maternally or horizontally, there is no unequivocal evidence to indicate that either has actually occurred.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the number of BSE cases slaughtered and confirmed during 1994.

Mrs. Browning: The provisional figure for the number of suspect BSE cases slaughtered in 1994 is 28,257. The number of cases confirmed in 1994 was 25,578.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made towards rapid detection of cattle infected with BSE prior to their final encephalopathic clinical illness.

Mrs. Browning: Research is in progress to permit more accurate diagnosis of BSE in the clinically suspected live animal. Studies include detection by post mortem and laboratory test of changes in the concentration of metabolites in urine, proteins in cerebrospinal fluid and detection of PrP peripheral tissues. None is sufficiently advanced to be of immediate use.

Another study, based on work already published in the *Veterinary Record* by Austin and Simmons—27 March 1993, 132, 324–325—involves field trials where monitors are attached to cattle for detection of changes to heart and rumination rates. These studies are still in progress but will not result in instant diagnosis. It is expected that monitors would need to be attached to cattle for several hours if they are to be a valuable diagnostic indicator. They will only be of value for cases where clinical diagnosis is in doubt. It will not be feasible to use such equipment on all suspect cases.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* renderers, *(b)* feed compounders and *(c)* farmers have been prosecuted for contravening BSE regulations annually since 1988.

Mrs. Browning: There have been two prosecutions taken by the local authorities concerned under the Animal Health Act 1981 for contravening BSE regulations since 1988, one in 1991, the other in 1992.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the results of the vertical experiment, identified within the Southwood report at paragraph 8.1, will be published.

Mrs. Browning: The animal experimental part of the cohort study in maternal transmission in BSE is expected

to be completed at the end of 1996. Results of the study are expected to be available by mid-1997.

Interim observations of this study were reported in *Hansard* on 12 December 1994, columns *523–24*.

EU Scientific Veterinary Committee

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the United Kingdom representatives on the EU Scientific Veterinary Committee.

Mrs. Browning: The following is a list of United Kingdom members of the European Commissions's Scientific Veterinary Committee:

Mr. R. Bradley
Dr. D. J. Alexander
Dr. A. M. Johnston
Dr. R. J. Gilbert
Prof. D. Broom
Prof. J. Webster

The Commission appoints experts to be members of the various EC expert committees. These members do not represent their respective member states when participating in the work of the committees.

Cattle Semen

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what volume of cattle semen from United Kingdom herds was exported to *(a)* New Zealand, *(b)* Australia and *(c)* Canada, annually, from 1992 to 1994.

Mrs. Browning: The information requested in respect of exports from Great Britain is set out in the table. The figures are based on the expected number of doses to be exported included in applications to the Department for official export health certification. It is possible that quantities actually exported differ slightly.

Year	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Destination			
New Zealand	—	5,933	10,653
Australia	2,500	—	200
Canada	8,107	5,371	4,495

Offal Disposal

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has available to identify the routes of disposal for specified offals from cattle prohibited from entering human food in November 1989.

Mrs. Browning: The Bovine Offal (Prohibition) Regulations 1989, which came into effect on 13 November 1989, prohibited the use of specified bovine offals, as defined, in food for sale for human consumption.

The SBO controls, which are under review at present, require, subject to certain exceptions, that SBO must be sterilised or stained at the slaughterhouse. Movement permits are required for the removal of SBO from the slaughterhouse for disposal. The movement of protein material derived from SBO—after rendering—is prohibited except under licence for incineration or burial.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the decision of 30 June 1994 to remove intestines and thymuses from calves under six months has been reported to EU member states.

Mrs. Browning: The European Commission and individual member states were informed of the decision on the 30 June 1994, and official notification to the commission under the technical standards directive—83/189/EEC—was made on 26 July 1994.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Ministry has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Mr. Jack: From records held centrally, N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. has not undertaken any work on privatisation programmes in which the Ministry has been engaged since 1979.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

Mr. Waldegrave: To my knowledge, officials from this Department have had no such meetings.

Shellfish

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those inshore and estuarial fisheries where the collection of shellfish for commercial purposes has been banned because of the level of viral and faecal matters in seawater.

Mr. Jack: Since 1 January 1993 single market legislation requires all shellfish growing areas in the Community to be classified according to microbiological criteria. The classification of production areas as A, B or C carries specific requirements for the marketing of the shellfish—bi–valve molluscs.

A areas—molluscs can be harvested for direct human consumption.

B areas—molluscs can go for human consumption after purification in an approved plant, or after relaying in an approved relaying area, or after an EU approved heat treatment process.

C areas—molluscs can go for human consumption, only after relaying for at least two months in an approved relaying area whether or not combined with purification, or after an EU approved heat treatment process.

Molluscs must not be marketed from areas that are not classified, or fall outside the criteria.

Shellfish growing areas are monitored continuously by local food authorities. The results for England and Wales are collated by the Ministry's fish disease laboratory at Weymouth and the classification is published annually. The latest classification, which contains a list of designated prohibited areas, was issued on 4 October and a copy is in the Library of the House.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them published periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. Waldegrave *[pursuant to his reply, 26 January 1995, c. 358–61]:* The letter to the right hon. Member from the chief executive of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate stated that he would write to the right hon. Member when the information on the cost of the VMD logo was available.

I understand that the VMD has now written to the right hon. Member. The text of the letter is as follows:

Letter from C. J. Lawson to Gerald Kaufman, dated 27 January 1995:

I am now able to let you have the information about the costs incurred in the design of the Directorate logo, which was not available when I wrote to you on 24 January.

The design costs were £360 + VAT.

I am very sorry that I could not let you have this in my original letter and regret any inconvenience that may have been caused.

Farm Incomes

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the level of farm incomes in 1994.

Mr. Waldegrave *[pursuant to his reply, 26 January 1995, c. 356]:* Total income from farming is estimated to have risen by 4.4 per cent. in real terms in 1994 compared with 1993. This is further evidence that the industry is responding well to common agricultural policy reform. 1993 saw a very large increase in agricultural income and I am pleased that overall there has been a further improvement in 1994. Detailed estimates of income, output and productivity of United Kingdom agriculture in 1994 were published this morning and have been placed in the Library of the House.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements;

(2) on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 25 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *197*. Ministers and officials receive representations about a wide variety of matters, but the information requested is not collected.

SCOTLAND

Health Care International

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to submit Health Care International hospital Clydeside to independent audit in respect of losses to public funds.

Mr. Stewart: At the request of the Public Accounts Committee, the National Audit Office is currently preparing a factual memorandum on the public sector funding of the Health Care International project. In preparing this memorandum, the NAO has had full access to departmental records on the HCI project and the full co–operation of my right hon. Friend's officials.

The receiver has recently signed an agreement in principle with a preferred bidder for the continued operation of the Clydebank facility and there is therefore every possibility that the project will yet yield the economic development and job creation benefits which the public sector funding was designed to secure.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the company that takes over Health Care International in Clydebank will be eligible for regional selective assistance; what promises have been given to the receiver on this matter; and what are the conditions for the release of any grant assistance.

Mr. Stewart: If a new investor were prepared to take the project forward, there is no reason in principle why consideration should not be given to transfer of the balance of the existing offer. Such a transfer would be subject to appropriate conditions and be based upon the project being taken forward as previously envisaged. No promises have been given to the receiver on this matter. If the offer was transferred, the unpaid balance of grant would be released in line with the job targets which would otherwise have applied to HCI.

Employment (Children)

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to include clauses on child employment in the forthcoming Children (Scotland) Bill.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are no plans to include provisions relating to the employment of children in the Children (Scotland Bill). The Government are committed, however, to making changes in the regulation of employment of children in line with the European Community directive on the protection of young people at work. The Scottish Office Education Department and the Department of Health are currently consulting education authorities about this.

Student Finance

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what would be the full amount of a student loan to be repaid, assessing the current rate of interests, if a student currently in the first year of a three-year course applied for the maximum loan in each of these years; and what is

his forecast for the total loan for a three-year course beginning in 1995 and subsequent years for which calculations on present information can be made.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The figures requested are set out in the table. In order to estimate them it has been necessary to make certain assumptions, the basis for some of which will be subject to review from time to time.

The main assumptions used in estimating the figures are:

(i) The move to broad parity between grants and loans for student maintenance will continue and will be achieved in academic year 1996–97;

(ii) the value of the student maintenance provision will be increased in line with forecast price increases;

(iii) movements in the retail prices index will be consistent with those underlying the Budget statement in November 1994;

(iv) the students concerned are studying away from home outwith the London area; and

(v) repayments commence in the April following completion of the course.

Table 1: Total level of debt for student on a three year course

Course beginning in academic year:	*Estimated total debt as at April following graduation*
1994–95	£4,000
1995–96	£4,500

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the absenteeism rate for the Lord Advocate's Department in each year since 1991.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The average number of working days lost per staff year due to sickness is as follows:

1994: 9.6
1993: 8.1
1992: 6.4
1991: 9.6

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the absenteeism rate for *(a)* his Department, *(b)* Historic Scotland, *(c)* the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency, *(d)* the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency, *(e)* the Register of Scotland, *(f)* the Scottish Office Pensions Agency, *(g)* the Scottish Prison Service, *(h)* the Scottish Record Office and *(i)* the Student Awards Agency in each year since 1991.

Mr. Lang: The average number of working days lost per staff year due to sickness is as follows for:

a. The Scottish Office—excluding SPS;

b. The Scottish Prison Service Agency—SPS; and

c. The Secretary of State's Executive Agencies of Registers of Scotland and the Scottish Record Office—SRO:

	The Scottish Office (excluding SPS)	*SPS*	*ROS*	*SRO*
1993	10.3	15.3	15.9	10.1
1992	8.9	12.6	15.0	7.2
1991	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Information on the disaggregation of the Scottish Office, excluding SPS, total into the core and each of its agencies is not readily available.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of sheep scab there were in each year since 1990 and in each month for 1994.

Sir Hector Monro: Official records on the number of sheep scab cases in Scotland are not available for the period following the deregulation of compulsory controls in 1992. The number of confirmed cases in the preceding three years were as follows:

1990: 4
1991: 5
1992 (to 30 June): 17

In the early part of last year, industry reports suggested a growing incidence of sheep scab throughout Great Britain and a surveillance exercise was carried out at sales and markets during the spring of 1994. In Scotland, this showed that sheep scab was present throughout the country, although the incidence related to flock numbers was relatively low.

The Government carried out an extensive poster and leaflet campaign in the autumn of 1994 to urge farmers to dip their sheep and to remind them of their welfare responsibilities. Surveillance at markets was also stepped up and a further survey of the incidence of the disease will be made in spring 1995.

Energy Recycling, Airdrie

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will outline the criteria used to approve the energy recycling scheme proposed by Shanks and McEwan Ltd. for the generation of energy from methane gas from the Greengairs landfill site near Airdrie;

(2) if he will outline the criteria used to turn down the energy recycling scheme proposed by Monklands district council for the generation of energy from methane gas from the Dalmacoulter landfill site in Airdrie.

Mr. Steward: In setting the size of the waste-to-energy band within the Scottish renewables obligation, my right hon. Friend accepted the advice of the Director General of Electricity Supply that only those projects bidding at less than 4.2p per unit generated should be supported.

Dental Services

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much additional expenditure each health board has incurred as a result of dentists de-registering patients following the changes in their pay structure implemented by the Scottish Office in October 1990; and how much of this expenditure has been reimbursed to them by the Scottish Office.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 26 January 1995, *Official Report*, columns *346–48*, giving expenditure on general dental services over the past five years by each health board. It is not possible to to attribute changes in expenditure to specific causes. All legitimate costs incurred in providing general dental services are met from central funds.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which health boards have emergency dental services; when these dental services were established; how much it has cost to provide these services; and how many patients have received treatment from this

emergency dental service in each of the last five financial years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Since 1990, general dental practitioners have been responsible for providing emergency dental treatment for their own registered patients. Health boards may also set up emergency dental services to provide treatment out of hours, at weekends and on public holidays where necessary, using general dental practitioners and/or community dental staff. The table shows which Scottish health boards operate formal emergency dental services and when these services were established. It is not possible to identify separately the cost of providing emergency dental services from the overall costs of the general dental service. Information is not held centrally on the number of patients who receive treatment under emergency dental services.

	Emergency dental services available	*When services established*
Argyll and Clyde	—	—
Ayrshire and Arran	yes	1982
Borders	yes	October 1990
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—
Fife	yes	1989
Forth Valley	yes	1986
Grampian	yes	1982
Greater Glasgow	yes	1982
Highland	—	—
Lanarkshire	—	—
Lothian	yes	1977
Orkney	yes	Pre-October 1990
Shetland	yes	Pre-October 1990
Tayside	yes	1982
Western Isles	—	—

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many patients were de-registered by their dentists in the financial year 1993–94; how many patients have been de-registered by their dentists in the financial year 1994–95 so far; and how many dental practices were involved in these de-registrations in each health board area in Scotland;

(2) how many patients have been de-registered by their dentists; and how many patients in each of these years were still in receipt of dental treatment, in each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Formal arrangements for patients to be registered with a dentist were introduced in October 1990. Information supplied by health boards about de-registrations since that date is contained in the table. It is not possible to identify individual patients de-registered or to establish whether each subsequently received treatment from another dentist.

	October 1990–March 1991	
Health Board	*Number of patients de-registered*	*[1]Number of dentists involved*
Argyll and Clyde	3	1
Ayrshire and Arran	—	—
Borders	1	1
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—
Fife	1	1
Forth Valley	—	—
Grampian	—	—
Greater Glasgow	7	5
Highland	4	3
Lanarkshire	4	4
Lothian	18	2
Orkney	—	—
Shetland	—	—
Tayside	n/a	n/a
Western Isles	—	—

n/a—not available.
Notes:[1] Number of dentists involved in de-registration in a particular year.

	April 1991–March 1992	
Health Board	*Number of patients de-registered*	*[1]Number of dentists involved*
Argyll and Clyde	25	2
Ayrshire and Arran	14	10
Borders	11	4
Dumfries and Galloway	11	2
Fife	—	—
Forth Valley	42	12
Grampian	9	5
Greater Glasgow	41	36
Highland	19	12
Lanarkshire	70	10
Lothian	101	21
Orkney	—	—
Shetland	—	—
Tayside	n/a	n/a
Western Isles	—	—

n/a—not available.
Notes:[1] Number of dentists involved in de-registration in a particular year.

	April 1992–March 1993	
Health Board	*Number of patients de-registered*	*[1]Number of dentists involved*
Argyll and Clyde	2,241	14
Ayrshire and Arran	1,309	11
Borders	1,432	4
Dumfries and Galloway	4,518	10
Fife	295	32
Forth Valley	201	23
Grampian	257	21
Greater Glasgow	579	45
Highland	210	24
Lanarkshire	252	29
Lothian	483	23
Orkney	—	—
Shetland	—	—
Tayside	[2]206	[2]29
Western Isles	37	4

Notes:[1]Number of dentists involved in de-registration in a particular year.
[2]From July 1992.

	April 1993–March 1994	
Health Board	*Number of patients de-registered*	*[1]Number of dentists involved*
Argyll and Clyde	42	7
Ayrshire and Arran	400	13
Borders	683	4
Dumfries and Galloway	1,388	10
Fife	417	21
Forth Valley	63	18
Grampian	179	18

Health Board	April 1993–March 1994 Number of patients de-registered	[1]Number of dentists involved
Greater Glasgow	339	49
Highland	73	24
Lanarkshire	145	25
Lothian	1,625	17
Orkney	—	—
Shetland	—	—
Tayside	57	11
Western Isles	16	4

Notes:[1] Number of dentists involved in de-registration in a particular year.

Health Board	April 1994–December 1994 Number of patients de-registered	[1]Number of dentists involved
Argyll and Clyde	—	16
Ayrshire and Arran	65	17
Borders	41	4
Dumfries and Galloway	724	16
Fife	439	24
Forth Valley	184	—
Grampian	140	35
Greater Glasgow	893	87
Highland	67	32
Lanarkshire	47	57
Lothian	650	22
Orkney	—	—
Shetland	—	—
Tayside	361	48
Western Isles	—	—

Notes:[1] For 1994–95 the figures show the running total of dentists involved in de-registration from July 1992 to December 1994.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment the Scottish Office has made of the impact of de-registration of patients on the dental health of the overall population.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of patients registered with general dental practitioners has decreased by less than 1 per cent. over the last 12 months from 2,650,925 to 2,632,878. Patients can be de-registered by their dentists for a variety of reasons. It is not possible to relate this information directly to the level of dental health in Scotland.

NHS Helpline

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *466*, how many *(a)* interactive and *(b)* non-interactive phone calls were made to the NHS helpline up until 12 January.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total number of interactive and non-interactive calls received by the NHS helpline between 29 October 1992 and 12 January 1995 is listed in the table.

	Interactive	Non-interactive	Total
29 October–20 November 1992	573	186	759
21 November–18 December 1992	315	395	710
19 December–15 January 1993	383	291	674
16 January–12 February 1993	973	330	1,303
13 February–12 March 1993	621	519	1,140
13 March–9 April 1993	714	500	1,214
10 April–7 May 1993	472	362	834
8 May–4 June 1993	539	436	975
5 June –2 July 1993	579	549	1,128
3 July–30 July 1993	647	589	1,236
31 July–27 August 1993	366	495	861
28 August–24 September 1993	323	478	801
25 September–22 October 1993	420	639	1,059
23 October–19 November 1993	319	446	765
20 November–17 December 1993	285	359	644
18 December–14 January 1994	256	305	561
15 January–11 February 1994	543	413	956
12 February–11 March 1994	524	515	1,039
12 March–8 April 1994	346	444	790
9 April–6 May 1994	653	512	1,165
7 May–3 June 1994	398	426	824
4 June–1 July 1994	566	714	1,280
2 July–29 July 1994	360	844	1,204
30 July–26 August 1994	430	626	1,056
27 August–23 September 1994	734	398	1,132
24 September–21 October 1994	4,031	337	4,368[1]
22 October–18 November 1994	5,090	1,554	6,644[1]
19 November–16 December 1994	2,003	428	2,431
17 December–12 January 1995	514	566	1,080
Total	23,977	14,656	38,633

[1] Corrected and updated figures.

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidelines exist for the declaration of business interests by the directors of local enterprise companies in Scotland; what interests they are required to declare; and what scrutiny procedure exists for these declared interests.

Mr. Stewart: The local enterprise companies are required by their operating contracts with Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to maintain a register of directors' interests; to make that register open for public inspection; and to have in place procedures designed to avoid potential conflicts of interest. The approval and monitoring of the local enterprise companies' conflict of interest procedures is an operational matter for the enterprise bodies and I have asked their chairmen to write to the hon. Member.

Long-term Care

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many NHS continuing care beds each health board in Scotland plans to close from 1 April 1994 in *(a)* learning disabilities, *(b)* psychiatric, *(c)* geriatric, *(d)* psycho-geriatric and *(e)* physical disabilities; over what timescales the closures will take place; and if he will make a statement on Government targets in these areas.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are no centrally imposed targets for long-stay bed provision in the NHS. The pace of change is directed by patient needs. The organisation of long-stay care and care services in the community are determined by continuous joint assessment of local needs involving health boards and local authorities. The aim is to secure the most effective package of services, both in hospital and the community, that meet the specific needs of patients and carers.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been transferred from each health board in Scotland to local authorities under resource transfer arrangements in respect of reductions in NHS continuing care beds in *(a)* learning disabilities, *(b)* psychiatric, *(c)* geriatric, *(d)* psycho-geriatric and *(e)* physical disabilities in each year since 1991; what is his assessment of the adequacy of the level of resource transfer to local authorities; and what proportion of the money saved by health boards will be transferred to local authorities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on money transferred from health boards in Scotland to local authorities has only recently been collected centrally and is available for the period 1993–94 onwards. The data provided do not include an analysis of the different categories requested. The latest information available is given in the table:

Health board	*Resource transfer 1993–94 £000*	*Estimated resource transfer 1994–95 £000*
Argyll and Clyde	—	1,465
Ayrshire and Arran	642	1,529
Borders	—	608
Dumfries and Galloway	119	857
Fife	1,018	1,822
Forth Valley	987	2,129
Grampian	2,404	3,216
Greater Glasgow	399	466
Highland	549	1,519
Lanarkshire	778	2,105
Lothian	590	3,926
Tayside	604	1,401
Orkney	—	163
Shetland	—	101
Western Isles	144	147
Total	8,234	21,454

In addition to the above, health boards paid £10.3 million to other agencies in 1993–94 for non-NHS care services, and are estimating £9.6 million for 1994–95.

Resource transfers are to be regarded as a contribution towards the cost of alternative care services in the community. Health boards' contributions will reflect what can be afforded from the savings achieved through contractions in long-stay bed provision after any necessary reinvestment in alternative health care services. The level of reinvestment is very much dependent on local circumstances and need. It is not possible, therefore, to draw ready conclusions about either the adequacy or proportion of savings eventually transferred. I am, nevertheless, encouraged with the expected level of increase for 1993–94 to 1994–95.

Development Corporations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *467*, if he will list for each development corporation of Scotland *(a)* how many of their properties are currently leased to housing associations and *(b)* the name of the housing association in each case.

Mr. Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to his question on 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *467-68*.

Footpaths

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent or grant aided in each of the last three years for which figures are available by Scottish National Heritage on the repair of eroded footpaths.

Sir Hector Monro: Expenditure on footpath repairs in each of the last three years has been:

1991–92: £277,655—Countryside Commission for Scotland
1992–93: £292,024—Scottish Natural Heritage
1993–94: £272,566—Scottish Natural Heritage

These figures exclude some expenditure on paths which is aggregated with other works to improve a recreation site or facility. They are grant costs at rates varying from 50 per cent. to 85 per cent. according to location of site and the range of organisations which are contributing to the costs.

SNH also runs a footpath management project with aims of promoting more action on path management and encouraging high standards of work. This project is funded through SNH's research budget at around £20,000 per annum. In addition, SNH has undertaken surveys of the need for path management to establish better the scale

of the problem. Surveys of this kind have been undertaken in Wester Ross and are under way in the Cairngorms.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the number of buildings currently listed in category A and in category B;

(2) how many applications have been received from the owners of listed buildings for financial assistance towards the cost of repairs and maintenance in each of the last five financial years; and what has been the total value of the grants awarded.

Sir Hector Monro: The subjects of the questions relate to matters undertaken by Historic Scotland. I have asked its director and chief executive, Mr. Graeme Munro, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graeme N. Munro to Mr. Robert Maclennan, dated 31 January 1995:

You have tabled two Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Scotland for Written Answer on 31 January. As these Questions relate to operational matters undertaken by Historic Scotland, I have been asked to provide the information you are seeking. The terms of this letter will be reproduced in the Official Report and a copy of it will also be deposited in the Library of the House.

I shall answer each Question in the order in which it appears on the Order Paper.

Question: What is the number of buildings currently listed in category A and in category B.

As at 25 January 1995, the number of buildings listed at category A was 2,987 and the number of buildings listed at category B was 25,093.

Question: How many applications have been received from the owners of listed buildings for financial assistance towards the cost of repairs and maintenance in each of the last five financial years; and what has been the total value of the grants awarded.

The total number of historic building repair grant applications received from owners of listed buildings and buildings situated within outstanding conservation areas over the past five financial years is as follows:

1989–90 116
1990–91 103
1991–92 62
1992–93 54
1993–94 97
Total 432

The total value of historic building repair grants awarded for the last five complete financial years is as follows:

1989–90 £8,848,360
1990–91 £11,371,775
1991–92 £12,317,845
1992–93 £9,836,580
1993–94 £14,644,413
Total £57,018,973

The relationship between the figures in the above tables warrants some further explanation. The award of a grant can take place in the same financial year in which the application was received, but that is unusual given the importance of a careful evaluation by the owner, his professional adviser and Historic Scotland of the building and its needs so that a comprehensive specification for repairs can be agreed. What is more, the amount of grant awarded for what are usually significant capital projects normally is paid over two or more financial years and payments do not flow until recognised phases of the work have been completed.

The actual grant payments in each of the last five complete financial years were:

1989–90 £8,358,655
1990–91 £8,954,716
1991–92 £9,219,458
1992–93 £10,291,158
1993–94 £11,140,000
Total £47,963,987

I hope this information is helpful.

Reversal of Status Forms

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients in each health board area are recorded as having signed reversal of status forms from *(a)* private to NHS and *(b)* NHS to private in each of the past three years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not centrally available.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many Glasgow houses Scottish Homes intends to transfer to new landlords or housing associations;

(2) if the ballot papers issued to Scottish Homes tenants will have an option for the tenants concerned to vote *(a)* to remain with Scottish Homes or *(b)* to be transferred to the local authority;

(3) what guidelines he has issued or plans to issue to housing associations with regard to which organisation they can borrow from in order to acquire the property which Scottish Homes wishes to transfer;

(4) what housing estates in Glasgow Scottish Homes will be seeking to transfer to new landlords or housing associations;

(5) what is the current value of the houses that Gemini housing association has expressed an interest in buying from Scottish Homes;

(6) what restrictions on borrowing have been placed on Gemini housing association by Scottish Homes; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked the chairman of Scottish Homes, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member with the relevant information.

A74-M74

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many miles of the A74-M74 upgrading being financed by his Department is in England; what is the estimated cost of the work involved; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None of the A74 upgrading being financed by the Scottish Office is in England.

The Kirkpatrick Fleming to Gretna contract, administered by my Department and opened in December 1992, incorporated a 1 km length of motorway in England, including an interchange at Guardsmill. This short section was necessary to enable the new road to be opened as a motorway and was financed by the Department of Transport.

The Scottish Office and the Department of Transport are exploring the possibility of completing the remaining sections of route using a design, build, finance and operate solution. Should this proceed as a single joint contract, the costs would again be apportioned to each Department.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department (i) hold open meetings, (ii) conduct public consultation exercises, (iii) conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interest, (iv) publish a register of members' interests, (v) publish agendas for meetings and (vi) publish the minutes of meetings; and whether this is in each case *(a)* under a statutory requirement or *(b)* voluntary.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 16 December 1994]:* The information requested by the hon. Member is as follows:

(i) In the case of children's panel advisory committees, the meetings are open to the public but discussions relating to confidential matters affecting children's panels or individual panel members or candidates are taken in private.

(ii) The Boundary Commission for Scotland conducts public consultation exercises by publicising proposed changes to electoral boundaries and holds inquiries under the Parliamentary Constituency Act 1986. The Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland also publicises its proposals and holds local inquiries under section 19 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. Local inquiries usually take place where there are major differences of opinion about the commission's proposals.

(iii) No consultation exercises are held by any advisory non-departmental public body sponsored by my Department with outside commercial interests.

(iv) No advisory non-departmental public body sponsored by my Department holds a register of members' interests.

(v) Agendas of meetings of children's panel advisory committees are available to the public if required.

(vi) Minutes of meeting of children's panel advisory committees are available to the public if required. Subject to confidential matters concerning individuals not being available, the boundary commission would be willing to consider making minutes of meetings available to interested parties.

The requirement for children's panel advisory committees to make available the information recorded above is not statutory. The requirement for the Boundary Commission for Scotland and the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland to publicise their proposals is statutory.

New Zealand Flatworm

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what studies he has carried out into the numbers of areas in Scotland where the New Zealand flatworm has been found; if it is increasing in numbers and areas affected; and what assessment he has made of its impact on native earthworms and soil structure.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* In 1992 research was commissioned by the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department into the distribution of New Zealand flatworm in Scotland and also its impact on agriculture and horticulture. The flatworm was found to be widely distributed, mainly in private gardens and allotments. There is evidence to show that it has not become widely established in agricultural land. The research was thus unable to assess fully the impact on earthworm populations and soil in an agricultural background.

There has been an increase in sightings reported by the public. These are recorded by the Scottish Crop Research Institute, which monitors the position in conjunction with the Department. The need for further research into the impact of the New Zealand flatworm and methods of control is kept under review.

Electro-shock Weapons

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the manufacture and supply of *(a)* electro-shock weapons and *(b)* instruments of torture by Scottish-based companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* I have no such information.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the acquisition of electro-shock weapons by police forces in Scotland, the use for which they are acquired and the guidelines which govern such acquisitions.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* No police force in Scotland has acquired electro-shock weapons, nor has any force intimated an intention to acquire such weapons.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what financial assistance has been given by his Department to United Kingdom companies actively involved in the manufacture, marketing and supply of electro-shock weapons; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the policy of his Department in providing financial assistance to firms involved in the manufacture, marketing or supply of electro-shock weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* My right hon. Friend is not aware of any financial assistance having ever been provided to support the manufacture, marketing or supply of electro-shock weapons. Prior to 1989, regional development grants amounting to less than £5,000 were paid to ICL Plastics Ltd., but these grants did not relate to electro-shock weapons.

Forth Rail Bridge

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 25 January, *Official Report*, column 275, if he will publish the findings of any engineering or structural survey of the Forth rail bridge commissioned by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 25 January, *Official Report*, column 275.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Mr. Lang: No work has been undertaken by N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. on any privatisation programmes in which my Department has been engaged since 1979.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 1 February 1995

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor's Department has not employed any special advisers during the last five years.

Legal Aid

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what has been the total sum paid in legal aid for Mr. Jawad Hashim in connection with legal action between him and the Arab monetary fund.

Mr. John M. Taylor: A total of £2.8 million has been paid on account to lawyers representing Dr. Hashim. However, the principal legal aid certificate issued in respect of proceedings between Dr. Hashim and the Arab monetary fund has been revoked pending an appeal against revocation by Dr. Hashim. If the decision to revoke is upheld Dr. Hashim will be deemed never to have been legally aided, in which case the Legal Aid Board would be entitled to recover its costs from Dr. Hashim. The final cost of the case to the legal aid fund will depend on the outcome of the appeal and, if appropriate, any legal aid costs would be subject to taxation by the court.

TREASURY

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the Departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document, "Focus on Ability".

Mr. Nelson: At 1 July 1994 the number of registered disabled people employed in the Chancellor's departments and agencies was 1,686, representing 1.8 per cent. of total staff. Figures for the number and proportion of all disabled people employed in the Chancellor's departments and agencies are not available, but surveys carried out by some of the Chancellor's departments and agencies suggest that there may be as many non-registered disabled people as there are registered.

Advertisements

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions and in what circumstances in the last five years advertisements have been placed in newspapers or periodicals which have been described as being issued by or on behalf of Ministers in his Department rather than on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Nelson: None.

Standard Chartered Bank

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has met the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss the activities of Standard Chartered bank.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I meet the Governor of the Bank of England regularly, and a wide range of issues is discussed.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the chairman of Standard Chartered bank.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I cannot recall and I have no record of meeting the current chairman of Standard Chartered bank, or his predecessor, since my appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has called for a report from the Governor of the Bank of England on Standard Chartered bank's involvement in India.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I receive regular reports from the Bank of England on a range of issues.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what improvements he is to make to banking supervision following the involvement of Standard Chartered bank in India.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: None. The Banking Acts already give the Bank of England the powers it needs to supervise the world-wide operations of United Kingdom authorised institutions.

Budget Report

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will revise the tables in the 1995–96 "Financial Statement and Budget Report" to take account of the measures he announced on 8 December.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Copies of a document which contains a full set of revised tables, corresponding to those in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995–96", are available today from the Vote Office.

Taxes

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer on 19 December, *Official Report*, column *944*, if he will now show the figures for indirect taxes, broken down into *(a)* VAT and *(b)* other indirect taxes; and when figures for council tax will be available.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* The breakdown requested is in the table. Figures for council tax on a similar basis to those provided for other taxes will need to be estimated from family expenditure

survey data on actual council tax payments. At present we have figures only for such payments for the first nine months of its operation after April 1993. We need to investigate further to see whether this provides data of sufficient quantity and quality to enable reliable estimates to be made. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as I have further information on when these figures might be available.

Indirect taxes at multiples of average earnings 1993–94[1]

	Percentages of average male earnings		
	75	*100*	*150*
Single			
Amounts, £ per week			
Gross income	269.33	359.10	538.65
VAT	14.81	19.77	30.37
Other indirect taxes	19.56	24.10	33.80
Total indirect taxes	34.37	43.86	64.17
Percentage of earnings			
VAT	5.5	5.5	5.6
Other indirect taxes	7.3	6.7	6.3
Total indirect taxes	12.8	12.2	11.9
Married, no children			
Amounts, £ per week			
Gross income	269.33	359.10	538.65
VAT	13.57	18.98	30.75
Other indirect taxes	21.93	26.55	36.62
Total indirect taxes	35.50	45.52	67.37
Percentage of earnings			
VAT	5.0	5.3	5.7
Other indirect taxes	8.1	7.4	6.8
Total indirect taxes	13.2	12.7	12.5
Married, two children			
Amounts, £ per week			
Gross income	269.33	359.10	538.65
VAT	13.44	19.56	32.89
Other indirect taxes	21.71	25.38	33.39
Total indirect taxes	35.15	44.94	66.28
Percentage of earnings			
VAT	5.0	5.4	6.1
Other indirect taxes	8.1	7.1	6.2
Total indirect taxes	13.1	12.5	12.3
Married, two earners, no children: Earnings split 60:40			
Amounts, £ per week			
Gross income	269.33	359.10	538.65
VAT	15.64	21.53	33.25
Other indirect taxes	25.46	29.47	37.43
Total indirect taxes	41.10	51.00	70.68
Percentage of earnings			
VAT	5.8	6.0	6.2
Other indirect taxes	9.5	8.2	6.9
Total indirect taxes	15.3	14.2	13.1

[1] Figures for indirect taxes are only shown for a narrow earnings range because the margin of error outside this range is too high to produce even illustrative estimates using the methods outlined in the notes below. Spending patterns vary widely between households with the same income and composition and all figures shown for indirect taxes are very approximate.

Indirect taxes at multiples of average earnings 1994–95[1]

	Percentages of average male earnings		
	75	*100*	*150*
Single			
Amounts, £ per week			
Gross income	278.78	371.70	557.55
VAT	16.40	21.70	32.97
Other indirect taxes	20.49	25.26	35.39
Total indirect taxes	36.89	46.96	68.35
Percentage of earnings			
VAT	5.9	5.8	5.9
Other indirect taxes	7.4	6.8	6.3
Total indirect taxes	13.2	12.6	12.3
Married, no children			
Amounts, £ per week			
Gross income	278.78	371.70	557.55
VAT	15.04	20.79	32.99
Other indirect taxes	22.77	27.63	37.92
Total indirect taxes	37.81	48.41	70.91
Percentage of earnings			
VAT	5.4	5.6	5.9
Other indirect taxes	8.2	7.4	6.8
Total indirect taxes	13.6	13.0	12.7
Married, two children			
Amounts, £ per week			
Gross income	278.78	371.70	557.55
VAT	14.89	21.43	35.32
Other indirect taxes	22.63	26.51	34.74
Total indirect taxes	37.52	47.94	70.06
Percentage of earnings			
VAT	5.3	5.8	6.3
Other indirect taxes	8.1	7.1	6.2
Total indirect taxes	13.5	12.9	12.6
Married, two earners, no children: Earnings split 60:40			
Amounts, £ per week			
Gross income	278.78	371.70	557.55
VAT	17.19	23.49	35.97
Other indirect taxes	26.67	30.88	39.19
Total indirect taxes	43.86	54.37	75.16
Percentage of earnings			
VAT	6.2	6.3	6.5
Other indirect taxes	9.6	8.3	7.0
Total indirect taxes	15.7	14.6	13.5

[1] Figures for indirect taxes are only shown for a narrow earnings range because the margin of error outside this range is too high to produce even illustrative estimates using the methods outlined in the notes below. Spending patterns vary widely between households with the same income and composition and all figures shown for indirect taxes are very approximate.

Indirect taxes at multiples of average earnings 1995–96[1]

	Percentages of average male earnings		
	75	*100*	*150*
Single			
Amounts, £ per week			
Gross income	291.30	388.40	582.60
VAT	17.55	23.26	35.33
Other indirect taxes	21.74	26.86	37.65
Total indirect taxes	39.29	50.12	72.98
Percentage of earnings			
VAT	6.0	6.0	6.1

Indirect taxes at multiples of average earnings 1995–96[1]

	Percentages of average male earnings		
	75	*100*	*150*
Other indirect taxes	7.5	6.9	6.5
Total indirect taxes	13.5	12.9	12.5
Married, no children			
Amounts, £ per week			
Gross income	291.30	388.40	582.60
VAT	15.84	22.03	35.12
Other indirect taxes	23.96	29.14	40.11
Total indirect taxes	39.80	51.18	75.23
Percentage of earnings			
VAT	5.4	5.7	6.0
Other indirect taxes	8.2	7.5	6.9
Total indirect taxes	13.7	13.2	12.9
Married, two children			
Amounts, £ per week			
Gross income	291.30	388.40	582.60
VAT	15.55	22.59	37.47
Other indirect taxes	23.88	28.07	36.91
Total indirect taxes	39.43	50.66	74.38
Percentage of earnings			
VAT	5.3	5.8	6.4
Other indirect taxes	8.2	7.2	6.3
Total indirect taxes	13.5	13.0	12.8
Married, two earners, no children: Earnings split 60:40			
Amounts, £ per week			
Gross income	291.30	388.40	582.60
VAT	18.08	24.87	38.31
Other indirect taxes	28.20	32.69	41.58
Total indirect taxes	46.29	57.56	79.88
Percentage of earnings			
VAT	6.2	6.4	6.6
Other indirect taxes	9.7	8.4	7.1
Total indirect taxes	15.9	14.8	13.7

[1] Figures for indirect taxes are only shown for a narrow earnings range because the margin of error outside this range is too high to produce even illustrative estimates using the methods outlined in the notes below. Spending patterns vary widely between households with the same income and composition and all figures shown for indirect taxes are very approximate.

Notes to tables:

1. Earnings are taken to be the average gross weekly earnings of all full-time males on adult rates with pay unaffected by absence. Estimates of earnings in 1994–95 and 1995–96 are based on earnings growth assumptions of 3½ per cent. in 1994–95 and 4½ per cent. in 1995–96.

2. The estimates of indirect taxes shown exclude council tax, but include estimates of the impact of intermediate taxes on households as well as taxes on final goods and services. Estimates of the impact of taxes on final goods and services assume that these taxes are fully incident on households. Estimates of the impact of intermediate taxes are based on the relation between intermediate production costs and final consumption derived using input-output techniques.

3. Estimates for most indirect taxes are based on equations derived from the 1985 family expenditure survey uprated to later years using forecasts of aggregate tax receipts. Estimates of VAT on domestic fuel and power, airline passenger duty and insurance premium tax are based on equations using results from the 1991 and 1992 family expenditure surveys uprated using a similar methodology. All estimates are based on the illustrative assumption that 10 per cent. of disposable income is saved.

4. Estimates of indirect taxes are very approximate because spending patterns vary widely between households with the same composition and income. The margin of error is even higher outside the range of earnings shown, and even illustrative estimates cannot be made. Because of sampling variation, there can be substantial differences between estimates obtained from family expenditure surveys for different years.

5. Net disposable income after income tax and national insurance is calculated on the assumption that the household receives no tax reliefs other than the standard allowances and only have income from employment. All earners, including wives, are assumed to pay class 1 NI contributions at the contracted-in rate. Child benefit is treated as a negative income tax in order to provide comparability with support given through child tax allowances.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when severance pay for special advisers was introduced; for what reasons; and what are the terms of the scheme.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* Severance pay for special advisers was introduced in 1977. Under current arrangements, advisers are eligible for severance payments when their appointments are terminated automatically with the end of an administration, or on the day after polling day in a general election, or when the appointing Minister leaves his or her appointment. Where an adviser is reappointed immediately after one of those occurrences, no payment is made. Similarly, if an adviser is reappointed following a break of service, the adviser may be required to pay back a proportion of any severance payment received. Severance payments, subject to tax and national insurance, are made in accordance with the scale in the table.

	Number of months pay in lieu of notice for those aged:		
Years of service	*Under 34*	*34*	*35 and above*
Less than two	3	3.0	3
Two but less than three	3	3.5	4
Three but less than four	3	4.0	5
Four and over	3	4.5	6

All special advisers, regardless of age, are entitled to one month's severance pay if their appointment is made within six months of the latest date by which a general election must take place, or if they resign to take part in national political activities within six months of their appointment.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Flagpole

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee why the flagpole at Westminster is not perpendicular.

Mr. Ray Powell: I have no reason to believe that the flagpole is not perpendicular.

Private Dining Facilities

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee, pursuant to his answer of 1 December, *Official Report*, column *804*, when he expects the Catering Committee to conclude its review of private dining facilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: The Catering Committee has now concluded its review of private dining facilities. In its deliberations, the Committee endorsed several general principles on the proper use of these facilities, and agreed that a reasonable degree of transparency would be appropriate in releasing statistics on bookings in response to parliamentary questions, based on those provided by the then Leader of the House on 10 November 1989.

The Committee also considered whether Members hosting a function should indicate whether they had a relevant registered interest, and agreed to a new procedure which is set out in the resolution passed on 25 January 1995, which records the Committee's conclusions and is, for the benefit of the House, set out in full:

Resolved, That the Committee, having considered the principle and operation of private dining facilities in the House, do conclude that:

(a) it is appropriate for the House to have private dining rooms; it is acceptable for these facilities to be used for party political functions or for "lobbying purposes"; and because of security and other implications, no alternative use of the rooms is considered appropriate.

(b) it is unacceptable for the private dining rooms to be used for any purpose involving direct commercial gain, or as an inducement to recruit new members of outside organisations or non-Parliamentary associations.

(c) the special status of the following Parliamentary organisations be recognised by permitting them to book the private dining rooms in their own names:

(i) Select Committees of the House and the British-Irish Parliamentary Body;

(ii) The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the British-American Parliamentary Group, the Council of Europe, the Western European Union, the North Atlantic Assembly and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly;

(iii) The Industry and Parliament Trust;

(iv) registered All-Party and Parliamentary Groups; and

(v) established Dining Clubs.

(d) in the interests of clarifying the stance of a Member hosting a function in a private dining room, he or she should indicate a relevant registered interest by answering the following questions, to be added to the booking form:

(i) "Do you have a registered interest relating to your sponsorship of this function? Yes/No".

(ii) "Are you making this booking on behalf of another Member? Yes/No."

(iii) "If Yes, does this other Member have a registered interest relating to the sponsorship of this function? Yes/No";

and that, in addition, invitations should be annotated appropriately "Relevant registered interest declared"".

The Committee also agreed that the resolution should take effect from the return of the House after the Easter adjournment, and that in response to future parliamentary questions requesting statistics of the booking of private dining rooms, I should answer giving figures on the basis of the statistics compiled from the date of implementation of this resolution.

Finally, I wish to advise the hon. Member that the Committee's full formal "Minutes of Proceedings" are today available from the Vote Office or through HMSO.

TRANSPORT

Drivers (Eyesight)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent his Department's system for determining the causes of road accidents seeks to identify visual defects as causative factors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The reports completed by police officers for national statistical purposes—STATS 19—are confined to the objective circumstances of the accident and do not record views about possible causes.

Road Schemes

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those road schemes approved at the public inquiry stage since 1985 and since built, in each case giving *(a)* the capital cost estimate submitted to the public inquiry, *(b)* the actual cost, *(c)* the net present value estimated at the public inquiry and *(d)* his estimate of the net present value had the correct capital cost been approved.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Joan Walley, dated 1 February 1995:

As you know, Mr. Watts, Minister for Railways and Roads, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for a list of those road schemes approved at the public inquiry stage since 1985 and since built, in each case giving *(a)* the capital cost estimate submitted to the public enquiry, *(b)* the actual cost, *(c)* the net present value estimated at the public inquiry and *(d)* his estimate of the net present value had the correct capital cost been approved.

I regret that the information you asked for is not held centrally by the Agency and given the number of schemes involved a file search to extract it could only be done at disproportionate cost.

However, I can say that a recent study of 6 schemes has indicated that the overall post-construction net present value is very close to that predicted prior to public inquiry on those schemes.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road schemes approved since 1985 are at the stage where *(a)* orders have been published, *(b)* an inquiry is pending, *(c)* an inquiry has been completed, the road approved and no contract has been let and *(d)* an inquiry has been completed, the road approved and the contract let.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Joan Walley, dated 1 February 1995:

As you know, Mr Watts, Minister for Railways and Roads, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many road schemes approved since 1985 are at the stage where (a) orders have been published, (b) an inquiry is pending, (c) an inquiry has been completed, the road approved and no contract has been let and (d) an inquiry has been completed, the road approved and the contract let.

The information you requested will take a little time to retrieve.

I shall write with your answer as soon as possible.

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by the Department or agency.

Mr. Norris: This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Red Routes, Lambeth

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects red routes to come into operation in Lambeth and on which roads.

Mr. Norris: The traffic director for London is currently considering a revised timetable for the project as a whole, under which red routes in Lambeth would come into operation progressively between 1996 and 2000. The routes in question are specified in SI 1992 No. 1372.

Channel Tunnel Link

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the status of the final line of the route for the channel tunnel link route announced by his predecessor in October 1991 at the time of that announcement.

Mr. Watts: The route announcement in October 1991 was of a broad corridor for an easterly approach to London along the lines of the proposals by Ove Arup, following a comparative assessment by British Rail of four strategic route options.

London Regional Transport

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the actual or approximate public support in pence per passenger mile on services to which London regional transport provides financial support.

Mr. Norris: Government grant to London Transport is now used almost entirely for investment, rather than revenue support to services. However the current year's grant of £373 million is equivalent, on average, to approximately 6p per passenger mile travelled on London Transport's underground and bus services. Decisions on support for individual services are an operational matter for London Transport.

Through Ticketing

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that through ticketing facilities will continue to be available at *(a)* Nunhead, *(b)* Peckham Rye, *(c)* Denmark Hill, *(d)* West Dulwich, *(e)* North Dulwich and *(f)* Sydenham Hill stations.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 24 January 1995]:* None of these stations currently offer a complete through ticketing service because they are not linked to the computer seat reservation system which is essential for some tickets. All are able to offer through tickets not requiring seat reservations.

The rail regulator is consulting on the requirements which should be imposed on station operators. The regulator and I are committed to easy access to through tickets for passengers.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Television Reception

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he expects all parts of Great Britain to be able to receive television signals from the BBC and independent television.

Mr. Dorrell: An estimated 99.4 per cent. of the United Kingdom population can receive television signals from the BBC and independent television. To extend coverage still further, the BBC and independent broadcasters are pursuing a programme of building about 25 new transmitters a year. The self-help television scheme provides unserved communities with the option of making their own arrangements to obtain TV signals. Technological developments, including cable and satellite, provide further opportunities for securing TV reception.

National Lottery

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to commission market research into the socio-economic groups of lottery ticket purchasers; if he will monitor the advertising policies of the national lottery operators to ensure that tickets are not marketed specifically to groups in receipt of social security benefits or otherwise unlikely to be able to afford them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I have no plans to commission such market research at present.

The advertising policy of the national lottery operator is an operational matter. I have therefore asked Peter Davis, the director-general of the national lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the national lottery, to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what has been the total and average weekly value of ticket sales by the national lottery to date; how much of that money has been *(a)* allocated to good causes, *(b)* retained by the Treasury, *(c)* retained by the company and *(d)* awarded in prizes; and what percentage of the sums retained by the company he estimates are its operating profits.

(2) whether the national lottery operators are required to make known their operating profits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: In the first eleven weeks, national lottery sales have reached £619,694,634—a weekly average of £56,334,875. Of this, to the nearest pound, £161,303,539 has been paid to the national lottery distribution fund for distribution to the good causes; £74,363,356 has been paid in lottery duty; £297,456,628 has been paid in prizes to over 12 million winners; and the remaining £86,569,121 has been retained by Camelot Group plc to cover its operating costs and profit, including the 5 per cent. commission on ticket sales paid to its retail agents.

Figures for the operating profits of Camelot Group plc are a matter for the company. It will be filing annual returns and meeting other reporting requirements in accordance with the provisions of the Companies Act and other relevant regulations.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much interest has been earned to date on that money raised via the national lottery for distributing to charities.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* To date, interest of £661,699 has been earned by the national lottery distribution fund. Of this £132,869 has been attributed to the National Lottery Charities Board.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what guidelines are operated by his Department as regards the use of executive search agencies to fill vacancies within his Department and his Department's executive agencies; and in what circumstances his Department employs executive search agencies instead of relying fully on departmental resources to fill vacant posts.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* The guidelines operated by my Department are those set out in the section of the civil service management code covering recruitment as augmented by the more detailed guidance set out in "Executive Searchlight" produced by the public appointments unit of the Cabinet Office and made widely available within my Department. No additional guidelines are issued. To date no executive search agency has been employed to fill a post within my Department or its two agencies. We rely almost completely on filling vacancies with staff from other Government Departments; linked non-departmental public bodies; and local authorities.

Recruitment

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much his Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to his Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* My Department and its agencies spent £60,654.05 on recruiting staff during 1994. The number of staff recruited was 46.

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by it on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1992 after taking account of inflation.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* There has been no expenditure of this kind.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* None of my Department's officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates, either formally or informally, on 26 January.

Protected Wrecks

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress he now expects to make towards the resolution of the issues which have prevented the transfer of responsibility for protected wrecks in English waters to English Heritage.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* It remains departmental policy to seek to transfer responsibility for protected wrecks in English waters to English Heritage. Some issues needing to be resolved are still under discussion but the Treasury Solicitor advises that no transfer can in any case be made without primary legislation, for which there is no immediate parliamentary opportunity.

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many licences are currently in force for archaeological work on protected wreck sites; and how many of these licensees have so far published field work information or deposited copies of their reports with the Royal Commission on the historical monuments of England.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* There are currently four licences in force covering archaeological investigation of protected wreck sites. In the last diving season 26 licences were issued in respect of archaeological investigation: three by the Secretary of State for Scotland, two by the Secretary of State for Wales, and 21 by my own Department. I expect that a similar number will be issued for the next diving season.

There is published information about 23 of the sites for which licences were issued in 1994 and those licensed to dive are known to have published information on nine of those sites. Since 1992 one report has been formally deposited with the Royal Commission on the historical monuments of England. Full information about fieldwork reports published by those licensed to dive is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the annual cost to his Department of the functions relating to protected wrecks in English waters in each of the past five years.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* The costs of exercising the functions relating to protected wrecks in United Kingdom waters[1] for the last five years are as follows:

	£000
1990–91[2]	110
1991–92[3]	227
1992–93[4]	[5]307
1993–94	271
1994–95	255

[1] The majority of expenditure is incurred on a United Kingdom basis. [2] The Department of Transport was responsible for underwater archaeology until April 1991.
[3] The Department of the Environment was responsible for underwater archaeology until April 1992.
[4] The Department of National Heritage has been responsible for underwater archaeology since April 1992.
[5] This figure includes costs associated with a new, expanded contract with the ADU.

The figures include the cost of marking wrecks on land and at sea and a contract with the archaeological diving unit based at St. Andrew's university to provide advice in relation to wrecks of historical, archaeological or artistic interest. They also include approximate figures to cover the varying costs of the advisory committee on historic wreck sites, and, from April 1991, diminishing grants to voluntary organisations carrying out projects connected with the Department's underwater archaeology objectives, and departmental staff costs.

Coaching (Cricket and Rugby)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assistance his Department has given towards the development of coaching of *(a)* cricket and *(b)* rugby football in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* Total Sports Council funding for these sports, which includes support for the development of coaching, is as follows:

	1992–93 £	*1993–94* £
Cricket	802,114	587,732
Rugby Union	118,320	219,196
Rugby League	322,110	197,654

A total figure is not available for 1991–92. The council also gives an annual grant to the National Coaching Foundation—£1.064 million in 1992–93, £1.494 million in 1993–94 and £1.420 million in 1994–95—which contributes to the development of coaching in these and other sports. In addition, Sportsmatch has provided total awards to cricket, rugby league and rugby union projects which include coaching or training as follows:

	1992–93 £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £
Cricket	3,000	248,192	199,000
Rugby League	40,000	118,650	138,042
Rugby Union	12,000	352,412	415,144

HOME DEPARTMENT

DNA Databases

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration his Department has given to providing additional funding to police authorities to enable them to establish full DNA databases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 16 December 1994, *Official Report* column *828.*

British Citizens (Extradition)

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many British citizens have been extradited to face criminal charges involving child sexual abuse for each year since 1989.

Mr. Maclean: Since 1989 three British citizens have been extradited for offences involving child abuse; one each year in 1990, 1992 and 1993.

Probation Service

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what advice will be given to the probation service on efficiency savings following the 1994 Budget statement and current probation caseload;

(2) what efficiency savings he expects will be made by the probation service in England and Wales during the financial year 1995–96.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Government have already made clear to the probation service their expectation that improvements in efficiency across the full range of operational and support services will be vigorously pursued. It will be for individual probation committees to judge what specific steps should be taken in the light of local circumstances; but among the efficiencies to which the Government expect committees to give particular attention are the use of accommodation, information systems, inter-area collaboration and quality control.

Probation Service

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the estimated additional cost to the probation service of working with victims during 1995–96;

(2) what is the estimated additional cost to the probation service of enforcing national standards during 1995–96.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Grant support for the probation service in 1995–96 should be sufficient to enable it to carry out its responsibilities in relation to the enforcement of national standards and working with victims without additional provision.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff employed by the probation service in England and Wales have a previous background which is either *(a)* military, *(b)* police or *(c)* industry for the latest date available.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: This information is not readily available.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what adjustments were made to the probation service budget in England and Wales as a result of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The provisional current grant baseline for 1995–96 published after the 1993 Budget statement was £309.1 million, net of retentions and balances. The grant settlement for that year will be £306.3 million plus a further £14.8 million to support probation service partnerships with the independent sector previously funded by the Home Office.

Community Sentencing

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will be publishing his Department's consultation paper on community sentencing.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My right hon. and learned Friend hopes to do so before too long.

Electro-Shock Equipment

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions have taken place with Mr. Gerry Hall on the need to apply for a section 5 permit for the manufacture, possession or sale of repressive technologies, including electro-shock treatment.

Mr. Maclean: None.

Confiscation Orders

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many domestic confiscation orders have been made under *(a)* the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 and *(b)* part VI of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 in each year since 1992; and what were the amounts ordered to be confiscated and the amounts actually realised under each Act for each year.

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the table.

Confiscation order data England and Wales

Act/Year	Number of confiscation orders	Amount ordered to be confiscated £	Year	[1]Amount realised £
Drug Trafficking Act 1986				
1992	1,002	9,129,863	[2]1992–93	5,180,900
1993	983	9,678,100	1993–94	5,377,400
Part VI—Criminal Justice Act 1988				
1992–93	19	1,354,000	[2]1992–93	481,600
1993–94	13	412,200	1993–94	265,600

Note:

Annual data is taken from the Criminal Statistics England and Wales, financial year data from the Confiscation Order Financial return. The figures are therefore not directly comparable.

[1] The amounts overstate the amounts reaching the Consolidated Fund, as magistrates' courts deduct from these figures any costs incurred in enforcing domestic confiscation orders. Receivers' costs can vary from £1,000 to £5,000, depending on the complexity of the case.

[2] For 1992–93 the information collected centrally is known to be incomplete as returns were not received from all petty sessional divisions.

Crime Prevention

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department spent on crime prevention in the latest year for which figures are available; and what percentage this was of total spending on the criminal justice service.

Mr. Maclean: The information available is as follows. Home Office expenditure on crime prevention in 1993–94 was £13.1 million. That figure is separate from and additional to public expenditure on the police which was £6.2 billion in 1993–94, an increase of 87 per cent. in real terms since 1978–79. The prevention of crime is one of the key functions of the police. Public expenditure on the criminal justice system as a whole in 1993–94 is estimated to have been £9.5 billion.

Humberside Probation Committee

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to announce a date for the replacement of Humberside probation committee by the shadow probation boards.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My right hon. and learned Friend will bring forward legislative proposals for the replacement of probation committees by boards when the parliamentary timetable permits.

Reconvictions

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 January, *Official Report*, column *138*, what are the current reconviction rates for *(a)* adult males, *(b)* adult females, *(c)* young adult males, *(d)* young adult females, *(e)* juvenile males and *(f)* juvenile females commencing probation orders and community service orders and for persons discharged from custodial sentences.

Mr. Maclean: The information is as follows:

Percentage of offenders convicted[1] within a two-year period following commencement of an order in 1987–90 or discharged in 1987–90 from a custodial sentence by sex and age at commencement or discharge

	Males	Females	All
Aged under 17[2]—Juveniles			
Community service order	78	[3]61	77
Custodial sentence	85	58	85
Aged 17 to 20—young adults			
Probation order	70	45	66
Community service order	65	45	65
Custodial sentence	71	56	70
Aged 21 and over—adults			
Probation order	50	36	46
Community service order	47	42	47
Custodial sentence	47	36	47
All ages			
Probation order	58	39	54
Community service order	56	44	56
Custodial sentence	55	40	54

[1] Reconvicted of a serious offence as defined by the standard list in appendices 4 and 5 of "Criminal Statistics England and Wales 1993"

[2] Until the Criminal Justice Act was implemented on 1 October 1992 it was not possible to sentence an offender aged under 17 to a probation order. Those aged under 17 who were sentenced to a community service order were all aged 16.

[3] Based on a sample of only 23 offenders.
Comparisons between different types of sentence are affected by differences in the age, sex, previous convictions and other characteristics of offenders receiving the sentences, as described in the forthcoming Home Office Research Study, "Explaining reconviction rates: a critical analysis".

Sponsor Interviews

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals for changes to procedures used for recording and progressing requests from entry clearance officers overseas and others for sponsors living in the United Kingdom to be interviewed have been canvassed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The system of recording and progressing requests from entry clearance officers for interviews is reviewed from time to time. As a way of progressing applications, consideration is given, as necessary, to offering sponsors the opportunity for interview at a location outside their immediate area if capacity exists at another port.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many requests for sponsor interviews have been recorded by his Department in each of the last three years to date; and what is the current target time between the recording of a request for a sponsor interview and the official requesting the interview receiving a report on the outcome of such an interview;

(2) in how many cases over the last three years his Department has recorded more than one request for a sponsor interview in the United Kingdom from an entry clearance officer overseas; in how many a sponsor has waited to be interviewed more than *(a)* six months; *(b)* nine months and *(c)* 12 months;

(3) how many requests for sponsor interviews have been recorded by his Department over the past year; if he will list the ports of entry to which those interview requests have been referred; in each port in how many cases *(a)* the interview has taken place, *(b)* an interview date has been offered, *(c)* no offer of an interview has yet been offered, *(d)* an interview report has been passed to his Department and *(e)* an interview report has yet to be despatched.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: This information is not available. Some 1,700 entry clearance interviews with sponsors were conducted between 1 January 1992 and 31 December 1994. The waiting time for interview may vary according to the operational commitments at a particular port at a particular time but the objective is for interviews on deferred EC applications to be carried out within three months of receipt of the request from the entry clearance officer.

Leeds-Bradford Airport

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Leeds-Bradford airport was designated as a port of entry; how many and what grades of immigration service officers are currently based at the airport; what was the establishment of immigration officer staff at the comparable period of each year since the airport became a port of entry; how many immigration clerical support staff have been employed at the airport each year since it became a port of entry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Leeds-Bradford airport was designated as a port of entry on 1 March 1987. Records indicate that, since 1987, the immigration office at Leeds-Bradford airport has had the following staff in post:

1 March 1987:
1 Chief Immigration Officer
7 Immigration Officers
1 part-time Administrative Officer and
1 part-time typist.

1 January 1988:
1 Inspector
1 Chief Immigration Officer
7 Immigration Officers
1 part-time Administrative Officer and
1 part-time typist.

1 January 1989:
1 Inspector
2 Chief Immigration Officers,
8 Immigration Officers and
1 part-time typist.

1 January 1990:
1 Inspector
2 Chief Immigration Officers
9 Immigration Officers
1 part-time Administrative Officer
1 part-time typist.

1 January 1991:
1 Inspector
2 Chief Immigration Officers
8 Immigration Officers
1 part-time Administrative Officer and
1 part-time typist.

1 January 1992:
1 Inspector
2 Chief Immigration Officers
8 Immigration Officers
1 part-time Administrative Officer
1 part-time typist.

1 January 1993:
1 Inspector
2 Chief Immigration Officers
9 Immigration Officers
1 part-time Administrative Officer and
1 part-time typist.

1 January 1994:
1 Inspector
2 Chief Immigration Officers
10 full-time and 1 part-time Immigration Officers
1 part-time Administrative Officer and
1 part-time typist.

1 January 1995:
1 Inspector
2 Chief Immigration Officers
10 full-time and 1 part-time Immigration Officers,
1 Executive Officer, 1 part-time Administrative Officer and
1 part-time typist.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of requests outstanding for sponsor interviews at Leeds-Bradford Airport; and over the last three years *(a)* what has been the average delay between the date a request for a sponsor interview being recorded in his Department and the interview being conducted by immigration officers based at Leeds-Bradford airport and *(b)* how many sponsor interviews have been conducted each week; and what representations has he received about delays in holding sponsor interviews by immigration office staff at Leeds-Bradford airport.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Local records indicate that there are currently 135 requests for sponsor interviews outstanding at Leeds-Bradford airport where the average delay in 1992 and 1993 in dealing with cases was 2.14 months in 1992 and 3.29 months in 1993. In 1994 the average delay in completed cases was 2.29 months. Some cases from 1994 have not yet been completed.

Records of interviews are not kept on a weekly basis but a total of 27 interviews took place in 1992, 20 in 1993 and 69 in 1994.

The information requested about representations received in respect of delays in holding sponsor interviews at Leeds-Bradford airport is not held in the form requested and cannot be obtained without disproportionate cost.

Boards of Visitors

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what are his proposals for reviewing the role of boards of visitors at prison establishments.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am currently setting up a review of the role of boards of visitors.

The Prisons Act 1952 provides for a board of visitors to be appointed to every prison and young offender institution. Members of boards are lay volunteers drawn from the local community. I value the work of boards and the participation of the local community, and I am keen to maintain this involvement of lay people in the prison system. My objective for the review is to strengthen the role of boards and help them undertake their duties more effectively. With this background the review is asked to make recommendations with particular respect to:

how this role should be redefined or clarified;
the interface between boards of visitors, HM Chief Inspector of Prison and the prison ombudsman;
the recruitment and appointment of boards of visitors members;
the training of boards of visitors members;
the national representation of boards of visitors;
the administrative support at national and local level
funding of the work of boards visitors;
an appropriate title for boards of visitors;

I shall be helped in the work of the review by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons; a small number of board members; representatives of their national

organisations and a co-opted prison governor. We will be supported by a small team of Home Office officials.

Board members and groups with an interest in penal affairs are being invited to submit representations to the review group by 3 March. I would also welcome any representations from hon. Members. I hope to reach conclusions by the beginning of April and will announce these to the House.

Alleged Rape Charges

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to ensure that the names and addresses of persons charged with the offence of rape and not published in the press or broadcast media unless and until those persons are found guilty.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* I am satisfied that the present law, which affords anonymity for complainants in sexual offence cases but offers no special protection for defendants in such cases, strikes a proper balance between the principle of open justice on one hand and the need to ensure that victims of sexual offences come forward on the other. I therefore have no plans to alter the law in this area.

ENVIRONMENT

Right to Buy (Repurchase)

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to allow local authorities to use a proportion of their capital receipts to repurchase properties from tenants who exercised their right to buy and now find themselves living in accommodation which is no longer suitable and which is unsaleable on the property market.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We are currently looking at an exchange sale scheme to help local authorities to take back certain flats, which are affected by mortgageability difficulties, in exchange for selling leaseholders another home more suitable for their needs. We have received a number of representations on this which we are currently considering.

Social Housing

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the background information on the need for new social housing lettings which he used in his decisions on the 1995–96 Housing Corporation approved development programme.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My Department takes a view on the medium-term demand for rented housing as part of the annual public expenditure survey. I will publish the necessary background information in due course.

Housing Co-operatives

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the figures for the Housing Corporation's allocations for co-operatives for the year 1995-96; and if he will make a statement on how these relate to their housing co-operative strategy.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Housing Corporation's total allocation to housing co-operatives in 1995–96 is £9.514 million.

The projects supported reflect the policies set out in the corporation's "Housing Co-operatives Strategy" published in March 1993.

Pollution Levels, Rotherham

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to measure levels of *(a)* nitrogen oxides, *(b)* sulphur dioxide, *(c)* ozone, *(d)* carbon monoxide and *(e)* PM10 in Rotherham.

Mr. Atkins: My Department, in co-operation with local authorities, operates national monitoring networks which measure, inter alia, levels of smoke and sulphur dioxide on a daily basis, and the levels of nitrogen dioxide on a monthly basis. the sites at Brampton, Dinnigton, Maltby and Wath upon Dearne in the Rotherham area form part of the national smoke and sulphur dioxide network. The levels of nitrogen dioxide are measured at four separate sites in the Rotherham metropolitan area: Doncaster gate, Wellgate, Broom and Eastwood.

I understand that further air quality monitoring is undertaken in Rotherham by the local authority, and at present covers ozone, nitrogen oxides and sulphur dioxide.

The Government's strategy for the general development of air quality monitoring was recently set out in "Air Quality: Meeting the Challenge", a copy of which has been deposited in the Library of the House. This includes proposals for the progressive integration of national and local authority monitoring networks into a single quality-assured network.

Research and Development

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what his Department's budget for research and development was in 1994; and what proportion of this was spent on research into radioactive waste management and disposal.

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department's budget for research and development in 1994–95 is £112 million. The proportion of the Department's total research expenditure to be spent on research into radioactive waste management and disposal is expected to be 3.5 per cent.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the absenteeism rates for *(a)* the Planning Inspectorate and *(b)* the Ordnance Survey in 1994.

Sir Paul Beresford: The provision of information on absenteeism rates in the Planning Inspectorate is the responsibility of the agency itself under its chief executive, Mr. Chris Shepley. For the Ordnance Survey this is the responsibility of its chief executive, Professor Rhind.

I have therefore asked them to reply.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 1 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the absenteeism rate for the Planning Inspectorate (PQ/940/94/95).

The average number of days absent due to sickness, both certificated and uncertificated, was 8.75. This covers both Planning Inspectors and administrative staff.

Letter from David Rhind to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 27 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for the Environment has asked me to reply to your Question about absenteeism in Ordnance Survey.

As I intimated in my letter of 16 January, since the Occupational Health Service keeps the statistics you seek from information supplied regularly by individual departments, Ordnance Survey does not itself keep duplicate records. I am told by the Occupational Health Service that details of absenteeism rates for 1994 will be available to departments in July 1995.

I regret that I cannot supply the information you have requested at this time.

Westminster City Council

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will be replying to the letter dated 12 January from Mr. Andrew Disnall, regarding an extraordinary audit of Westminster city council.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration replied to Councillor Dismore's letter on 30 January.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to order an extraordinary audit into the affairs of Westminster city council.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Secretary of State has no such plans.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he first became aware of the allegations of malpractice at Westminster city council; and how these were brought to his attention.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Neither the Audit Commission nor its appointed auditors has any duty to advise the Secretary of State of audit inquiries that may be initiated.

Since late 1991 my right hon. Friend has been aware, from coverage in the media and motions before this House, that the auditor was carrying out an investigation. The Westminster auditor published his provisional findings on 13 January 1994 which was the first occasion upon which the nature of the allegations and his investigation was confirmed. My right hon. Friend made a statement to the House on that day.

Parking Charges

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if income from parking charges made by local authorities is taken into account when calculating standard spending assessment settlements.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The income of local authorities from car parking is taken into account in determining the total of standard spending assessments. Income of this kind is also taken into account in the analyses on which the SSA formula for 'all other services' is based. But the standard spending assessment of an individual authority does not take specific account of the income from car parking of that authority.

Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 10 local authorities that gained and lost the largest sums through the changes to the education standard spending assessment formula, stating how much each gained or lost.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Taken on a comparable basis the 10 authorities which have gained the most in their education standard spending assessment for 1995–96, and the amount, are:

	£ million
Surrey County Council	16.766
Hertfordshire County Council	10.328
London Borough of Lambeth	6.926
Devon County Council	6.848
Lancashire County Council	6.688
East Sussex County Council	6.404
London Borough of Southwark	6.308
Berkshire County Council	5.788
London Borough of Croydon	5.329
Wiltshire County Council	4.878

The 10 authorities which have lost the most, and the amount, are:

	£ million
London Borough of Havering	2.485
Northumberland County Council	1.980
Norfolk County Council	1.580
Cheshire County Council	1.428
Essex County Council	1.391
Birmingham City Council	1.316
Stockport Metropolitan Borough	1.140
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough	1.052
Sunderland City Council	0.993
Cumbria County Council	0.934

These tables compare the Education SSA for 1995–96 with the sum of the Education SSA for 1994–95 and the estimated net income from recoupment payments in 1994–95.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities that made representations to him regarding the changes to the education standard spending assessment formula; and on what dates these representations were made.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The authorities listed have made representations about the education element in standard spending assessments during the 1995–96 consultation period.

Authorities	
Avon County Council	5 January 1995
Bedfordshire County Council	5 January 1995
Berkshire County Council	5 January 1995
Birmingham City Council	7 December 1994
	6 January 1995
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council	7 December 1994
	22 December 1994
	5 January 1995
Bradford City Council	5 December 1994
	14 December 1994
	6 January 1995
Buckinghamshire County Council	4 January 1995
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council	16 December 1994
Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council	7 December 1994
	20 December 1994
Cheshire County Council	9 January 1995
Coventry City Council	23 December 1994
	10 January 1995

Authorities	
Cumbria County Council	20 December 1994
	11 January 1995
Derbyshire County Council	29 December 1994
Dorset County Council	4 January 1995
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	5 January 1995
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council	21 December 1994
Hampshire County Council	9 December 1994
	10 January 1995
Hereford and Worcester County Council	6 January 1995
	10 January 1995
Hertfordshire County Council	6 January 1995
Kent County Council	3 January 1995
	6 January 1995
Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council	6 January 1995
	10 January 1995
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council	9 December 1994
County of the Isles of Scilly	6 January 1995
Lancashire County Council	12 January 1995
Lincolnshire County Council	12 December 1994
	19 December 1994
	6 January 1995
	12 January 1995
Liverpool City Council	23 December 1994
London Borough of Bexley	12 January 1995
London Borough of Brent	12 December 1994
	5 January 1994
	9 January 1995
London Borough of Bromley	9 December 1994
	5 January 1995
London Borough of Camden	7 December 1994
London Borough of Croydon	22 December 1994
	15 December 1994
	21 December 1994
	29 December 1994
London Borough of Ealing	9 January 1995
London Borough of Enfield	11 January 1995
London Borough of Harrow	4 January 1995
London Borough of Havering	4 January 1995
	10 January 1995
London Borough of Hillingdon	23 December 1994
	12 January 1995
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea	13 December 1994
London Borough of Lewisham	6 January 1995
London Borough of Merton	10 January 1995
London Borough of Redbridge	21 November 1994
	5 January 1995
London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames	6 January 1995
London Borough of Southwark	4 January 1995
London Borough of Sutton	22 December 1994
	21 December 1994
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	5 January 1995
London Borough of Wandsworth	4 January 1995
Norfolk County Council	23 December 1994
Northamptonshire County Council	13 December 1994
	3 January 1995
Northumberland County Council	4 January 1995
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council	2 December 1994
	5 January 1995
Salford City Council	5 January 1995
	11 January 1995
	17 January 1995
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council	6 January 1995
Sheffield City Council	6 January 1995
	9 January 1995
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	4 January 1995
	5 January 1995
	6 January 1995
	19 January 1995
Staffordshire County Council	3 January 1995
	6 January 1995
St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council	5 January 1995
	13 January 1995
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council	6 December 1994
	4 January 1995
Suffolk County Council	12 December 1994
Surrey County Council	12 December 1994
	23 December 1994
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council	22 December 1994
	12 January 1995
Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council	5 January 1995
Wolverhampton Metropolitan Borough Council	29 December 1994

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution the highway maintenance indicator makes to the standard spending assessment of *(a)* Westminster, *(b)* Coventry and *(c)* Birmingham councils.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The table shows the information requested in respect of standard spending assessments for 1995–96.

Local Authority	*Highway Maintenance Assessment £ million*	*Total Standard Spending Assessment £ million*	*Highway Maintenance as percentage of total Percentage*
Westminster	9.680	241.849	4.0
Coventry	10.244	227.863	4.5
Birmingham	35.567	880.278	4.0

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the effect of the changes to the education standard spending assessment formula on the standard spending assessment of Westminster and Coventry councils.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Taken on a comparable basis, the percentage increases between 1994–95 and 1995–96 in the Education standard spending assessments for Westminster and Coventry are:

Westminster: 2.6 per cent.

Coventry: 2.0 per cent.

These figures compare the education SSA for 1995–96 with the sum of the education SSA for 1994–95 and the estimated net income from recoupment payments in 1994–95.

Planning Inquiries

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities in England and Wales which have paid him the costs of local plan inquiries together with *(a)* the amount paid, *(b)* whether this money has been paid back, *(c)* when it was paid back, if applicable, and *(d)* the amount of interest from the date of refund to the present day.

Sir Paul Beresford: I am writing to the hon. Member.

Audit Commission

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the members of the Audit Commission with the terms of appointment, the payment received per year and the number of days worked.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Audit Commission members serving at 31 January 1995 were:

	Time input (per calendar month (pcm)	Remuneration for 1994–95 £
Chairman—Sir David Cooksey	4 days	19,000
Murray Stuart (Deputy)	4 days	13,034
Sir Peter Bowness CBE	1 day	2,948
Alan Brown CBE	2 days	5,896
Anthony Christopher CBE	2 days	5,986
Sir Terence English	1 day	2,948
Sir Donald Irvine CBE	1 day	2,948
Kate Jenkins	1 day	2,948
Sir Peter Kemp	1 day	2,948
Jeremy Orme	1 day	2,948
Peter Soulsby	1 day	2,948
Iris Tarry CBE	1 day	2,948
Clive Thompson	1 day	2,948
Tony Travers	1 day	2,948
Clive Wilkinson	2 days	5,896
Peter Wood	2 days	5,896

Members' remuneration is taxable and non-pensionable. Adult Commission members are required to comply with the requirements placed upon the commission by statute—primarily the Local Government Finance Act 1982. Members are also expected to adhere to the Audit Commission's code of conduct which is based upon the Treasury's model code of best practice for NDPB boards.

They are debarred from standing for Parliament and are required to declare their interests and to take steps to disengage from any activities which may lead to a conflict of interest with their responsibilities to the Commission.

The terms of appointment of four commission members—Murray Stuart, Sir Peter Bowness, Alan Brown CBE and Anthony Christopher—end on 31 January 1995. The appointment of three new members, effective from 1 February 1995, have been announced; they are Helena Shovelton, Ron Watson CBE and John Foster OBE. From that date the deputy chairman of the commission will be Clive Thompson.

Advertisements

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions and in what circumstances in the last five years advertisements have been placed in newspapers or periodicals which have been described as being issued by or on behalf of Ministers in his Department rather than on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Sir Paul Beresford: Some 2,641 statutory notice advertisements have been issued by the Department of the Environment over the last five years. These normally appear under the Secretary of State's or his Ministers' name, in exercise of a statutory duty, and reflect the work of a wide range of divisions within this Department.

Smoke Alarms

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to encourage the fitting of smoke alarms in flats of multiple occupation; and what plans he has to make their fitting compulsory.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities have powers under part XI of the Housing Act 1985, as amended, to require houses in multiple occupation—HMOs—to have adequate means of escape from fire and other fire precautions. They have a statutory responsibility to ensure adequate fire safety precautions in HMOs with three storeys or more and with a floor space exceeding 500 sqm.

My Department's Circular 12/92 contains the current guidance on fire precaution standards in HMOs. For smoke and fire detection, the minimum standard recommended for two-storey houses is for single-point smoke alarms. For houses of three-storeys or more, L2 fire warning systems are recommended.

The Housing (Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990 No. 830) require managers of HMOs to ensure that all fire precautions are in and are maintained in good order and repair.

The Government also published a consultation paper in November 1994 inviting views by 18 February 1995 on the desirability of introducing a licensing system for HMOs in England and Wales.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) when he first became aware of the malpractice which led to the surcharging of councillors in *(a)* Liverpool and *(b)* Lambeth; and how this was brought to his attention;

(2) when he ordered an extraordinary audit into the affairs of *(a)* Lambeth and *(b)* Liverpool councils.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The failure of the members of both Liverpool and Lambeth councils to set a legal rate before midnight on 31 March 1985 and the district auditor's investigations which led to surcharging in each case were widely reported in the press.

The Secretary of State did not order an extraordinary audit of either authority. The Audit Commission exercised its own power under section 22(1) of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 to direct an extraordinary audit.

Noise Pollution

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to encourage local authorities to give higher priority to tackling noise pollution.

Sir Paul Beresford: Local authorities have a wide range of powers to tackle noise pollution from premises and from vehicles, machinery and equipment in the street. In response to rising numbers of complaints about noise, an increasing number of authorities have introduced 24-hour noise complaint services but this is a matter for each authority to decide on the basis of local priorities and needs. An inter-departmental working party was set up in October last year to review the controls over neighbour noise and to investigate options for swifter remedies. The working party expects to complete its review shortly and I intend to consult fully on its conclusions and recommendations.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful prosecutions have been brought for noise nuisance for each year since 1979.

Sir Paul Beresford: The numbers of prosecutions and convictions for noise nuisance in England and Wales for

each year since 1979 are as shown in the table. Figures are not yet available for 1993–94.

Noise nuisance prosecutions and convictions

	Prosecutions	*Convictions*
1979	245	144
1980	240	171
1981	269	249
1982	263	205
1983–84	495	332
1984–85	355	298
1985–86	318	251
1986–87	430	342
1987–88	404	322
1988–89	446	418
1989–90	284	233
1990–91	559	465
1991–92	367	310
1992–93	416	343

Source:
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health.

Planning, Yorkshire and Humberside

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he intends to introduce an adequate planning structure to implement the planning strategy he outlined in paragraph 4.9 of the Yorkshire and Humberside planning guidance January 1995.

Mr. Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 20 January his proposals on how to take forward strategic planning in North Yorkshire, Humberside and Lincolnshire.

The Secretary of State has endorsed the commission's comments on the need for continued local authority co-operation on economic and planning issues across the Humber estuary. It is this need which is addressed in paragraph 4.9 of the draft regional planning guidance. The Secretary of State would look to the authorities concerned to put in hand the necessary administrative arrangements to achieve this. A formal structure for this purpose is not necessary. The Government office for Yorkshire and Humberside in Leeds is, however, ready to discuss with the authorities concerned any informal arrangements they might like to develop.

Business Rates

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals have been made against the business rate revaluation of 1 April 1990; how many are still outstanding nationally, regionally and by valuation office; and when this process is expected to be completed.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: A total of 1,231,145 proposals to alter the 1990 rating lists had been received in England by 31 December 1994, of which 295,222 were outstanding. I am placing in the Library a table which breaks these totals down by valuation office region and office.

We expect that the vast majority of proposals received by the end of March 1995 will be cleared by the end of 1995–96. Proposals will continue to be made up to 31 March 1996, and the remainder will therefore be settled as early as possible thereafter.

North Yorkshire

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the county name of North Yorkshire.

Mr. Gummer: In the light of representations I have received about the changes I am proposing to make to the structure of local government in North Yorkshire I have decided to change the name of the county to the county of the North Riding of Yorkshire. For ceremonial and related purposes the City of York, which will be a unitary authority, will be deemed to be part of the County of the North Riding of Yorkshire. This change will be reflected in the draft structure order.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which companies or other organisations are conducting contained use work with genetically modified organisms—group I or group II for research or commercial programmes—and at which sites in the United Kingdom; if he will list the documentation he or other public bodies hold concerning the nature of the work undertaken; and what monitoring he has implemented at these sites.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have been asked to reply.

I have arranged for the names and addresses of all persons, companies and other organisations, who have notified premises to be placed in the Library. For all of these notifications the Health and Safety Executive holds the information provided, which includes a description of the modified organism and the activity, and an assessment of the risks to human health and the environment. It also holds similar information for certain individual activities of higher risk.

There are two forms of monitoring of the regulations. It is the responsibility of the person notifying to monitor, where necessary, for the presence of viable genetically modified organisms outside the primary physical containment. In addition, HSE's specialist inspectorate monitors compliance through a programme of inspection and enforcement.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the regulation of contained use activities with genetically modified organisms.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have been asked to reply.

All contained use activities involving genetically modified organisms are controlled under the Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) Regulations 1992. The regulations have now been in force for two years. The experience so far has been that they have provided adequate safeguards to protect human health and the environment.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Iraq

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether the possible falsification of export licences to Iraq referred to in his Department's press statement of 20 September 1993 have now been proved; what formal

investigations have been commenced; and what criminal prosecutions have been undertaken.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Inquiries have established that, as far as the Department is aware, falsification of United Kingdom export licences for Iraq has, in the main, taken place outside UK jurisdiction. Since the introduction of new procedures the number of export licences issued for Iraq has fallen significantly. One investigation was undertaken by HM Customs and Excise but no criminal prosecution has taken place.

Regional Electricity Companies

Mr. Cummings: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what matters of public interest he will take into account in the event of a foreign conglomerate proposing to take over one of the regional electricity companies.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In the event of such a takeover qualifying for investigation under the Fair Trading Act 1973, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade would be advised on the matter by the Director General of Fair Trading. In giving his advice the DGFT would take account of all relevant factors as would the president in making his decision.

Northern Electric

Mr. Cummings: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what matters of public interest he will take into account when considering Trafalgar House's bid for Northern Electric;

(2) if he will take into account the views of consumers in the north-east in his consideration of the proposed take over by Trafalgar House of Northern Electric.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will be advised on the proposed merger by the Director General of Fair Trading. In giving his advice the DGFT will take account of all relevant factors, as will the President in making his decision.

Euratom Treaty

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of the facilities operated by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority have had sanctions imposed for infringement of article 88 of the Euratom treaty since 1988; what specific infringement occurred; and what has been done to rectify the situation.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Article 88 of the Euratom treaty provides that

"The Agency shall keep a special account in the name of the Community, called Special Fissile Materials Financial Account."

It contains no provision for the imposition of any sanctions.

Nuclear Waste Shipments

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the first shipment of high level waste will take place from Sellafield via Barrow in Furness.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Arrangements for the return of such waste are, in the first instance, a matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc and its customers in line with the contracts between them. I understand that no date has yet been set for the first commercial shipment.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

EU Fisheries Policy

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at what date, and in what circumstances, qualified majority voting was agreed to by the United Kingdom Government for fisheries policy.

Mr. Jack: While the Community's market regime for fish and fish products has always been based on article 43 of the treaty, on United Kingdom accession regulation 2141/70 gave vessels of all member states, subject to certain limited derogations, the right to fish throughout all member states waters and was also based on article 235 which requires unanimity.

The UK accession treaty included a 10-year derogation from the provisions of regulation 2141/70. This enabled the UK to maintain a six-mile exclusive limit and impose certain restrictions in the six to 12 mile belt.

In 1976, regulation 2141/70 was replaced by regulation 101/76. This regulation's treaty base also included article 235. The regulation stated that in principle vessels of all member states should have equal access to the use of all fishing grounds within the fisheries limits of member states.

Later in 1976, the member states of the EC agreed to extend their fishery limits to 200 miles. The UK Government sought to extend the UK exclusive limit significantly, but a Council resolution, adopted in The Hague on 3 November 1976 about the creation of a 200 mile fishing zone in the Community, made no reference to this. The outcome of a European Court case in the early 1980s also suggested that, unless a decision to the contrary were taken, the principle of "free access to waters" came into force at the end of the period specified in the accession treaty.

This was the background to the negotiations on the CFP regulations which were formally adopted at the beginning of 1983. These regulations substantially reduced other member states' access to waters within the UK six to 12 mile belt, while continuing their total exclusion from the six mile belt, and also provided for the Shetland box. Regulation 170/83 was the principal regulation and was based on article 43.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the three largest registered owners of milk quota in the United Kingdom, with *(a)* the quota held by each, *(b)* the amount of quota held which is leased, *(c)* the amount of agricultural land owned by each of these registered milk quota holders and *(d)* the amount of milk produced annually by each of the above.

Mr. Jack: No. An individual's entry in the Intervention Board's milk quota register, maintained under the Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations 1994, is confidential and is

disclosed only to that individual or to a person with a valid interest in his or her holding.

Caviar

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what quantity of caviar has been imported from *(a)* Russia and the Soviet Union before it and *(b)* elsewhere in each year since 1984.

Mr. Jack: Official figures on imports, by quantity, of caviar—sturgeon roe—and caviar substitutes originating from Russia and the former Soviet Union and from elsewhere are given in the tables:

Imports of caviar (sturgeon roe) (tonnes)

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Russia/USSR	7.4	3.4	7.4	18.7	19.4	16.5	8.7	8.4	10.3	5.3
Elsewhere	25.5	38.4	11.9	10.6	25.2	24.8	25.7	14.4	22.0	27.5
Total	32.9	41.8	19.3	29.4	44.6	41.3	34.4	22.8	32.3	32.8

Imports of caviar substitutes (tonnes)

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Russia/USSR	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Elsewhere	173.0	173.5	236.4	254.2	505.6	745.1	388.5	246.4	315.4	305.0
Total	173.1	173.6	236.4	254.3	506.9	745.2	388.5	246.4	315.4	305.0

Source:
HM Customs & Excise (Country of Origin data).

British Association of Sheep Exporters

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the chairman of the British Association of Sheep Exporters.

Mrs. Browning: My right hon. Friend and I have not met representatives of the British Association of Sheep Exporters nor have we been requested to meet them.

NORTHERN IRELAND

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what purposes other than those connected with the tax and benefits systems the national insurance number may be used; what plans he has to make the number more widely available for those purposes; if legislation is necessary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 6 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *163*. The national insurance number can be used only for national insurance, tax and social security benefit purposes and there are no plans at present to introduce legislation to extend its use.

Health and Social Services Councils

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* Roman Catholics and *(b)* Protestants are employed by each health and social services council.

Mr. Moss: There are no staff employed by health and social services councils. Staff employed by the health and social services boards service the councils.

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document, "Focus on Ability".

Sir John Wheeler: At 1 January 1994 there were 1,073 non-industrial staff in the Northern Ireland civil service—4.2 per cent. of the non-industrial service—who self-reported a disability. Of these 413—1.6 per cent. of the non-industrial service—were, or had been registered as disabled. In addition 81 registered disabled people are working in the Northern Ireland civil service under the employment support programme.

Of the home civil service staff in the Northern Ireland Office one person is known to be registered disabled—0.45 per cent. of the work-force.

Egg Production

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are employed in the egg production industry; and what was the figure five years ago.

Mr. Ancram: A total of 522 people are estimated to have been working on specialist egg production farms in 1989 and 605 in 1994. In addition 422 people are estimated to have been working in packing, processing and marketing eggs in 1989 and 462 in 1992, the latest year for which an estimate is available.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many parliamentary answers on health issues have been refused on the grounds of disproportionate cost or information not being held centrally *(a)* as a total and *(b)* as a percentage of all health answers in each of the last five years.

Mr. Moss: The information is as follows:

Year	Number of PQs unable to be answered (a)	PQs as a percentage of all Health Answers (b)
1990[1]	8	4
1991[1]	11	4
1992[1]	9	4
1993	15	4
1994	14	[illegible]

[1] Due to implementation of computer system the percentage of PQs prior to 1993 are approximate.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

United States Congress

19. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he is taking to build relations with the new United States Congress.

Mr. Hurd: I visited Washington last month, partly to meet the new congressional leaders. Ministers visiting Washington invariably see Members of Congress and I have no doubt that our excellent relations with the US Congress will continue.

Fisheries

20. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food relating to the re-negotiation of the EU-Morocco fisheries agreement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have been in close contact on this subject, and will continue to liaise as negotiations with Morocco develop.

Falkland Islands

21. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Argentina and the future sovereignty of the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Hurd: Co-operation between Britain and Argentina has developed well since 1990. Our exports in the first 10 months of 1994 rose 35 per cent.

My hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, visited the Falkland Islands last weekend. He reassured the islanders that we will continue to uphold their right to self-determination and are not prepared to discuss sovereignty with Argentina.

We have co-operated with Argentina over fisheries conservation since 1990 and we are now examining the prospects for co-operation over oil.

China

22. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to visit the People's Republic of China to discuss Anglo-Chinese relations.

Mr. Goodlad: I have no plans to visit China at present.

Iraq

23. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has had about hunger and health problems in the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates as a result of the implementation of United Nation sanctions against Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Iraqi regime, not the United Nations, is responsible for the suffering in Iraq. Food and medicines are exempt from UN sanctions. Iraq has twice rejected UN schemes to provide much-needed humanitarian aid in return for limited sales of oil. The Iraqi regime's continued refusal of these offers and its exploitation of human suffering show its callous disregard for its own people.

Overseas Missions

24. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the proportion of the budget for United Kingdom overseas missions currently devoted to promoting trade and commercial relations; and what was the position in 1979.

Mr. Goodlad: Commercial work, including export promotion and inward investment, is the FCO's largest single activity overseas, accounting for 23 per cent. of the cost of running overseas missions or 30 per cent. of frontline staff. This is broadly the same level as in 1989, the first year in which comparable data were available. With the help of efficiency savings, including a programme to reduce staff and costs in support areas, the FCO is planning to create over 100 additional commercial staff slots in posts overseas during 1995, an increase of over 9 per cent. in frontline commercial staff.

Armenia

25. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made towards opening an embassy in Armenia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The possibility of opening an embassy in Yerevan is currently being carefully considered as part of the regular review of our representation in the states of the former Soviet Union.

Middle East

26. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the peace process in the middle east.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We welcome the substantial progress that has been made, but we are concerned at the strains on the peace process resulting from a number of recent development, especially the dreadful bombing near Tel Aviv. We will continue to lend our full support to the peacemakers to ensure that those who oppose them do not succeed.

UNESCO

27. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom rejoining UNESCO.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are continuing to keep this issue under review, but have not yet reached a decision.

Departmental Staff

28. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the academic background of graduates entering his Department.

Mr. Goodlad: Graduates entering the fast and main streams of the diplomatic service and the Overseas Development Administration come from a wide variety of academic backgrounds.

European Union

29. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the President of the European Commission to discuss the future of the European Union.

Mr. Goodlad: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary meets Mr. Santer as a matter of course at Foreign Affairs Councils. The next Foreign Affairs Council is on 6 and 7 February.

Pirate Attacks

30. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many attacks by pirates on British shipping off the coast of Brazil have been recorded since 1987.

Mr. Goodlad: Our records show six attacks since 1987: three attacks on British-flagged ships, one attack on a Hong Kong-flagged, British-managed ship and two attacks on ships with a British interest, but flagged in other countries.

Chechnya

31. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to assist the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe to establish a mission in Chechnya.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We welcome the Russian decision to agree to an Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe fact-finding mission to Moscow and Chechnya on 24 to 27 January which explored the possibilities for greater OSCE involvement. A United Kingdom official, the director of the OSCE office for democratic institutions and human rights, was a member of the team.

Human Rights

32. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet representatives of *(a)* the Red Cross and *(b)* Amnesty International to discuss human rights overseas.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross in October last year and I hope to meet him in Geneva in the margins of my visit to the UN Commission on Human Rights in February. I have no immediate plans to meet representatives from Amnesty International. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met Amnesty representatives in November. FCO officials are in regular contact with Amnesty International.

UN Peacekeeping

33. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to meet the Secretary-General of the United Nations organisation to discuss the United Nations' peacekeeping work.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I last met the Secretary-General of the United Nations when he visited the United Kingdom in October. We had wide-ranging discussions covering a number of UN-related topics including peacekeeping operations.

Cyprus

34. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the application of Cyprus for full membership of the European Union.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Corfu European Council agreed that Cyprus will be involved in the next phase of enlargement. The Council is committed to a review of the application, in the light of progress in the intercommunal dispute, early in 1995. We welcome the prospect of eventual Cypriot accession.

Kashmir

35. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new proposals he has to assist the Governments of Pakistan and India to resolve the Kashmir dispute.

Mr. Baldry: Our position has not changed. We continue to believe that the best way forward on Kashmir should involve simultaneous progress on dialogue between India and Pakistan as provided for under the 1972 Simla agreement; an improvement in human rights in Kashmir and a genuine political process there; and a clear cessation of external support for violence in Kashmir. We stand ready to offer our good offices to help resolve the dispute if both sides so wish.

Malta

36. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Malta's application for membership of the European Union.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Corfu European Council agreed that Malta will be involved in the next phase of enlargement. The Council will review the application this year. We welcome the prospect of Maltese accession to the European Union,

Africa

37. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about areas of disagreement with France about foreign policy in Africa; and what he proposes to try and ensure a joint approach.

Mr. Baldry: We work closely together with the French both bilaterally and within the EU. On 18 November, my

right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister and Mr. Balladur said both Governments would explore ideas on peacekeeping further with African partners. We are following this up. More recently, on 25 January, my right hon. and noble Friend, the Minister for Overseas Development had wide-ranging talks in Paris with French experts on Africa.

India

38. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment of current relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of India.

Mr. Baldry: Relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of India are excellent, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary saw when he visited Calcutta and Delhi last month. In particular the Indo-British partnership initiative continues to flourish. British exports to India have increased by 40 per cent. in the last 18 months, and investment approvals have increased dramatically in the last two years. The UK's largest bilateral aid programme is in India.

Sudan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the current status of the mission of the United States special representative to Sudan; what he is seeking to achieve; and what progress he is making.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The US special envoy on the Sudan, Ambassador Melissa Wells, was appointed last May to work in support of regional efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Sudan. She has visited Sudan and neighbouring countries in pursuit of this.

Palestinian National Authority

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further international discussions are taking place that are leading to proposals further to assist the Palestinian national authority with its internal security and terrorist problems.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The international committee, which co-ordinates assistance to the Palestinian police force, will meet in Gaza as one of the working groups under the local aid co-ordination committee, supported by the UN special co-ordinator for the occupied territories. The first meeting is expected to take place on 7 February.

Afghanistan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the recent arrest and release by rebels of a British citizen in Afghanistan.

Mr. Baldry: We welcomed the release of Eden Fernandez, on humanitarian grounds. Swift and effective action by a British diplomat, who fortunately was visiting Kabul, and the helpful co-operation of the International Committee of the Red Cross, enabled his release and return, via Pakistan, to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ray Nelson

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what investigations have been made into the circumstances of the death of Mr. Ray Nelson in a fire at a works living quarters in Tengiz, Kazakstan on 29 December 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The police in Tengiz, Kazakstan are treating the tragic death of Mr. Raymond Anthony Nelson as an accident. Mr. Nelson was sub-contracted to TengizChevroil, which is holding its own investigation. The company's initial accident report states that Mr. Nelson remained in a burning building, looking for another person when he was overcome by smoke. The full report has not yet been completed.

Gibraltar

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what factors preclude residents of Gibraltar from voting for and being represented by a Euro-MP.

Mr. Baldry: Annex II of the 1976 Act on direct elections limits to the United Kingdom itself the franchise for elections to the European Parliament.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Independent Counsel

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Attorney-General on how many occasions in 1994 the Government sought opinions from independent counsel; and what was the total cost.

The Attorney-General: Information is not held centrally and could be obtained from Departments only at disproportionate cost.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Indonesia

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all Overseas Development Administration-funded forestry and forestry-related projects since 1980 in Indonesia, providing *(a)* the dates approved and the status of their implementation, *(b)* the amount and type of aid funding, *(c)* the main objectives of the projects and *(d)* the counterpart Indonesian Government or private sector bodies involved in each of the projects.

Mr. Baldry: A list of forestry projects has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Sudan

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which parts of Sudan are still inaccessible to international aid agencies and humanitarian relief.

Mr. Baldry: Operation Lifeline Sudan was refused access in January to seven of the 95 destinations

designated as relief distribution centres: Maiyut, Pariang, Boma, Nimule, Chunkodum, Ikotos and Mundri. These are all located in areas of military activity. Access to the Nuba mountains remains as described in my answer of 25 October 1994, *Official Report*, column *546*.

Pergau Dam

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral statement of 13 December, *Official Report*, column *773*, if he will make a further statement on the Pergau dam project.

Mr. Baldry: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs announced to the House on 13 December, arrangements are being made for the outstanding commitments on this project to be met from the reserve voted by Parliament. This is outside the scope of the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980.

International Development Association

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to argue in the forthcoming IDA replenishment negotiations, that the bulk of IDA funds should be allocated to social sectors and direct poverty reduction programmes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: In the report on the 10th replenishment of IDA, donors underlined the central importance of poverty reduction in IDA's policy dialogue with borrowers, and stated that they expected the share of social sector and poverty-targeted interventions to increase steadily where justified by the country assistance strategy. In IDA-11, we will press IDA to intensify its efforts in this area.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's plans for *(a)* the size of the 11th IDA replenishment and *(b)* the allocation of IDA-11 among the various objectives towards which it is directed.

Mr. Baldry: We shall be working for a substantial replenishment of the International Development Association, while taking account of the constraints on available aid programme resources. We do not expect any major shift in IDA's priority objectives of poverty reduction, sound economic management and environmentally sustainable development.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy *(a)* to support the United States Government's position on mandatory social safety net programmes and public consultation campaigns for all structural adjustment loans and *(b)* to press for their implementation, at the Paris meeting of International Development Association delegates in February.

Mr. Baldry: If the United States tables proposals during the IDA-11 negotiations, we and other donors will give them careful consideration.

Turkey Ankara Metro

Mr. James Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements are being made by the Overseas Development Administration to meet expenditure in 1994–95 on the Turkey Ankara metro mixed credit aid and trade provision project.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs announced to the House on 13 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *773-74*, that, following a review of aid and trade provision projects in the light of the judgment of the divisional court on the Malaysia Pergau hydro-electric dam project, arrangements would be made for outstanding commitments to certain projects to be met from funds voted by Parliament outside the scope of the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980.

Financial aid for the Turkey Ankara metro project, including the cost of monitoring, will be met from funds outside the overseas aid budget. Parliamentary approval to this new service will be sought in a spring supplementary estimate for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—Overseas Development Administration: external assistance vote, class II, vote 5. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure, estimated at £4.627 million, will be met by repayable advances from the contingencies fund.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the number of housing benefit claimants who are likely to be affected by the tighter restrictions on the level of rent eligible for housing benefit consequent on the change to the housing benefit regulations he proposes to make from October 1995.

Mr. Roger Evans: Much will depend on the definition of average rents to be used in the calculation of housing benefit, and other factors, including the behavioural effects of the proposals. A realistic estimate will not be possible until we have made decisions on the detailed structure of the new arrangements, following consultation with the local authority associations, the social security advisory committee and other interested bodies.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases the Child Support Agency has had to trace the absent parent; and what is the rate of success.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 1 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number and success rate of specialist traces performed by the Child Support Agency.

Since launch to the end of November 1994, specialist tracing action has been completed in almost 77,000 cases, 58,000 of which were successful; a success rate of 75 per cent.

I hope that this is of help.

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the outcome of the 13,281 section

18 reviews outstanding as at 31 March 1994 cited in his answer of 18 May 1994, *Official Report*, column *526*; how many section 18 reviews of child support officers' decisions have been requested since then and how many have been cleared; and what efforts are being made to monitor the outcomes and length of time that reviews are taking to be decided;

(2) how many section 17 reviews of child support officers' decisions have been cleared in the first half of 1994–95; how many of these resulted in a fresh assessment; and what efforts are being made to monitor the number of requests made for section 17 reviews and the length of time that reviews are taking to be decided.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Adam Ingram, dated 1 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Section 17 and Section 18 reviews completed by the Child Support Agency.

Between April and september 1994, 15,562 Section 17 reviews were cleared. From April to the end of July, 13,065 reviews resulted in the maintenance assessment being revise. From August 1994, numbers of reviews resulting maintenance assessments were no longer collected because there was no business need for the information and data collected for earlier periods had clearly shown that the overwhelming majority of reviews cleared result in a fresh assessment.

Following enhancements to the Agency's management information systems it was found that the number of Section 18 review applications outstanding at 1 April 1994 was 9,537, which differs from the figure of 11,732 given in the answer of 18 May 1994. Between April and November 1994, a further 18,766 review applications were received and 18,671 applications were cleared.

Enhancements to our Management Information Systems enable us, from August 1994, to identify the number of Section 18 review clearances which actually result in a review being completed, against those considered not appropriate to Section 18 and those refused or withdrawn. However, there is no business requirement to record the number of completed reviews which result in a change to assessment. From August we are also now able to measure the proportion of Section 17 and Section 18 reviews completed within specific age bands.

I hope that this is of help.

Household Commodities

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on the proportion of households in the bottom 10 per cent. of income distribution which have *(a)* a car, *(b)* a television, *(c)* a video, *(d)* a telephone, *(e)* a washing machine, *(f)* a fridge freezer or freezer and *(g)* a home computer (i) in the latest year for which figures are available and (ii) in 1979.

Mr. Burt: The available information is in the table.

Percentage of individuals in the bottom 10 per cent. of the income distribution who live in households with access to consumer durables, in 1979 and 1991–92[1]

	Before Housing Costs		*After Housing Costs*	
	1979	*1991–92*	*1979*	*1991–92*
Car or van	39	51	40	53
Television	93	[2]97	93	[2]97
Video	[4]—	60	[4]—	65
Telephone	47	74	47	73
Washing machine	69	87	69	86
Fridge freezer or freezer[3]	29	79	32	81
Home computer	[4]—	20	[4]—	21

Notes:
[1]The latest period for which figures are available is 1991–92; that is the calendar years 1991 and 1992 combined.
[2]The latest period for which information on televisions is available is 1990–91.
[3]The large increase in access to fridge freezers or freezers mainly reflects a rise in the access to fridge freezers over the period.
[4]Information on videos and home computers was not available in 1979.

Unemployment

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each of the last three years the numbers unemployed and drawing *(a)* national insurance benefit only, *(b)* national insurance and income support and *(c)* income support only; and if these three sets of data for each year could also be presented in percentage terms of the total claimant unemployment count.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the tables.

Number of unemployed claimants by benefit entitlement at the second Thursday of the given months (GB)

thousands

	All unemployed claimants	*Unemployment Benefit only*	*Unemployment Benefit and Income Support*	*Income Support only*	*No benefit*
1991					
November	2,313	507	119	1,386	301
1992					
February	2,553	566	129	1,530	328
May	2,546	545	124	1,564	313
August	2,641	525	117	1,651	347
November	2,687	534	121	1,664	368
1993					
February	2,840	578	123	1,769	370
May	2,759	543	116	1,765	335
August	2,821	532	108	1,817	364
November	2,640	483	101	1,744	312

Number of unemployed claimants by benefit entitlement at the second Thursday of the given months (GB)

thousands

	All unemployed claimants	Unemployment Benefit only	Unemployment Benefit and Income Support	Income Support only	No benefit
1994					
February	2,727	503	104	1,802	317
May	2,551	428	113	1,729	281
August	2,542	381	132	1,763	266

Notes:
Figures are based on a 100 per cent. count.
Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand and component parts may not sum to totals.
Source:
Quarterly Analysis of Unemployed Claimants.

Percentage of unemployed claimants by benefit entitlement at the second Thursday of the given months (GB)

Percentages

Year	All unemployed claimants	Unemployment Benefit only	Unemployment Benefit and Income Support	Income Support only	No benefit
1991					
November	100	21.9	5.2	59.9	13.0
1992					
February	100	22.2	5.0	59.9	12.8
May	100	21.4	4.9	61.4	12.3
August	100	19.9	4.4	62.5	13.2
November	100	19.9	4.5	61.9	13.7
1993					
February	100	20.4	4.3	62.3	13.0
May	100	19.7	4.2	64.0	12.1
August	100	18.9	3.8	64.4	12.9
November	100	18.3	3.8	66.1	11.8
1994					
February	100	18.4	3.8	66.1	11.6
May	100	16.8	4.4	67.8	11.0
August	100	15.0	5.2	69.3	10.5

Notes:
Figures are based on a 100 per cent. count.
Percentages are rounded to one decimal place and component parts may not sum to totals.

Disabled People (Discrimination)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of the report prepared by SIA Ltd. on the analysis of responses to consultation on Government measures to tackle discrimination against disabled people.

Mr. Hague: The total cost of producing and printing the document, including the sum paid to SIA Ltd. for research and analysis, was £73,000.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will commission a report on the analysis of responses to the Government consultation on pensions similar to the analysis carried out by SIA Ltd. on Government measures to tackle discrimination against disabled people.

Mr. Arbuthnot: No. The report of the pension law review committee included an analysis of the written responses to the committee's consultation document. Since the publication of that report, the Department has consulted widely on a large number of issues, and received detailed and technical responses. These were placed in the Library on Thursday 22 December 1994 in response to the hon. Member's earlier question, on 19 December 1994, *Official Report* columns *930-31*.

Benefits

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to help improve the take up of benefits by older people.

Mr. Roger Evans: The Benefits Agency pursues a number of initiatives to ensure that all sectors of the public, including older people, are aware of the availability of benefits. A leaflet, FB32 "Benefits after retirement", gives information on a wide range of benefits available to older people. The first stage of the one-step benefit delivery service was completed in July, providing information locally on all major benefits, plus help with claims. Information material is also available through other, non-Benefits Agency, outlets. The social security freeline service provides information and advice on all benefits.

Pensions, Australia

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has had

about the level of British pensions paid to people living in Australia; what replies he has sent; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: We have received a number of letters recently about non-payment of annual pension increases to British pensioners living in Australia. We have also received representations from the Government of Australia. It would cost an additional £105 million a year to uprate British pensions paid there. In view of the continued need to contain public expenditure, we have no plans to change our policy on this issue.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has studied the comments made on 24 January by Australia's Minister for Social Security about the level of British pensions paid to people living in Australia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: We have seen the press release issued by the Minister's office. We have no plans to change our existing policy on indexation.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what use his Department or its executive agencies makes of private hospitals in testing applicants for benefits; if he will list *(a)* those private hospitals which have contracts from his Department or its executive agencies to carry out work during the current financial year, *(b)* the types of medical testing which will be carried out, *(c)* the number of patients to be treated under those contracts and *(d)* the value of the contracts; and what factors led his Department to use these facilities rather than national health service hospitals.

Mr. Hague: Only the War Pensions Agency makes use of private hospitals in testing applicants for benefit.

(a) General Healthcare Group plc trading as BMI Healthcare Audiology Services (BMI) are currently contracted to carry out audiological examinations for the War Pensions Agency.

(b) In each case pure tone audiometry is performed and depending on the circumstances, tympanometry and/or Evoked Response Audiometry may also be performed.

(c) BMI performed just over 105,000 pure tone audiometric tests.

(d) This information is commercial in confidence.

Prior to this contract being awarded, audiological services were provided by a fragmented network of private individuals throughout the United Kingdom that had been appointed by senior medical officers in the various regions. However, a wide variance of service reporting standards and unacceptable delays in some areas led to the decision to undertake a competitive tendering exercise for the nationwide provision of audiological services. Many expressions of interest were received, including some from individual NHS hospitals. However, upon extensive and thorough evaluation of all submissions, a single contract was awarded to General Healthcare Group plc, its tender best matching the contract strategy of providing a uniform quality service to pre-determined standards and offering the best value for money.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the Department and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document, "Focus on Ability".

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The number of registered disabled people in the Departments and agencies for which my right hon. Friend is responsible and other areas which fall to the Cabinet Office vote is as follows:

	Number of RDP	*Total staff in department*	*Percentage of RDP*
Cabinet office OPSS (including CCTA)	18	1,316.5	1.4
CCC	3	397.5	0.75
CSC	—	253	—
OHS	0.5	113	0.4
RAS	3	137.5	2.2
COI	4	502	0.8
HMSO	40.5	2,002	2

The figures represent full time equivalent posts; part time staff are shown as 0.5.

Figures for the number of all disabled people employed within the Departments and agencies as a whole are not available. However, 51 staff in the central Cabinet Office/OPSS and CCTA have a disability which they consider might affect them at work.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many tenants of the Duchy are in receipt of housing benefit.

Mr. David Hunt: The Duchy has no record of tenants who may themselves be in receipt of housing benefit. The Duchy receives housing benefit in the form of rental payments on behalf of tenants for four properties.

Open Government

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many applications for the release of information under the code of practice on access to government information since April 1994 have been *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful; and in the latter case what reasons have been given.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: This information is not available centrally, but information on the first nine months of operation of the code of practice is being collected for a report to be issued shortly by the Office of Public Service and Science.

Open Government

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will make available documentation in its original form in instances where information is released under the code of practice on access to government information.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: There is no commitment that pre-existing documents, as distinct from information, will be made available, but paragraph 52 of the guidance on the code of practice states:

"Requests for information should be met in the simplest, most cost-effective way. This will usually be by letter giving the information requested [. . .] There may be occasions on which it is appropriate to send photocopies—for example of a letter which has been published or a factual record . . . "

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister (1) in which circumstances a Minister is not expected to notify the Member for the constituency visited by the Minister of a ministerial visit to the constituency, under paragraph 71 of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", May 1992;

(2) what constitutes adequate notice of a ministerial visit, under paragraph 71 of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" May 1992;

(3) in which circumstances hon. Members are *(a)* invited and *(b)* not invited to make suggestions to Ministers about the inclusion of places which it would be helpful to visit, under paragraph 71 of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", May 1992.

The Prime Minister: It is for individual Ministers to ensure that they comply with paragraph 71 of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" and to judge what constitutes adequate notice. "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" makes it clear that informing the Members for the constituencies that they intend to visit is a courtesy which they should take special care not to overlook.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Medical Advisory Service

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many nurses were employed by the Health and Safety Executive's employment medical advisory service in the years 1974 to 1994;

(2) how many *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses were employed within the Health and Safety Executive's Health policy division and its predecessors in each year since 1974;

(3) how many doctors were employed by the Health and Safety Executive's employment medical advisory service in each year since 1974.

Mr. Oppenheim: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Job Vacancies (Rural Areas)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what initiatives he is developing to improve access to information on employment vacancies for people living in rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about initiatives to improve access to information on employment vacancies for people living in rural areas.

Local initiatives are being developed by many of the Employment Service's (ES) rural offices to improve our clients' access to vacancy information. These often involve provision of vacancy displays in post offices, libraries, community centres and other focal points in small rural communities. Local press and radio are also used to publicise our services.

The ES programme Development Fund is being used to develop rural initiatives and supplement the more traditional forms of vacancy filling in scattered communities. Mobile Jobcentres have been provided in several areas and Freephone services are being used to make Jobcentre services more accessible to clients in the more remote areas. Access to vacancies and advisory services has also been provided by our Claimant Advisers through Outreach projects. These initiatives will be subject to evaluation in the future and consideration may then be given to wider delivery.

You may also be interested to know that an internal working group has been set up in Scotland to consider how existing ES services might be further developed to meet the needs of ES clients in rural areas.

Jobcentres

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidelines he has issued in respect of the geographical size of the catchment area served by the Jobcentres.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 1 Februry 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the guidelines he has issued in respect of the geographical size of the catchment area served by Jobcentres.

There are no specific guidelines on the geographical size of catchment areas. Decisions on the location of Jobcentres and the area they serve are made primarily on the basis of how the best possible service can be provided to clients taking economic, demographic and geographic factors such as travel to work patterns into account.

The network of local offices nationally was reviewed in 1990 as part of the Employment Service's (ES) integration programme, which is about merging Jobcentres and Benefit Offices into a single location of ES Jobcentres.

The location of the new integrated Jobcentres and the areas they serve were decided using the factors mentioned above to provide, wherever possible a service appropriate to the local economy and labour market. Since 1990, 925 integrated Jobcentres have been created, with a further 47 planned in the current financial year.

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the Departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document,"Focus on Ability".

Miss Widdecombe: On 1 July 1994 the number of registered disabled people employed as non-industrial civil servants in the Employment Department group was

2,342, representing 3.9 per cent. of the total. Figures for the number and proportion of all disabled people are not available as the Department does not record information on people who have chosen not to register as disabled.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of men aged 55 to 64 years were active in the labour market in *(a)* 1967, *(b)* 1977, *(c)* 1987 and *(d)* 1994.

Miss Widdecombe: Latest estimates from the summer 1994 labour force survey show that 64 per cent. of men aged 55 to 64 were economically active. Equivalent figures for 1987 and 1979—the earliest available comparable data—were 68 per cent. and 84 per cent. respectively.

South Thames TEC

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what indicators were available, and when, to providers to South Thames TEC in respect of its insolvency;

(2) when the state of solvency of the South Thames TEC was at such a point as to render it advisable for providers to ask for cash in advance.

Mr. Paice: I understand that the board of South Thames training and enterprise council invited my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to appoint a receiver as soon as it became apparent to them that the TEC was insolvent. This was as a result of a report by a team of accountants acting on behalf of the Department, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Before that point the terms on which providers contracted with the TEC were a matter for their commercial judgment. I have no direct knowledge of the indicators available to providers prior to the appointment of the receiver though I understand that the appointment was preceded by a period of difficulty in relations between TEC and its providers when, for example, payments to some providers were delayed.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what alternatives to the South Thames TEC existed for providers of training opportunities guaranteed by Government before the insolvency of the TEC.

Mr. Paice: The Government do not guarantee that training opportunities will be contracted to any provider of training. The extent to which training providers had alternatives to their commercial contracts with South Thames training and enterprise council will have depended on the nature of their business. Many providers will also have contracts with other TECs in London and elsewhere.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training providers were not paid by *(a)* the Manpower Services Commission at the time it was wound up and *(b)* the South Thames TEC.

Mr. Paice: At the time the Manpower Services Commission ceased to exist, its contractual responsibilities on training were transferred to the Training Commission and business continued as normal. As for South Thames training and enterprise council, it is for the receiver to specify what number of training providers have not been paid as a result of it's receivership.

Advertisements

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on how many occasions and in what circumstances in the last five years advertisements have been placed in newspapers or periodicals which have been described as being issued by or on behalf of Ministers in his Department rather than on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Miss Widdecombe: There have been no occasions where advertisements have been placed in newspapers or periodicals which have been described as being issued by or on behalf of Ministers in the Employment Department rather than on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

North West Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many members are on the board of the North West training and enterprise council; and what is the gross turnover.

Mr. Paice: The total number of board members on the 14 north-west training and enterprise councils is currently 198. Their total income in 1993–94 was £263,600,572.

HEALTH

Next Steps Agencies

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many parliamentary questions she has referred to chief executives of next steps agencies in each year since 1992.

Mr. Sackville: Five parliamentary questions were referred to agency chief executives in the 1992-93 parliamentary Session. Two parliamentary questions were referred to chief executives in 1993–94 and so far in 1994–95 one parliamentary question has been referred.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set out for each of the next steps agencies in her Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required who were not required when their operations were within her Department; how many of them publish periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. Sackville: There are four next steps agencies within the Department of Health:

Medicines Control Agency
Medical Devices Agency
National Health Service Estates
National Health Service Pensions Agency

I have asked the chief executive of each of them to reply to the right hon. Member in respect of their own agency.

Agencies operate within the framework of demanding quality standards and tight financial control of civil service running costs and other financial targets, set out in the White Paper "The Civil Service, Continuity and Change", Cm 2627. In the usual way their expenditure is subject to audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Staff in agencies remain civil servants, but total civil service manpower in my Department has reduced at the same time as my Department's next steps agencies have established. Improvements in efficiency or effectiveness brought about by my Department's agencies are a matter of record.

Letter from A. F. Cowen to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 26 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Health has asked me to reply to your question in so far as it relates to the NHS Pensions Agency.

The NHS Superannuation Scheme became an Executive Agency of the Department of Health from 20 November 1992 and continued in it existing premises (Hesketh House) at Fleetwood which are leased via Property Holdings from the Co-operative Society. The acquisition of a separate Headquarters was not necessary. At launch the Agency had some 650 staff. It currently employs 494 whole-time equivalent staff which includes 4 staff recruited on contracts to support the Agency's development—the Chief Executive; a professionally qualified accountant; a human resources professional; and an information technology specialist. Our corporate objective is to secure a running cost reduction of 20 per cent. below the 1992–93 baseline whilst measurably improving our service to customers.

We do not publish periodical journals, we are required to publish our statutory Annual Report and Accounts. With regard to vehicles, the Agency has continued to use the Private Use Scheme run by the Department of Social Security. There are currently six vehicles available to regular travellers. The annual stationery budget pre and post Agency status remains at £110,000 per annum. The Agency does not have a corporate clothing policy but on launch 22 messengerial staff were provided with replacement uniforms needed because of the nature of their work. This is a continuation of pre Agency practice.

Letter from Alan Kent to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 26 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Health has asked me to reply to your recent question insofar as it relates to the Medical Devices Agency.

The Medical Devices Agency was established in September 1994 with the primary purpose of protecting the public health and safeguarding the interests of patients and users by ensuring that medical devices meet appropriate standards of safety, quality and performance.

The Agency remains in the same premises it occupied as the Medical Devices Directorate of the Department of Health. In May 1995 we will move to another building on the civil estate, sharing facilities with other staff of the Department of Health and making an estimated saving on Departmental budgets of about £4.5 million over the four years to 1998–99.

The Agency employs the same number of support staff now as before its establishment. We have accommodated within existing resources work on personnel and finance services previously provided centrally by the Department.

The Agency does not publish periodical journals and has neither executive cars nor corporate clothing.

The Agency logo and stationery were designed together at a cost of just over £12,000. The extra cost of printing the stationery was just under £6,000. The new logo and stationery have improved our communication with manufacturers and users of medical devices and so contributed to the Agency's primary purpose of safeguarding public health.

Letter from Dr. K. H. Jones to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 24 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to respond to the points of detail in your Parliamentary Question with respect to Medicines Control Agency (MCA).

You may be aware that the MCA has been fully funded by fees from the pharmaceutical industry since it became a Next Steps agency in July 1991.

We have remained in our original accommodation on the civil estate. No additional support staff have been employed other than those required to handle functions conducted now by MCA that were previously the responsibility of the Department of Health or to service the Agency's growing workload from the pharmaceutical industry.

We publish a bi-monthly newsletter, MAIL, which has been in publication since June 1973. The annual cost is £18,000 and, while it is supplied free of charge to all licence holders, a small annual fee is paid by subscribers who are not licence holders and who are not directly involved in regulatory affairs. The Agency also publishes, three or four times a year, "Current Problems", first produced in 1975, which is a newsletter to all doctors and pharmacists in the UK, updating them on issues in the field of drug safety. The cost of each bulletin is £55,000, the bulk of which relates to distribution costs. Like MAIL and all MCA activities, it is fully funded by fees from the pharmaceutical industry.

The Agency has no executive cars or corporate clothing. Our logo was designed in-house by a member of staff at no additional cost and our stationery is of a similar weight and quality to that used by other parts of the Department of Health.

Letter from J. Locke to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 27 January 1995:

Further to the Secretary for States written answer to you on the 24th January 1995, I detail below the information requested:

NHS Estates was established as a Next Steps Agency on the 1st April 1991. From that date until the 28th March 1993 its staff were mainly based in London using existing Department of Health accommodation. The notional cost of the accommodation was £1,617,000. From the 1st April 1993 the Agency moved to offices in Trevelyan Square Leeds for which the Agency pays a current annual rent of £370,000.

Currently the Agency has 9 support staff who were not required when the Agency was part of the Department. These generally represent Finance and Personnel functions taken over from the Department. The total cost of services provided by the Department to the Agency has dropped from £999,000 in 1991–92 to £347,000 in 1994–95.

We publish one periodical every quarter known as "Newslink", a review of the latest developments affecting the healthcare estate. In 1994–95 its production costs were £18,786. Prior to this the Department published "Health Service Estate", a more substantial and expensive publication, until April 1991.

We do not provide a fleet of executive or individual cars. Providing they meet the normal Government usage criteria, our staff may apply for vehicles provided by the Department's transport section.

The Agency has a logo that was designed in parallel with the NHS Management Executive logo, before it was established in 1991. The costs of producing the logo were paid by the Department.

The only item of corporate clothing commissioned by the Agency was a bulk purchase of specially designed ties at a cost of £931.

Our stationery incorporates the Agency logo and office address details to a similar specification and cost as the Department of Health. No extra costs are incurred by their inclusion.

I hope this answer provides you with the information requested.

NHS Beds

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS beds, overall and by region, have been closed since 1979; and how many NHS beds there are at present.

Mr. Sackville: Information on bed closures is not available centrally. The latest information on the average number of available national health service beds is published in "Beds availability for England, Financial Year 1993–94", copies of which are available in the Library.

Tranquillisers

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence her Department has of the effect of the use of the benzodiazepine group of tranquillisers upon patients to whom they have been prescribed by their general practitioner.

Mr. Bowis: The effects of benzodiazepines on patients are described in the British National Formulary, a copy of which is available in the Library, which is issued by the Department to all general practitioners free of charge. The main effects include reduction in anxiety and induction of sleep. The British National Formulary also gives details of the side effects which some patients may experience from using benzodiazepines.

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been done by her Department into involuntary tranquilliser addiction.

Mr. Bowis: None.

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to encourage the development of non-addictive tranquillisers.

Mr. Bowis: None. We are seeking to reduce tranquilliser dependency by encouraging general practitioners to review use of benzodiazepines and replace them, as necessary, with behavioural, cognitive and other psychotherapeutic methods of treatment and, if appropriate, antidepressants. Family health services authorities have been asked to discuss with GPs local targets for reductions in benzodiazepine prescribing. To assist with this process, the Department has distributed copies of the Mental Health Foundation's booklet "Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Benzodiazepine Dependence" to every family health services authority, copies of which are available in the Library.

Air Fresheners (Allergies)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each regional health authority, the number of patients diagnosed as suffering from an allergy to air fresheners for the latest year she has figures; and what were the figures *(a)* five and *(b)* 10 years ago.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available.

Waiting Lists

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the correlation between specialties that have the longest waiting lists in the NHS and the level of private sector earnings of the consultant concerned.

Mr. Malone: None.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what correlation she has made between the English regions with the most private sector beds and the length of their waiting lists.

Mr. Malone: We have no evidence of a causal connection between the number of private sector beds in a region and length of waiting lists.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of private patients see an orthopaedic surgeon in under a month; what is the figure for NHS patients; and what assessment she has made of the reason.

Mr. Malone: Waiting times for private patients are not identifiable from information available centrally. In the quarter ended 30 September 1994 approximately 44 per cent. of patients seen in the trauma and orthopaedics specialty, which includes orthopaedic surgery, were seen within four weeks of written referral by a general practitioner.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those NHS trusts where over the past 12 months patients have reportedly been kept waiting on a trolley for longer than two hours.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Patients Charter

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to public funds of the production, printing, distribution and advertising of the patients charter when launched *(a)* in 1991 and *(b)* in 1995; and how many copies were printed in each case.

Mr. Malone: The cost of producing, printing, distributing and advertising the original patients charter when launched was just over £2.8 million. Twenty three million copies of a summary version were printed, and half a million copies of the full charter. The cost of launching the new charter is estimated as £535,000 and 3.25 million copies have been printed.

Blood Transfusion Centres

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions she has had with the National Blood Authority regarding the future of regional blood transfusion centres;

(2) what response she has made to the Keith Jerrome report on the future of the national blood transfusion centres; and what plans she has for implementing its recommendations.

Mr. Sackville: The National Blood Authority has undertaken a thorough and widespread consultation on its proposals for reorganisation. It is currently considering the comments received during the consultation, including those received from trades unions. The authority has announced the establishment of an independent panel which will ensure that the comments received during the consultation have received full and objective consideration. The authority hopes to produce final proposals in around three months.

Central Heating

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will commission research into the links between central heating and long-term illness and disability;

(2) whether possible links between central heating and long-term illness and disability have been taken into account in setting "The Health of the Nation" targets.

Mr. Bowis: The relationship between central heating and health is complex. For this reason no account was taken of such a postulated link in setting "The Health of the Nation" targets. The Department has no plans to commission research specifically on central heating and long-term illness and disability.

Drug Treatment Services

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she intends to complete and publish her review of the drug treatment service.

Mr. Bowis: The task force to review the effectiveness of treatment services for drug misusers is due to report to Ministers in January 1996.

Advertisements

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions and in what circumstances in the last five years advertisements have been placed in newspapers or periodicals which have been described as being issued by or on behalf of Ministers in her Department rather than on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Sackville: None. In the last five years, the Department has where necessary used the description Department of Health or Departments of Health.

Elderly People

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has for improving care given to the elderly in need of health care.

Mr. Bowis: We have made substantial improvements to services for elderly people and will continue to do so. The priorities and planning guidance for the NHS: 1995–96 requires authorities to identify needs and put specific actions in hand to ensure further improvements, and to secure care in the community, including continuing health care, in effective collaboration with local authorities and other agencies.

Physiotherapy

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified and unqualified physiotherapists are practising in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sackville: At 30 September 1993 there were 10,460 state registered physiotherapists practising in the national health service in England. Legislation provides that for direct employment in the NHS and local authorities, practitioners must be "state registered". No figures are available centrally on the number of physiotherapists practising in the private sector.

Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Note:
Figure rounded to the nearest 10 whole-time equivalents.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the absenteeism rates for *(a)* the Medicines Control Agency, *(b)* National Health Service Estates, *(c)* the NHS Pensions Agency and *(d)* her Department.

Mr. Sackville: The absenteeism rate for the Department including the Medicines Control Agency, National Health Service Estates and NHS Pensions Agency for 1994 is not yet available.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many parliamentary answers have been refused on the grounds of disproportionate cost or information not being held centrally *(a)* as a total and *(b)* as a percentage of all answers in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 12 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *470-71* for information on replies stating that information is not held centrally for the 1989–90 to 1993–94 sessions. A search on POLIS has shown that, up to 26 January, 50 questions have been replied to in this form which is 3.7 per cent. of replies given so far in the 1994–95 Session.

Information on disproportionate costs replies is shown in the table.

Session	*Number*	*Percentage of total answered*
1989–90	11	0.24
1990–91	21	0.68
1991–92	5	0.33
1992–93	38	0.64
1993–94	42	0.83
1994–95[1]	7	0.52

Source:
POLIS.
[1]To 26 January 1995.

Long-term Care

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on whom do the costs fall when a long-stay stroke patient is transferred from a hospital bed to a nursing home but requires continued nursing.

Mr. Bowis: The decision would depend on the results of an assessment of the patient's health and social care needs.

Hospitals, Bolton

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many long-stay beds for the elderly are available in Bolton hospitals;

(2) if Hulton hospital is planned to continue as a hospital for the long-stay elderly;

(3) what plans there are to close Hulton hospital without replacement.

Mr. Bowis: The provision of health services in Bolton is a matter for Wigan and Bolton health authority, and the hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman for details of hospital services for the elderly and its plans for the future.

Resident Accommodation Charges

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make a statement on the position of the spouse of an elderly person contributing to nursing home care whose sole asset is part ownership with the spouse of the marital home in respect of continued residence in that home;

(2) if she will make it her policy that in no case the spouse of an elderly person contributing to nursing home care whose sole asset is part ownership of the marital home will have to leave that home against his or her wish.

Mr. Bowis: When assessing a resident's ability to contribute towards the costs of nursing home care, the legislation already requires local authorities to ignore the value of property when the spouse continues to live there.

Intensive Therapy Beds

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many intensive therapy unit beds there were in each region in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* Information is provided in the table on the average daily number of available designated intensive therapy beds for England, excluding neonatal intensive care, and for each regional health authority area, in the years 1989–90 to 1993–94. However, in addition to these services provided in units designated as intensive therapy units, intensive therapy can also be delivered in a variety of hospital departments, such as neonatal intensive care, coronary care units, accident and emergency departments, renal units and high dependency units. It is for each purchasing authority to determine the appropriate level and type of provision of intensive therapy based on an assessment of the needs of their population, taking account of local priorities.

	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
England	2,517	2,483	2,475	2,525	2,606
Northern and Yorkshire	351	353	333	346	388
Trent	272	262	255	250	265
Anglia and Oxford	170	192	198	184	183
North Thames	398	392	370	401	369
South Thames	323	314	340	335	355
South and West	304	312	336	315	320
West Midlands	251	259	244	263	260
North West	386	352	347	380	405
Special Health Authorities	56	48	52	53	60

Source:
KH03 returns.

EDUCATION

Surplus School Places

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her latest estimate of the cost of a surplus primary and secondary school place.

Mr. Robin Squire: The average premises-related cost of maintaining a surplus place is estimated to be £182 a year for a primary school and £303 a year for a secondary school at 1995–96 prices. The actual cost and the scope for realising savings from removal of surplus places in practice will depend on local circumstances.

National Curriculum

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if she will list for each subject on the national curriculum, except English, history and mathematics, the publications, guidance and teaching material which has been sent to schools since 1988; if she will give the cost for each subject; and whether the publications are pertinent to the revised national curriculum;

(2) pursuant to her answer on 24 January, *Official Report*, columns *169–72*, if she will list for each of *(a)* English, *(b)* mathematics and *(c)* history which publications, guidance and teaching material sent to schools are pertinent to the revised national curriculum.

Mr. Forth: The documents listed under the first heading in the answer of 24 January set out the requirements of the current or previous national curriculum for English, mathematics and history; and the curriculum guidance listed under heading 3a related to these requirements. The current requirements will be superseded by those of the revised national curriculum as set out in the documents listed under the second heading, but the guidance listed under heading 3a will continue to be relevant to the revised national curriculum in as much as this is essentially a slimmed down version of the existing curriculum.

The documents listed under heading 3b are in the main annual publications relating to each year's assessment arrangements and are directly relevant therefore only to the year to which they relate, though teachers may use a previous year's tests in their teaching and, as with the curriculum materials, the content remains relevant because the tests assess core elements of the curriculum which are largely unchanged.

The following list shows the publications relating to national curriculum subjects other than English, mathematics and history, arranged under similar headings to those used in the answer of 24 January. The separate costs of the documents listed under the second heading cannot be disaggregated for the reason given in the answer of 24 January, but the total costs of the revised national curriculum documents were included in that answer. I will write the hon. Member as soon as possible with the costs of the documents listed under the third and fourth headings. The relevance of the documents listed to the revised national curriculum is as explained above.

1. Statutory documents containing or relating to attainment targets and programmes of study for the current or previous national curriculum

	Production costs £	*Distribution costs* £
Science in the National Curriculum	762,000[1]	198,000[1]
Science in the National Curriculum (1991)	251,000	76,000
Technology in the National Curriculum	630,000[1]	185,000[1]
Geography in the National Curriculum	888,000	243,000
Modern Foreign Languages in the National Curriculum	172,000	90,000
Music in the National Curriculum	488,000	175,000
Art in the National Curriculum	490,000	175,000
Physical Education in the National Curriculum	502,000	179,000
Order removing sex education from "Science in the National Curriculum"	12,000	7,000

[1] These figures are estimates.

The cost of miscellaneous deliveries in all subjects subsequent to the initial bulk distributions has totalled approximately £257,000.

2. Statutory documents containing Attainment Targets and Programmes of Study for the revised National Curriculum

Science in the National Curriculum
Design and Technology in the National Curriculum
Information Technology in the National Curriculum
Geography in the National Curriculum
Modern Foreign Languages in the National Curriculum
Music in the National Curriculum
Art in the National Curriculum
Physical Education in the National Curriculum
The National Curriculum
Key Stages 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum

3. Non-Statutory Curriculum guidance

Science
1989 Science Non-Statutory Guidance
1991 Science Explorations
1991 Science Non-Statutory Guidance
1992 Forces
1993 Electricity and Magnetism
1993 Energy
1993 Teaching Science at Key Stages 1 and 2
1993 Teaching Science at Key Stages 3 and 4
1993 Earth Sciences—Primary
1993 Earth Sciences—Secondary
1994 Chemical Changes
1994 Genetics and Ecology

Design and Technology
1990 Design and Technology Non-Statutory Guidance
1991 Implementing Design and Technology at Key Stages 1 and 2
1991 Implementing Design and Technology at Key Stage 3

Information Technology
1990 Information Technology Non-Statutory Guidance

Geography
1991 Geography Non-Statutory Guidance
1993 Teaching Geography at Key Stages 1 and 2: an INSET Guide
1993 Teaching Geography at Key Stage 3: an INSET Guide
1993 An Introduction to Teaching Geography at Key Stages 1 and 2
1993 An introduction to Teaching Geography at Key Stage 3

Modern Foreign Languages
1992 Modern Foreign Languages Non-Statutory Guidance
1993 Target Practice

Art
1992 Art Non-Statutory Guidance

Music
1992 Music Non-Statutory Guidance

Physical Education
1992 Physical Education Non-Statutory Guidance

4. Assessment of pupils

Science

Key Stage 1
1994 Optional Science Pack

Key Stage 2
1993 Pilot Tests
1994 Pilot Tests
1995 Tasks

Key Stage 3
1991 INSET material (Ma & Sc)
1992 Pupils' Work Assessed
1992 School Assessment Folder
1992 Tests
1993 Sample Test Questions
1993 Tests
1993 Assessing Sc1
1993 Pupils' Work Assessed
1994 Level 1&2 Tasks
1994 Tests
1995 Level 1&2 Tasks

Key Stage 4
1993 Sc1: Scientific Investigation

Technology

Key Stage 1
1992 Children's Work Assessed
1992 Optional Tasks
1993 Optional Level 4 Tasks
1993 Working with the current Order (D&T)

Key Stage 2
1993 Working with the current Order (D&T)

Key Stage 3
1993 Assessment material Te5
1993 Sample Test Questions (IT)
1993 Long Task and Test Questions (D&T)
1993 Tests
1993 Pupils' Work Assessed (IT)
1994 Optional Tasks

Geography

Key Stage 1
1993 Optional Tasks

Key Stage 3
1992 Teacher Assessment at KS3
1993 Pupils' Work Assessed

Modern foreign languages

Key Stage 3
1992 Teacher Assessment at KS3

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the total income received since 1988 for the sale of documentation relating to changes in the national curriculum.

Mr. Forth: Information on income from the sale of documents relating specifically to changes to the national curriculum is not available. Income from the sale of all documents relating to the national curriculum and its assessment since 1988 by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority and its predecessors is estimated at around £0.9 million. In addition the Department for Education has received royalties from Her Majesty's Stationery Office as a result of its sales of national curriculum documents estimated at £0.2 million since 1988.

Bradford University (Bursaries)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has received about her decision to cease offering bursaries for those wishing to undertake postgraduate language training at Bradford university; what consultation took place with Bradford university prior to her decision being announced; what evidence she has that bursaries for such courses are available from alternative sources; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has received correspondence from Professor David Johns. vice chancellor and principal of Bradford university, and five other letters about the withdrawal of bursary support for students undertaking the postgraduate diploma in interpreting and translating course at Bradford university. The decision was taken as part of the review of public expenditure for 1995–96 in which my right hon. Friend takes account of demands and priorities for spending.

A survey undertaken in January 1994 by the Department indicated that more than 60 per cent. of students on the interpreting and translation courses at the four institutions receiving bursaries through the scheme were undertaking their studies without support from the Department.

Schools (Special Measures)

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list those schools which have been identified by Her Majesty's chief inspector as in need of special measures.

Mr. Forth: The following schools have been identified as failing or likely to fail to provide an acceptable standard of education, and hence as in need of special measures:

LEA maintained secondary schools
Battersea Technology College, Wandsworth
Cross Green High School, Leeds
Dick Sheppard School, Lambeth
Fairfax Community School, Bradford
Hackney Downs School, Hackney
Lilian Baylis School, Lambeth
Northicote School, Wolverhampton
St. Mark's School, Hammersmith and Fulham
St. Joseph's Academy, Lewisham
St. Richard of Chichester School, Camden
Tamarside Community College, Devon
The Hammersmith School, Hammersmith and Fulham

Grant maintained secondary schools
Stratford School, Newham

LEA maintained middle schools
Abbey Farm Middle School, Norfolk

LEA maintained primary schools
Crook Primary School, Durham
Earlsmead Primary School, Haringey
Francis Askew Primary School, Humberside
Hockwold Primary School, Norfolk
Morningside Primary School, Hackney
Norbridge Primary School, Nottinghamshire
Rough Hay Primary School, Walsall
Roundthorn Primary School, Oldham
St. John the Divine C of E Primary School, Lambeth
St. Stephen's C of E Primary School, Lambeth
South Park Infants School, Redbridge
The Drive County Primary School, Gateshead

LEA maintained special schools
Brookside Special School, Derbyshire
Fred Nicholson Special School, Norfolk

Secondary School Performance Tables

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of circulating a copy of the secondary school performance tables for 1994 to every school.

Mr. Forth: The secondary schools performance tables 1994 were distributed to schools as part of the same exercise as the distribution of 1994 tables of school and college performance 16 to 18 age group. It is not possible to disaggregate these costs. Single photocopied pre-publication tables were mailed to all schools and colleges listed in the tables at an estimated cost of £4,500. Further printed copies, to pass on to parents, were sent to all schools and colleges for an additional cost estimated at £106,000.

Nursery Education

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many three-year-olds and four-year-olds there are in nursery classes in schools, not including primary reception classes, in each local education authority in England and Wales; and what percentage this represents of the population in those age groups for the latest figures available.

Mr. Forth: Information about the number of pupils under five years of age being taught in nursery classes in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England in January 1994 is shown in the table. Under fives provision in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Pupils under five years of age in nursery classes in maintained primary schools in each LEA in England January 1994

LEA	*Pupils*[1]	*Percentage of population*
Camden	794	20
Greenwich	2,354	34
Hackney	2,038	33
Hammersmith and Fulham	898	24
Islington	1,134	28
Kensington and Chelsea	560	17
Lambeth	1,742	25
Lewisham	2,264	32
Southwark	2,038	29
Tower Hamlets	2,088	36
Wandsworth	1,885	28
Westminster[2]	880	23
Barking and Dagenham	1,833	40
Barnet	1,669	20
Bexley	1,373	22
Brent	2,270	33
Bromley	156	2
Croydon	1,080	11
Ealing	2,720	34
Enfield	1,622	22
Haringey	2,223	38
Harrow	1,003	19
Havering	454	8
Hillingdon	3,049	45
Hounslow	2,493	43
Kingston upon Thames	851	24
Merton	2,142	44
Newham	3,496	44
Redbridge	1,156	19
Richmond upon Thames	723	17

Pupils under five years of age in nursery classes in maintained primary schools in each LEA in England January 1994

LEA	Pupils[1]	Percentage of population
Sutton	1,603	34
Waltham Forest	2,270	34
Birmingham	7,935	26
Coventry	1,837	21
Dudley	2,390	29
Sandwell	3,687	44
Solihull	1,837	35
Walsall	2,943	40
Wolverhampton	2,478	35
Knowsley	2,059	42
Liverpool	4,597	37
St. Helens	1,401	30
Sefton	1,746	22
Wirral	1,894	21
Bolton	2,255	29
Bury	1,341	26
Manchester	6,441	48
Oldham	2,429	37
Rochdale	1,174	18
Salford	2,511	40
Stockport	1,007	13
Tameside	1,991	31
Trafford	1,872	33
Wigan	1,898	22
Barnsley	2,665	45
Doncaster	3,427	41
Rotherham	2,822	39
Sheffield	4,640	35
Bradford	5,146	35
Calderdale	1,834	34
Kirklees	3,425	32
Leeds	7,139	37
Wakefield	3,857	43
Gateshead	1,514	30
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,318	33
North Tyneside	2,005	42
South Tyneside	1,537	37
Sunderland	2,237	28
Avon	3,334	13
Bedfordshire	3,906	24
Berkshire	4,181	19
Buckinghamshire	2,152	12
Cambridgeshire	1,452	8
Cheshire	3,791	14
Cleveland	6,815	42
Cornwall[2]	1,466	12
Cumbria	2,223	18
Derbyshire	7,440	30
Devon	2,395	9
Dorset	741	5
Durham	3,949	25
East Sussex	1,178	7
Essex	2,218	5
Gloucestershire	—	—
Hampshire	1,554	4
Hereford and Worcester	1,276	7
Hertfordshire	7,074	26
Humberside	7,414	31
Isle of Wight	143	5
Kent	1,723	4
Lancashire	3,870	10
Leicestershire	5,093	20
Lincolnshire	1,165	8
Norfolk	466	3
North Yorkshire	3,222	18
Northamptonshire	2,308	14
Northumberland	2,318	30
Nottinghamshire	11,995	43
Oxfordshire	1,768	11
Shropshire	1,784	16
Somerset	425	3
Staffordshire	4,560	16
Suffolk	2,906	16
Surrey	2,349	9
Warwickshire	1,301	10
West Sussex	518	3
Wiltshire	548	3
England[2,3]	268,361	21

[1] Excludes pupils who became five years of age by 1 January 1994.
[2] Includes the Isles of Scilly.
[3] Includes the Corporation of London.

Schools, Warwickshire

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much Warwickshire is spending on non-statutory areas of education.

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not collected centrally. Local education authorities' returns of their expenditure do not distinguish between expenditure on pupils of statutory and non-statutory school age. However, I understand that Warkwickshire LEA may be able to provide this information, and I suggest that the hon. Member writes to the chief education officer.

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* her agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by the Department or agency.

Mr. Boswell: Only one course costing £5,000 or more was attended by a member of DFE staff in the last 12 months. The course was "Challenges for Change" organised by Shell International Petroleum Company Ltd. group training. The cost of the course was £5,136 plus VAT. The main course objective was:

"to identify emerging social, political, economic and technological trends".

The officer concerned was responsible for providing advice on schools policy for a region of England. The officer was required to report on the value of the course both to himself and to the Department.

Education Committee, Warwickshire

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the current number of officers employed by the Warwickshire county council's education committee; and what the number was in 1990.

Mr. Robin Squire: The employment of LEA officers is entirely a matter for the LEA concerned. The Department does not collect such information.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many further education colleges have achieved their student targets;

(2) how many further education colleges have had their budgets cut because of non-attainment of student targets;

(3) if the methodology used by the Further Education Funding Council in allocating money to further education colleges includes criteria covering socio-economic factors.

Mr. Boswell: Details of individual colleges' student targets, the funding of individual colleges, and the funding methodology, are matters for the Further Education Funding Council. I am asking the council's chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Severance Payments

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what advice and guidance she offers to universities and other institutions of higher and further education concerning severance payment to senior staff.

Mr. Boswell: The Secretary of State does not offer advice and guidance on severance payments to institutions within the higher and further education sectors. However, the Further Education Funding Council has required its institutions, from their first accounting period in 1993–94, to disclose in their final accounts emoluments of senior postholders, showing the principal separately; and the aggregate amount paid to senior postholders as compensation, together with the number of persons receiving such compensation.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England requires the institutions for which it is responsible to disclose separately details of any compensation for loss of office to the vice-chancellor, or equivalent, and higher paid staff whose annual remuneration exceeds £50,000, together with the salaries of senior staff and vice-chancellor's emoluments. This requirement will be effective for institutions' 1994–95 accounts.

Patent Royalties

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list for each university the amount of patent royalties received for each year since 1986; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: This information is not currently available centrally.

Religious Festivals

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what account has been taken of religious festivals in drawing up the 1995 GCSE timetable.

Mr. Forth: The construction of the GCSE common timetable is a matter for the examining groups, acting through the joint council for the GCSE.

Advertisements

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education on how many occasions and in what circumstances in the last five years advertisements have been placed in newspapers or periodicals which have been described as being issued by or on behalf of Ministers in her Department rather than on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Forth: In the last five years all departmental advertisements have been issued under the Department's name.

Pupil Statistics

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list for each local education authority *(a)* the education standard spending assessment per pupil for (i) primary, excluding non-statutory age pupils, (ii) secondary and (iii) post-16 and *(b)* the actual expenditure per sector and the percentage difference between the standard spending assessment and the actual expenditure.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information is not available in the form in which it has been requested. I will write to my hon. Friend.

Independent Schools

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many applications she has had from independent schools to join the grant-maintained sector.

Mr. Robin Squire: To date, applications have been received from three independent schools to join the grant-maintained sector. One is from an interdenominational Christian school in Bradley Stoke, Avon. The other two are from independent Catholic grammar schools in Wirral. Other schools have expressed interest or sought further information.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what account is taken of savings, investments or value of property in determining who is eligible for assisted places at independent schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 20 January, *Official Report* column 722. Eligibility for an assisted place is determined by reference to parents' gross income from all sources. No account is taken of capital and other assets or the value of property in assessing parental means.

Direct Grant Schools

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education from which former direct grant schools she has received applications to enter the grant-maintained sector.

Mr. Robin Squire: The following grant-maintained schools were formerly direct grant schools:

Canon Slade School, Bolton
Notre Dame School, Sheffield
St. Boniface's College, Devon
St. Anne's Convent School, Hampshire
St. Francis Xavier's College, Liverpool
Ursuline Convent High School, Essex

National Youth Agency

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what have been the main components of the cost of the National Youth Agency in each year since its establishment, including *(a)* the yearly Government grant and *(b)* the initial start-up costs.

Mr. Boswell: Grants paid or allocated to the National Youth Agency by the Department for Education in the period 1991–92 to 1995–96 were as follows:

£ million

	Core grant	Additional grants	Total grant
1991–92	1.165	0.180	1.345
1992–93	1.236	0.068	1.304
1993–94	1.287	0.399	1.686
1994–95	1.336	0.380	1.716
1995–96	1.297	0.358	1.655

Core grant provides funding for the agency's agreed annual work programme including internal audit and the administration of youth work development grants. Additional grant covers funding for initial start-up costs, special initiatives, and grants for disbursement to other bodies.

In addition to these grants, the agency received in 1991– 92 grants from the Home Office—£232,640—the Department of Health—£69,000—and the Welsh Office—£18,000. It received further grants from the Home Office in 1992–93—£143,834—1993–94—£149,000 and 1994–95—£151,111.

SCOTLAND

NHS Supplies Division

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that the redundancies announced at the NHS supplies division of the Common Services Agency do not impair that division's ability to monitor and advise trusts on potential hazards in equipment involved in patient care.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The restructuring of the supplies division makes provision for the continued availability of the defects and hazards service. A service level contract with the management executive of the NHS will provide for defects in equipment and other items to be fully investigated and the outcomes reported to the NHS in Scotland.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff were employed in each of the past five years in the NHS supplies division of the Common Services Agency.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of staff— whole–time equivalent—employed was:

1990: 139
1991: 139
1992: 139
1993: 137
1994: 106

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the turnover of the NHS supplies division of the Common Services Agency in the most recent year; and what is his estimate of the savings it achieved through discounts for bulk purchase.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The turnover in 1993–94—the latest year for which information is available—was £201 million.

Savings through discount on bulk purchases are estimated to be in the region of £23 million per annum. This level of savings is expected to continue to be achieved through the mechanism of central contracts.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many NHS trusts in Scotland *(a)* have contracts with the NHS supplies division of the Common Services Agency for equipment service and *(b)* have switched such contracts to alternative suppliers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Six trusts have entered into firm contracts for equipping work for the next year. Information is not available on alternative contracts which trusts may have entered into with other providers. Not all trusts will require an equipping service in the course of the coming year and in the past some directly managed units who have since become trusts provided their own in-house equipping service.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the meeting took place between Mr. Dunmore, the director of the NHS supplies division of the Common Services Agency, and the NHS executive in Scotland to discuss the future of the division; if he will place copies of the minutes of that meeting in the Library; and what guidance was issued to NHS trusts in Scotland relating to purchasing of equipment through the NHS supplies division.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Staffing and organisation of the supplies division is a matter for the board of the Common Services Agency.

There have been no meetings between the NHS management executive and Mr. Dunmore, the director. No specific guidance has been given to NHS Trusts, but they are expected to obtain best value for money in purchasing.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what studies he has undertaken to assess the additional administrative costs to the NHS in Scotland if NHS trusts cease to purchase equipment in common through the NHS supplies division of the Common Services Agency, and instead enter into separate contracts with individual suppliers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No studies are required since in making purchasing decisions NHS trusts will ensure that best value for money is achieved.

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the Departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document "Focus on Ability".

Mr. Lang: The number and proportion of non-industrial staff who were registered disabled in the Departments and agencies for which I have responsibility are set out in the table that follows. The table records the position as at 1 July 1994. The table also lists those cases where central personnel records indicate that an individual is disabled although not registered.

The Scottish Office, moreover, recently undertook a survey of disability and long-term health conditions in the workplace, which covered staff in the Scottish Office and its agencies—for the Scottish Prison Service only headquarters staff were covered. The survey of some 7,680 staff—including 493 industrial staff—revealed that 97 felt that they were affected "a great deal" and a further 300 "to some extent" by a disability or long-term health condition in the workplace. This represented a total of 5.2 per cent. of all staff. These results suggest that there may be at least as many non-registered disabled people in Departments as there are registered.

Non industrial staff at 1 July 1994—Disability

Headcounts

Department/Agency	*Disabled—Registered*		*Disabled—Not Registered*		
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*All Staff*
The Scottish Office and its Executive Agencies:					
SO Core	63	1.4	8	0.2	4,590
Historic Scotland	1	0.3	—	—	386
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	1	0.5	—	—	193
Scottish Agricultural Scientific Agency	1	0.8	1	0.8	125
Scottish Office Pensions Agency	7	4.0	2	1.1	174
Student Awards Agency for Scotland	4	2.6	—	—	151
Scottish Prison Service	2	<0.1	—	—	4,110
Associated Departments:					
General Register Office for Scotland	2	0.8	—	—	257
Scottish Records Office	2	1.6	—	—	129
Other Responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Scotland:					
Forestry Commission	21	1.0	51	2.4	2.092
Crown Office	6	0.5	—	—	1,126
Scottish Courts Administration	6	0.8	7	0.9	760
Registers of Scotland	37	3.1	—	—	1,186

School Class Sizes

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was the number and percentage of pupils in primary schools in *(a)* January 1992 and *(b)* January 1994, being taught in classes of over 30 in (i) each local education authority and (ii) in total; and what was the percentage change;

(2) what was the number and percentage of pupils in secondary schools in *(a)* January 1992 and *(b)* January 1994, being taught in classes of over 30 in (i) each local education authority and (ii) in total; and what was the percentage change.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information on class size is that which is collected biennially in the September school census. The information requested, for education authority primary and secondary schools at September 1991 and September 1993, is given:

Education authority primary schools

Education authority	*September 1991*		*September 1993*		
	Number of pupils in classes over 30	*Percentage of all pupils*	*Number of pupils in classes over 30*	*Percentage of all pupils*	*Percentage change*
Scotland	72,202	16.4	74,894	17.1	+0.7
Borders	448	5.3	544	6.3	+1.0
Central	3,954	16.9	3,972	17.1	+0.2
Dumfries and Galloway	2,137	16.7	2,052	15.9	-0.8
Fife	4,944	15.9	5,435	17.5	+1.6
Grampian	6,900	15.6	6,556	14.6	-1.0
Highland	1,503	7.6	1,996	10.4	+2.8
Lothian	11,344	20.2	11,885	20.7	+0.5
Strathclyde	34,235	16.7	34,642	17.2	+0.5
Tayside	6,580	20.3	7,558	23.1	+2.8
Orkney	157	8.7	64	3.5	-5.2
Shetland	—	0.0	—	0.0	0.0
Western Isles	—	0.0	190	7.2	+7.2

Strathclyde Divisions

Education authority	*September 1991*		*September 1993*		
	Number of pupils in classes over 30	*Percentage of all pupils*	*Number of pupils in classes over 30*	*Percentage of all pupils*	*Percentage change*
Argyll and Bute	538	9.5	287	5.3	-4.2
Ayr	6,424	18.7	6,478	19.2	+0.4
Dunbarton	5,798	19.2	5,138	17.5	-1.7

Strathclyde Divisions

Education authority	*September 1991* *Number of pupils in classes over 30*	*Percentage of all pupils*	*September 1993* *Number of pupils in classes over 30*	*Percentage of all pupils*	*Percentage change*
Glasgow	8,321	14.6	8,068	14.3	-0.3
Lanark	7,172	15.4	6,717	14.8	-0.5
Renfrew	5,982	18.8	7,954	25.2	+6.3

Education authority secondary schools[1]

Education authority	*September 1991* *Number of pupils in subject classes over 30*	*Percentage of all pupils in subject classes*	*September 1993* *Number of pupils in subject classes over 30*	*Percentage of all pupils in subject classes*	*Percentage change*
Scotland[2]	57,109	1.7	89,069	2.5	+0.8
Borders	31	0.0	342	0.5	+0.5
Central	3,497	1.7	535	0.3	–1.4
Dumfries and Galloway	1,530	1.5	615	0.6	–0.9
Fife	1,765	0.8	2,371	0.9	+0.1
Grampian[2]	1,129	0.3	4,189	1.2	+0.9
Highland	2,015	1.3	3,616	2.0	+0.7
Lothian	2,311	0.6	8,996	2.1	+1.5
Strathclyde	41,869	2.8	62,282	3.8	+1.0
Tayside	2,962	1.2	6,123	2.4	+1.2
Orkney	0	0.0	0	0.0	0.0
Shetland	0	0.0	0	0.0	0.0
Western Isles	0	0.0	0	0.0	0.0

Strathclyde Divisions

Education authority	*September 1991* *Number of pupils in subject classes over 30*	*Percentage of all pupils in subjest classes*	*September 1993* *Number of pupils in subject classes over 30*	*Percentage of all pupils in subject classes*	*Percentage change*
Argyll and Bute	2,153	4.6	155	0.3	–4.3
Ayr	4,246	1.7	2,715	1.0	–0.7
Dunbarton	560	0.2	13,975	5.4	+5.2
Glasgow	11,501	3.3	15,224	4.0	+0.7
Lanark	14,595	4.0	9,168	2.3	–1.7
Renfrew	8,814	3.5	21,045	7.9	+4.4

[1] The information available only allows the numbers of pupils in classes over 30 to be estimated from the average class size of a subject-stage entry in each school's timetable. Pupils are counted once for each subject taken.
[2] The figures for 1993 exclude two schools for which information is not available.

Countryside Commission

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of remuneration and expenses for the board members of the Countryside Commission for Scotland during its last full year of existence.

Sir Hector Monro: The chairman and vice-chairman of the Countryside Commission for Scotland received remuneration and reimbursed expenses. The other 12 board members received reimbursed expenses only. The annual report of the commission for 1991–92 shows that total remuneration was £23,793 and the total of reimbursed expenses was £28,216.

Civil Servants

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff have *(a)* retired at age 60 years or *(b)* retired early before age 60 years in each of the department's and agencies for which he is responsible, in each of the past five years; and what was the cost to the public purse of retirement packages in each case in each of these years.

Mr. Lang: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of remuneration and expenses for the board members of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland during its year of existence.

Sir Hector Monro: Members of the main board, the regional boards and of the science, research and development board of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland received remuneration, according to their time commitment, and reimbursed expenses. The annual

report for the council for 1991–92 shows that total remuneration for the 67 people involved for all or part of the year was £418,000 and the total of reimbursed expenses was £80,000.

Patients Charter

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost to public funds of the production, printing, distribution and advertising of the patients charter when launched in 1991; and how many copies were printed.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The total cost of launching the patient's charter in Scotland in 1991, was £32,550. This included printing and distributing 16,000 copies.

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of admissions for each health board for the last five years for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the table.

NHSiS—discharges[2] by health board area of residence; years ending 31 March

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*[1]
All areas[3]	1,015,151	1,059,951	1,094,827	1,158,055	1,230,326
Argyll and Clyde	86,596	90,655	96,979	102,200	108,616
Ayrshire and Arran	70,803	75,092	78,822	83,365	91,556
Borders	20,039	21,129	21,619	23,755	25,092
Dumfries and Galloway	26,489	28,827	29,966	32,446	35,198
Fife	65,583	68,727	72,955	75,394	78,756
Forth Valley	51,994	56,956	59,797	62,927	65,158
Grampian	101,205	104,052	104,368	108,474	112,057
Greater Glasgow	202,695	207,707	210,736	221,818	236,531
Highland	37,712	39,130	40,980	43,536	45,600
Lanarkshire	106,942	110,783	114,259	121,948	130,692
Lothian	142,158	149,851	154,798	168,549	182,389
Orkney	3,426	3,628	3,593	3,759	3,966
Shetland	4,495	4,828	4,630	5,023	5,275
Tayside	81,919	84,927	86,232	89,265	93,453
Western Isles	5,784	5,887	6,466	6,666	7,056

[1] Provisional.
[2] Comprises inpatient and day case discharges for non-psychiatric specialties and inpatient admissions for psychiatric specialties.
[3] Includes those patients resident outwith Scotland and those whose area of residence was not recorded, Excludes patients treated outwith Scotland.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many jobs there were in *(a)* the manufacturing industry, *(b)* the engineering industry and *(c)* the aerospace industry in Scotland in each year since 1979; and what those figures represented in percentage terms of the total Scottish work-force.

Mr. Stewart: The information is given in the table.

Employees in employment, in each industry, at September

	Manufacturing		*Engineering*[1]		*Aerospace*[2]	
Year	*Number of employees*	*As percentage of all industries*	*Number of employees*	*As percentage of all industries*	*Number of employees*	*As percentage of all industries*
1979	601,700	28.5	255,200	12.1	10,600	0.5
1980	549,700	26.6	231,000	11.2	11,200	0.5
1981	502,400	25.3	211,300	10.6	11,100	0.6
1982	470,600	24.4	203,400	10.5	9,900	0.5
1983	441,700	23.3	194,100	10.2	8,500	0.4
1984	433,700	22.8	187,500	9.8	7,900	0.4
1985	433,000	22.7	184,600	9.7	8,200	0.4
1986	415,500	22.2	170,300	9.1	8,200	0.4
1987	406,900	21.6	163,200	8.7	8,200	0.4
1988	412,600	21.2	163,900	8.4	8,100	0.4
1989	402,400	20.5	165,800	8.4	8,600	0.4
1990	403,300	20.2	170,600	8.5	8,800	0.4
1991	381,000	19.0	160,200	8.0	8,900	0.4
1992	368,800	18.5	155,400	7.8	8,000	0.4
1993	361,800	18.2	151,000	7.6	7,800	0.4
1994	352,100	17.9	149,800	7.6	6,800	0.3

Main source:
Employment Department, Quarterly Employment Estimates.
Notes:
[1] Figures represent Standard Industrial Classification (1980), Division 3, Metal Goods, Engineering and Vehicles Industries.
Source:
[2] Scottish Register of Employment.

Private Health Contracts

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a reply to his letter of 9 November 1994 to the general manager of Orkney health board concerning private contracts for non-NHS facilities entered into by the health board;

(2) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a reply to his letter of 9 November 1994 acknowledged on 10 November 1994, to the general manager of Greater Glasgow health board concerning private contracts for non-NHS facilities entered into by the health board.

(3) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South can expect a reply to his letter of 9 November 1994 to the general manager of Highland health board concerning private contracts for non-NHS facilities entered into by the health board.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The acting general manager of Greater Glasgow health board replied to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South on 2 December 1994. Replies to his letters to the general managers of Orkney and Highland health boards are for these boards to consider.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many properties have been transferred by Scottish Homes from its ownership to that of other landlords; if he will indicate *(a)* when these properties were transferred, *(b)* the results of the ballots undertaken among the tenants prior to these properties being transferred, *(c)* the numbers of tenants in each case transferred against their expressed wishes to another landlord and *(d)* the name of the landlord to whom the properties in these cases were transferred;

(2) how much Scottish Homes has spent on its public relations function during the financial year 1993–94; how much it has set aside for tenant information relating to its stock transfer proposals; and how much money has been spent up until this point on publicising its stock transfer proposals.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked the chairman of Scottish Homes, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member with the relevant information.

National Library

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure the sound use of available resources at the national library of Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: The national library of Scotland is an important natational institution which provides valuable services to users in Scotland and beyond. My officials and I take a close and regular interest in the effectiveness of the corporate planning and financial management systems in the library. In keeping with the Government's policy towards non-departmental public bodies, the Scottish Office Education Department will now undertake a regular policy and financial management review of the library, focusing on key issues which will have a bearing on future policy developments at the library. The review will be conducted by Mr. Colin Imrie, a principal at the Scottish Office attached to the Scottish Office Education Department for the purpose of this review. I expect his report, including recommendations, to be completed this spring. Interested parties can contact Mr. Imrie at the following address:

The Scottish Office Education Department
Room 613, 43 Jeffrey Street
Edinburgh
EH1 1DN
Tel: 031 244 5360
Fax: 031 244 5526

M74

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what contractors are responsible for upgrading the M74; what is the deadline for improvements by contractors upgrading the M74; what are the daily financial penalties incurred by the contractors for work completed after the deadline on the M74; and what changes have been made to the contract concerning completion by the deadline on the M74.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* At present, there are two contractors working on the upgrading of the A74 to motorway: Morrison Construction on the length between Ecclefechan and Eaglesfield and Castelli-Girola between Eaglesfield and Kirkpatrick Fleming. Contracts have recently been completed by Barr, Balfour Beatty and Miller Civil Engineering. A contract to divert the Evan Water in advance of the main works has been let to Barr very recently; but work has not yet started.

When bidding for the Scottish Office road contracts, contractors submit their own completion dates with their tenders and these are taken into account when deciding which firm should be awarded the contract. The completion date becomes part of the contract, and the contractor becomes liable for liquidated damages if he is late. There is provision in such contracts to extend the time for completion—for example, due to exceptional weather conditions, which would delay the onset of liquidated damages.

The Ecclefechan to Eaglesfield contract is due to be completed on 3 December 1995, and the liquidated damages payable for late completion are £5,500 per day. The contract is on programme.

The Eaglesfield to Kirkpatrick Fleming contract was due for completion on 26 November 1994, and liquidated damages of £8,200 per day will be due, calculated from that date, except to the extent that the contract conditions relating to an extension of time apply. The appropriate application of these conditions to the circumstances of this contract is currently being considered. The terms of the contract therefore render it unnecessary to make changes concerning the completion date. The road is expected to open to traffic in mid-1995.

DEFENCE

Regimental Mascots

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the cost of regimental mascots in each of the last five years.

Mr. Soames: The costs of purchasing officially recognised mascots, together with the cost of food, accommodation and ceremonial accoutrements, are met

privately by regimental associations. Their travel and veterinary costs are met by my Department, but these are minimal and are not therefore separately identifiable.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the bids he received for the sale of houses at RAF Finningley, near Doncaster, *(b)* the criteria for determining the successful bid, *(c)* the name of the successful organisation and *(d)* the agreed purchase price.

Mr. Soames: Bids for the sale of 93 houses at RAF Finningley were received from the following:

Bassinder Dapo Housing Association
Ellinson
Five Jays
Gerrard Lewis
Glaister
Hetton Properties
Hodge and Co.
JSM Properties
G.A. Mell
R. Northgreaves
J. B. Pettifer
Sable Properties
South Yorkshire Housing Association
Woodwiss
Yorkshire Metropolitan Housing Association

The highest compliant bid was accepted once it had been determined that the bidder was capable of honouring the conditions of sale. The successful bidder was Hodge and Co. The agreed purchase price is commercial in confidence.

Executive and Advisory Bodies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by name and rank those personnel who have left his Department in the last two years and who now serve on his Department's executive or advisory bodies; if he will identify the advisory or executive body in each case; and if he will give the remuneration received in each case.

Mr. Soames: Four appointees have retired from my Department in the last two years and currently serve on a Ministry of Defence non-departmental public body. These are detailed:

Executive body

Vice Admiral Sir Barry Wilson KCB, appointed as Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Royal Naval Museum.

Captain B. Gibbs RM, appointed as a Trustee of the Royal Marines Museum.

Advisory body

Flight Lieutenant Z. Gunn, appointed as member of the Anglo-American Community Relations Committee.

Major P. Lawson, appointed as member of the Anglo-American Community Relations Committee.

None receives any remuneration.

Recruitment Applications

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many applications to join defence or defence-related companies from his Department's personnel have been refused in the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: None. The purpose of the rules on the acceptance of outside appointments is to ensure that no cause of suspicion or impropriety exists. All applicants are therefore approved either unconditionally or subject to a waiting period of up to two years, or with a ban on the involvement of the applicant in a specific project or area of work on behalf of the employer.

Property Sales

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings owned by his Department have been sold to *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* other buyers since 1 January 1994.

Mr. Soames: The number of dwellings sold to local authorities, housing associations and other buyers between 1 January and 31 December 1994 was as follows:

Local Authorities: Nil
Housing Associations: 231
Other Buyers: 1,315

Unfortunately, my answer of 15 December, *Official Report*, column *814*, contained an error. The number of dwellings sold to housing associations during financial year 1994–95 should have read 229, not 237.

Housing Offices

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) in which city the Crown housing trust has its offices; and what has been the total cost of building and leasing the offices since 1 January 1994;

(2) in which city the defence housing executive has its offices; and what has been the total cost of building and leasing the offices.

Mr. Soames: The staff initially recruited for a housing trust and now employed on setting up the defence housing executive were originally accommodated in Ministry of Defence offices in London. Since August 1994, they have occupied other Government offices in central London at a cost to my Department of approximately £165,000.

Eurofighter 2000

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's latest estimate for the cost of the Eurofighter 2000 project; what was the original estimated cost; when the Eurofighter is due in service; and when it was originally due in service.

Mr. Freeman: The estimated total cost of EF2000, comprising the costs of development, production and integrated logistic support, to the United Kingdom is £14.9 billion. The original estimated total cost in 1986 was £12.7 billion at today's prices.

At the time of the original approval, the EF2000 entry into service date was December 1998. Reorientation of the project, agreed by the Defence Ministers of the EF2000 partner nations in December 1992, has changed this to December 2000.

Bowman Combat Radio System

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's latest estimate for the cost of the Bowman combat radio system; what was the original estimated cost; when the Bowman system is expected to be in service; and what was the original in-service date of the project.

Mr. Freeman: The latest estimate for the cost of the Bowman combat radio system is £1.9 billion. The original estimated cost in 1988 was £1.5 billion, which equates to £2.1 billion at current prices. The in-service date for Bowman is January 2000. The original in-service date was 1995.

EH101 Helicopters

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's latest estimate for the cost of the EH101 Merlin; what was the original estimated cost; when the EH101 is expected to be in service; and what was the original in-service date of the project.

Mr. Freeman: The Department's latest estimate for the cost of the EH101 Merlin is £3,925 million. The estimated cost in 1991, at the time the Merlin prime contract was placed on Loral-ASIC—then IBM-ASIC—was £3,799 million, at 1994–95 prices. The Merlin is expected to be in service in 1998; the original in-service date, upon the approval of development in 1982, was 1993.

Boxer Communications System

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's latest estimate for the cost of the Boxer communications system; what was the original estimated cost; when the Boxer communications system is expected to be in service; and what was the original in-service date of the project.

Mr. Freeman: The latest estimate for the cost of Boxer is £337 million at 1994–95 prices. The original cost was £211.3 million at 1994–95 prices. Boxer is planned to be in service on 30 June 1996. The original in-service date was 31 December 1992.

Facsimile Messages

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will prohibit the use of facsimile messages between royal naval establishments unless the telephones used have automatic memory dialling facilities to avoid mis-dialling errors.

Mr. Soames: No. Automatic memory dialling is already widely used where appropriate.

Electric-shock Equipment

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with BAe Royal Ordnance about the sale of electric-shock batons to *(a)* Saudi Arabia and *(b)* other countries.

Mr. Freeman: None, prior to the recent publicity regarding the alleged supply of such equipment. The company has denied both publicly and to my officials that it has ever supplied such equipment.

Infantry Regiments

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will name each of the front-line infantry regiments.

Mr. Soames: A list of current Regular infantry regiments is as follows:

Regular Infantry Regiments
The Guards Division
Grenadier Guards
Coldstream Guards
Scots Guards
Irish Guards
Welsh Guards

The Scottish Division
The Royal Scots
The Royal Highland Fusiliers
The King's Own Scottish Borderers
The Black Watch
The Highlanders
The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders

The Queen's Division
The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment (First and Second Battalion)
The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers (First and Second Battalion)
The Royal Anglian Regiment (First and Second Battalion)

The King's Division
The King's Own Border Regiment
The King's Regiment
The Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire
The Green Howards
The Royal Irish Regiment
The Queen's Lancashire Regiment
The Duke of Wellington's Regiment

The Prince of Wales's Division
The Devonshire and Dorset Regiment
The Cheshire Regiment
The Royal Welch Fusiliers
The Royal Regiment of Wales
The Royal Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Berkshire Regiment
The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment
The Staffordshire Regiment

The Light Division
The Light Infantry (First and Second Battalion)
The Royal Green Jackets (First and Second Battalion)
The Parachute Regiment (First, Second and Third Battalion)

The Brigade of Gurkas
The Royal Gurkha Rifles (First, Second and Third Battalion)

Residential Garrison Duty

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the known and foreseeable residential garrison duty tours; if the units on residential garrison duty are more or less than battalion size; and if he will name those units which are on residential garrison duty tours at present and planned to be in the future.

Mr. Soames: Apart from Germany, there are three overseas garrisons that include resident major units: Hong Kong, Brunei and Cyprus. In Hong Kong the only such unit is the 1st Battalion, Royal Gurkha Rifles. It is due to leave Hong Kong in October 1996 and will be replaced by two successive battalions on four month unaccompanied tours. In Brunei there is one Gurkha battalion, currently the 2nd Battalion, Royal Gurkha Rifles which is due to remain there until November 1996 when it will be replaced by the 3rd Battalion, Royal Gurkha Rifles. In Cyprus there are two battalions resident at any one time. The current battalions are the 1st Battalion; the Royal Irish Regiment, which will be replaced by the 1st Battalion Royal Gloucester, Wiltshire and Berkshire Regiment in May 1995, and the 1st Battalion, Royal Green Jackets, which will be replaced by the 1st Battalion, Royal Kings Regiment in January 1996. Each garrison also includes minor units from non-infantry arms and services.

WALES

Teenage Pregnancies

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the trend in the number of unwanted teenage pregnancies in Wales.

Mr. Richards: The number of teenage pregnancies in Wales fell from 7,300 in 1984, to 6,400 in 1991—the earliest and most recent years for which figures are available. Over the same period the rate of conceptions per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 increased from 64.5 to 70.4. It is not known how many of these pregnancies were unwanted.

Civil Servants

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document, "Focus on Ability."

Mr. Redwood: There are 48 registered disabled people amongst the non-industrial staff in the Welsh Office, representing 2 per cent. of the total. Figures for the number and proportion of all disabled people employed in the Welsh Office are not available. A survey of staff using self-categorisation of disability suggested that there were a further 53 staff with a disability who have chosen not to register.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients by general practitioner practice are waiting to be seen for in-patient treatment for orthopaedics and ophthalmology in South Glamorgan.

Mr. Richards: The requested information is not held centrally.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average waiting time of patients, by general practitioner practice, for in-patient treatment for orthopaedics and ophthalmology in South Glamorgan.

Mr. Richards: The information requested could be provided only with the consent of individual general practitioners. The consent could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Consultants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what average hours consultants on maximum part-time contracts work for the NHS and how many hours in the private sector.

Mr. Richards: Maximum part-time consultants are expected to devote substantially the whole of their professional time to their NHS work. Information is not available centrally on the average number of hours such consultants work in the private sector.

Language Units, Clwyd

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make new funds available for language units in Clwyd local education authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend announced final decisions on the local government revenue settlement for 1995–96 for Wales on Monday 30 January. It will be for Clwyd local education authority to decide how much they spend on the services for which they are responsible, including language units.

In addition to the above, Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in Wales is to report to my right hon. Friend on the recording, monitoring and follow-up of absence by schools, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of current practices. This is expected shortly.

School Repairs Programmes

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to assist those local education authorities that have initiated programmes of major repairs to schools.

Mr. Richards: My support for local authority expenditure is in the form of revenue support grant and permission to borrow. It is for each local authority to determine how its available resources are allocated between the services it provides, in the light of its statutory responsibilities and its perception of local needs and priorities.

Local Authority Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local education authority schools there are in Wales.

Mr. Richards: A total of 2,021 as at January 1994.

School Staff Redundancies

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from schools concerned about teaching and staffing redundancies in 1995–96 following consultations on revenue support allocations for education in the next financial year.

Mr. Richards: The Department has received a number of representations from schools concerned about staffing levels in 1995–96. My right hon. Friend does not make revenue support allocations for education. It is for each local authority to determine how much of its available resources to direct to the services it provides, including education, in the light of its statutory responsibilities and its perception of local needs and priorities.

School Class Sizes

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning class sizes.

Mr. Richards: Class sizes are a matter for individual school governing bodies.

Consultants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of whether hospital consultants are complying with the terms of their NHS contracts and whether private practice interferes with the function of the NHS or disadvantages non-paying patients.

Mr. Richards: It is a matter for individual health authorities and NHS trusts to satisfy themselves that hospital consultants are fulfilling the terms of their NHS

contracts. Consultants who undertake private practice accept that their NHS work should receive priority at all times and employing authorities are entitled to expect no diminution in the level of service to NHS patients as a result of this arrangement.

Special Needs Children

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new funds he proposes to assist special needs children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Local authority expenditure on education, including provision for special needs children, is funded through the local government revenue settlement. It is for individual local authorities to determine how much is allocated to education, in the light of local needs and priorities.

Upland Farm Incomes

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what were the net income figures for upland cattle and sheep farms in each year from 1988–89 to 1993–94; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what were the net farm incomes for hill sheep farms in each year from 1988–89 to 1992–93; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what were the net income figures for hill cattle and sheep farms in each year from 1988–89 to 1993–94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is included in the statistical tables which were released when the results of the autumn hill review were announced on 29 November. A copy of these tables is available in the Library of the House.

Public Bodies

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people sit on two or more non-departmental public bodies in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: As at 1 December 1994, there were 59 people appointed to two or more non-departmental public bodies in Wales.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people sit on non-departmental public bodies in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: As at 1 December 1994, 1,377 people sat on non-departmental public bodies in Wales. Of these, 761 have been appointed by me or my predecessors. Details are given in "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales, 1 December 1994" which is available in the Library of the House.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many general practitioner fundholders there are in the county of Gwynedd;

(2) how many general practitioner fundholders there are in the county of Clwyd.

Mr. Richards: In Gwynedd there are nine general practitioner fundholding practices—one third wave and eight fourth wave; these include five practices in one group of three and one group of two. A further two practices are preparing to become fundholders from 1 April 1995.

There at 19 general practitioner fundholding practices in Clwyd—one first wave, nine second wave, eight third wave and one fourth wave; these include four practices in two groups. Another practice is preparing to become a fundholder from 1 April 1995.

Education Spending

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how much was spent per pupil on *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary education in the counties of (i) Dyfed, (ii) Mid Glamorgan, (iii) South Glamorgan and (iv) Gwent in 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1993; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how much was spent per pupil on *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary education in the county of Gwynedd in each year from 1990 to 1993; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how much was spent per pupil on *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary education in the county of Clwyd in each year from 1990 to 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The information requested for 1993–94 is not yet available. Figures for earlier years are available in tables 10 and 14 in the Welsh Office "Education Finance Bulletin" produced by the training and education intelligence unit, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

	Three and four-year-olds in nursery education				*Four-year-olds in nursery education*			
	Part time		*Full time*		*Part time*		*Full time*	
	Number	*Per cent.*[1]	*Number*	*Per cent.*[1]	*Number*	*Per cent.*[2]	*Number*	*Per cent.*[2]
Clwyd	4,622	44.3	90	0.9	1,551	30.1	90	1.8
Dyfed	937	11.3	1,101	13.3	266	6.5	609	14.8
Gwent	4,463	35.9	313	2.5	1,488	24.0	154	2.5
Gwynedd	641	10.8	194	3.3	217	7.3	194	6.5
Mid Glamorgan	1,565	10.2	3,339	21.8	477	6.1	1,176	15.1
Powys	4	0.1	294	10.5	1	0.1	198	14.1
South Glamorgan	3,121	26.8	128	1.1	1,036	17.8	48	0.8
West Glamorgan	4,333	46.3	1	—	1,354	29.4	—	—
Wales	19,686	25.8	5,460	7.2	6,390	16.8	2,469	6.5

[1]As a percentage of three and four-year-old population.
[2]As a percentage of four-year-old population.
Note:
Ages are estimated as at 31 December 1993.
Source:
School Census January 1994.

Farm Incomes

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the figures for net product and farming income in Wales in each year from 1981 to 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is as follows:

	Net product £000	*Farming income £000*
1981	202,645	60,035
1982	228,274	78,856
1983	200,304	40,434
1984	233,185	58,686
1985	228,735	29,946
1986	237,012	46,957
1987	251,565	55,484
1988	261,338	69,780
1989	268,062	45,987
1990	261,032	28,499
1991	268,266	28,318
1992	272,086	39,687
1993	339,067	117,246
1994	360,868	139,518

Truancy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he is taking to eradicate truancy.

Mr. Richards: We attach great importance to the elimination of truancy and are continually looking at ways in which to effect this. Over the past 12 months or so we have;

issued guidance to schools and LEAs on the policy and practice on categorisation of absence;

published details of absence levels at individual secondary schools for the first time;

encouraged LEAs to look more closely at individual pupils' absence rates and the reasons for them, and urged them to make more use of school attendance orders where appropriate;

reminded parents through the revised Charter for Parents in Wales of their duty to ensure that their children attend school regularly; and

supported projects totalling £663,500 on pupil discipline, bullying, and attendance including initiatives to combat truancy. The level of funding for 1995–96 has increased to £800,000 and the successful projects will be announced shortly.

Nursery Education

Mr Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* four-year-olds and *(b)* three and four-year-olds are in receipt of nursery education; what percentage of the total number of children in that age group that constituted; and if he will give the figures by each education authority.

Mr. Richards: The figures in the following table relate to children in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools. Children in reception or ordinary classes in maintained primary or special schools are not included, neither are children in non-maintained schools, nurseries and playgroups.

Ysgol y Berwyn, Y Bala

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when a decision will be made on the application by Ysgol y Berwyn, Y Bala for the reinstatement of its sixth form; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: As soon as possible.

Quarrymen

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will now take steps to facilitate a study into the incidence of emphysema and chronic bronchitis amongst slate quarrymen and former quarrymen, compared to the whole population; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have been asked to reply.

There are no plans to set up such a study.

Housing

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *155*, on the Department of the Environment's consultation document on a licensing system for houses in multiple occupation in England and Wales, if he has anything to add to his answer.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This document was issued in England only. The separate consultation arrangements, I described in my last answer, apply in Wales. The Welsh Office and the Department of the Environment will, of course, be discussing the outcomes of our separate consultations.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many parliamentary answers on health issues have been refused on the grounds of disproportionate cost or information not being held centrally *(a)* as a total and *(b)* as a percentage of all health answers in each of the last five years.

Mr. Redwood: Following a general search on POLIS, answers which contained the words "Health" or "NHS" are shown in the following table:

Session	*Total number*	*Not answered on the grounds of disproportionate costs or information not held centrally*	*Per cent.*
1989–90	63	4	2.52
1990–91	37	3	1.11
1991–92	23	2	0.46
1992–93	63	9	5.67
1993–94	39	5	1.95
1994–95 (up to 23 January 1995)	9	—	- -

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 2 February 1995

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Cash Limits

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals there are to change the 1994–95 cash limit for Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, class XVIII, vote 4, will be increased by £59,000 from £2,093,000 to £2,152,000. The increase is necessary to meet a higher than expected level of demand for official publications from United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament, and to restore a shortfall in compensation for the public library discount on official publications, which was occasioned in 1993–94 by excess expenditure on behalf of Members of the European Parliament. The increase will be offset by savings on class XVIII, vote 1, and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mrs Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has to change the 1994–95 cash limit or running costs limit for the Office of Public Service and Science.

Mr. David Hunt: The cash limit for the Office of Public Service and Science, class XVIII, vote 1 will be decreased by £1,556,000 from £66,428,000 to £64,872,000 and the gross running cost limit will also be decreased by £1,556,000 from £85,506,000 to £83,950,000. The majority of this decrease, £1,500,000, is in effect a transfer to Cabinet Office other services, class XIX, vote 1, in final settlement of an earlier transfer of functions. The remaining £56,000 is being transferred to HMSO, class XVIII, vote 4, to cover the increase in Members of the European Parliament supplies. The decrease is offset by increases to other Government Departments and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Science Budget

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what changes he proposes to the estimates, class XVIII, vote 2—Science—for 1994–95.

Mr. David Hunt: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 2 will be increased by £840,000 from £1,225,527,000 to £1,226,367,000 to enable the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council to meet the cost of certain redundancies at Horticulture Research International. The increase is offset by a similar reduction in class III, vote 4 and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The opportunity of the supplementary estimate is also being taken to show changes to the appropriations in aid of the vote and to switch resources between certain subheads of the vote.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the distribution of the science budget in 1995–96.

Mr. David Hunt: I have discussed the allocations with the Director General of Research Councils and have decided that, subject to parliamentary approval of the supply estimates in due course, the science budget of £1,281.675 million should be allocated as follows.

Allocations for 1995–96	*£ million*
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council	161.631
Economic and Social Research Council	61,232
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council	365.702
Medical Research Council	277.809
Natural Environment Research Council	155.483
Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council	196.367
Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils	1.500
Additional funding for LINK schemes *(to be allocated to Research Councils in due course)*	3.000
Royal Society	20.786
Royal Academy of Engineering	2.617
OST initiatives	2.250
Research Councils' Pension Scheme	33.298
Total	1,281.675

In making these allocations, I need to ensure that momentum is maintained with implementing the science, engineering and technology White Paper "Realising Our Potential". I have therefore decided that some 5 per cent. of the science budget should be targeted to priority initiatives aimed specifically at taking White Paper issues forward. Further details are set out in the paper "Allocation of the Science Budget 1995–96" which I have placed in the Library of the House.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the absenteeism rate for *(a)* the Central Office of Information, *(b)* the Office of Public Service and Science, *(c)* the Chessington Computer Centre, *(d)* the Civil Service college, *(e)* HMSO, *(f)* the occupational health service and *(g)* the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency in each year since 1991.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The average number of days sick leave taken by members of the staff of OPSS in each of the last four years was:

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Office of Public Service and Science	3.2	4.5	4.3	3.3

These figures include any weekends and public holidays which occurred within a single period of sickness absence.

I have asked the chief executives of each of the other Departments and agencies the hon. Member mentions to write to him with the information he seeks as they are responsible for operational matters within their organisations.

Letter from Michael D. Geddes to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 30 January 1995:

Mr. Robert Hughes has asked me to let you have the following information in respect of the average number of days sick leave taken by the staff in the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency; it was:

1991: 7.2
1992: 11.1
1993: 15.8
1994: 15.1

I hope that this information is useful to you.

Letter from Dr. Stephen Hickey to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 26 January 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the absenteeism rate for the Civil Service College in each year since 1991.

The average number of days sick leave taken by members of the staff in each of the last four years was:

1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
4.6	5.3	8.2	7.4

These figures include any weekends and public holidays which occurred within a single period of sickness absence.

Letter from Paul Freeman to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 26 January 1995:

I have been asked by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to reply to part of your question on absenteeism.

The average number of days sick leave taken by members of staff in HMSO in each of the last four years was:

1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
10.0	9.2	10.4	7.2

Letter from Dr. E. C. McCloy to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 27 January 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. Robert Hughes) has asked me to provide for my Agency, the information requested in your Parliamentary Question to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster about the absenteeism rate since 1991.

The average number of days sick leave taken by members of the staff of the Agency in each of the years since 1991 was:

1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
4.9	6.2	9.5	11.4

This information has been taken from records produced by Chessington Computer Centre and is provided on the same basis as that given for the Office of Public Service.

The figures therefore include any weekends and public holidays which occurred within a single period of sickness, and do not necessarily reflect days absent from the office due to sickness.

Letter from R. N. Edwards to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 26 January 1995:

SICK ABSENCE AT CHESSINGTON COMPUTER CENTRE

I refer to your enquiry of 19 January to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster regarding absenteeism at Chessington Computer Centre.

The average number of days sick leave taken by members of staff at Chessington Computer Centre in each of the last four years was:

1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
8.6	9.3	11.5	10.8

The figures include any weekends and public holidays which occurred within a single period of sickness absence.

Letter from Mike Devereau to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 26 January 1995:

In response to your PQ addressed to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the absenteeism rates for the Central Office of Information in each of the last four years were as follows:

Year	*Number of staff*	*Total number of days sick*	*Average rate (days)*
1991	669.5	4,776	7.1
1992	620.5	3,632	5.9
1993	541.5	5,467	10.1
1994	498.0	5,033	10.1

These figures include any weekends and public holidays which occurred within a single period of sickness absence, so do not necessarily indicate the number of days absence from the office.

Scientific Researchers

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of the total number of scientific researchers employed in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries was employed in the United Kingdom in each year since 1975.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The only available data are for the years 1981, 1985 and 1989 and are shown in the table.

Total number of scientific researchers employed in the UK as a percentage of the total employed in OECD countries

Per cent.

	1981	*1985*	*1989*
United Kingdom	8.0	6.9	6.0

Source:
OECD, STIU database (DSTI, EAS Division), January 1995.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what number of scientific researchersunder the Organisation for Economic Co-operationand Development definition were employedby publicly funded institutions in each year since 1975.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Available data start from 1981–82 and are shown in the table.

Research Scientists and Engineers engaged on R and D within Government 1981–82 to 1994–95[1]

	1981–82	*1982–83*	*1983–84*	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*
United Kingdom[2]	20,641	20,462	19,914	19,889	19,299	15,456[3]	15,121

Notes:[1] This table refers to personnel engaged in R and D, according to the "Frascati" definition, and excludes HEIs.
[2] Includes (a) DTI and its agencies and (b) the Sports Council for Wales, with manpower of 33—FTE—included for the first time in 1990–91.
[3] The drop in numbers reflects the fact that the UKAEA became a public corporation in 1986.

Sources:
Annual Review of Government Funded R and D, 1984 (Table 7.1).
Annual Review of Government Funded R and D, 1992 (Table 2.5.2).
Forward Look 1994 Statistical Supplement (Table 1.7.3).

	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
United Kingdom[1]	15,019	14,668	15,061	15,027	15,064	14,184	13,487

Notes:[1] *Includes (a)* DTI and its agencies and *(b)* the Sports Council for Wales, with manpower of 33—FTE—included for the first time in 1990–91.
Sources:
Annual Review of Government Funded R and D, 1984 (Table 7.1).
Annual Review of Government Funded R and D, 1992 (Table 2.5.2).
Forward Look 1994 Statistical Supplement (Table 1.7.3).

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Cash Limits

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what changes he plans to the 1994–95 cash limits for the votes of the Lord Chancellor's Department, class IX, vote 1 and the Public Record Office, class IX, vote 5.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IX, vote 1 has been increased by £18,175,000 from £760,918,000 to £779,093,000 as a result of a shortfall in civil court fee income. The running cost limit has been reduced by £2,884,000 from £431,330,000 to £428,446,000.

The cash limit for class IX, vote 5 has been reduced by £3,000,000 from £53,993,000 to £50,993,000 as a result of reduced expenditure on a major capital project. The running costs limit has been increased by £199,000 from £25,246,000 to £25,445,000. Some £196,000 is for take-up of end-year flexibility entitlement as announced by the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *729-34*. The remaining £3,000 has been transferred from HM Treasury for the move to repayment of the average property price lists for calculating additional housing cost allowance. The additional running cost provision is covered by savings in capital provision.

The increase in the cash limit on class IX, vote 1 is partially offset by the cash limit reduction on class IX, vote 5. The remaining £15,175,000 will be charged to the reserve and will not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Safety

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) which advanced gas-cooled reactors owned by Nuclear Electric are affected by the cracking of welds in steam headers; which Scottish reactors are affected by the same problem; and what changes have been made in their position on privatisation following these problems;

(2) what considerations his Department is giving within the nuclear review to generic cracking faults in welds on steam leaders of advanced gas-cooled reactors.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The answer I gave to the hon. Member for Leyton on 19 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *589*, explained that cracks had been identified in some of the steam header welds at Heysham 1 and Dungeness B advanced gas-cooled reactor power stations. The power stations owned and operated by Scottish Nuclear Ltd. are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland but I understand that no such cracks have been identified in any Scottish nuclear power station. The matter of the cracks does not fall within the scope of the terms of reference of the nuclear review.

China (Import Quotas)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he plans next to meet representatives from the People's Republic of China to discuss import quotas.

Mr. Needham: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has no such plans.

Oxygenated Petrol

Mr. Dowd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research his Department has carried out into oxygenated petrol; what plans for research into the environmental suitability of oxygenated petrol he has.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government are supporting the tri-partite programme, sponsored by the European Commission and the oil and motor industries, which is looking into the effects of motor fuel quality, including the use of oxygenates in petrol, and engine technology on air quality. A report is expected by mid-1995.

Tenant Farmers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he proposes to take to protect tenant farmers whose farms are being sold by British Coal.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The sale of British Coal's property is a matter for the corporation.

However, British Coal, in considering potential purchasers of the proposed agricultural land, will take every step to satisfy itself that they meet appropriate tests on viability and commitment to the future of the property which they are purchasing. Tenants' rights of tenure are also protected by the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986.

Iraq Trade Delegation

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what grounds he has given authorisation for a British trade delegation to Iraq on 15 February.

Mr. Needham: I have not given authorisation for a British trade delegation to visit Iraq, nor has such authorisation been sought.

Coal Privatisation

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will detail the present involvement of former

employees of British Coal in the ownership and management of new companies formed following the privatisation of British Coal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Tower Colliery was purchased by a team of its former employees and the South Wales regional coal company was purchased by a management buy-out team. Bidders' proposals for employee participation were taken into account in the selection of preferred bidders for the regional coal companies and care and maintenance collieries. The purchasers of the regional coal companies have all undertaken to provide the opportunity for employees to acquire shares.

Video Games

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 5 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *105*, on the publication of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the supply of video games received on 14 November 1994, when he now expects the report to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Publication will take place as soon as possible. As related in my previous answer, I shall make an announcement once the report has been published.

Departmental Funding

Mr. Gale: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent changes have been made and what future changes are planned to his Department's cash and running costs limits for 1994–95.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The cash limit for class IV, vote 1—support for business, consumer and investor protection, energy programmes and administration—has been reduced by £710,000 from £1,185,602,000 to £1,184,892,000. This reduction results from the transfer of responsibility for consultancy initiatives to the Scottish—£400,000—and Welsh—£310,000—Offices for their respective territories.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the same vote will be increased by a token £1,000 to £1,184,893,000.

The gross running cost limit for the Department of Trade and Industry will be reduced by £2,758,000 from £342,217,000 to £339,459,000. This reduction will be offset by an increase of £2,759,000 to cover the expected shortfalls against the Department's research laboratories' original net voted provisions.

In addition, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IV, vote 4—privatisation of the coal industry—will be increased by £2,000,000 from £15,897,000 to £17,897,000. The increase mainly covers additional costs of privatisation advisers' fees.

N. M. Rothschild and Son Ltd.

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the decision was taken to award the contract to advise the Department of Energy on the future of the coal industry to N. M Rothschild and Son Ltd.; who took the decision; what other companies were invited to tender; what criteria were used for awarding the contract; what was the value of the contract; and if the contract was awarded to the lowest tenderer.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. was appointed on 31 May 1991. The decision to appoint the company was taken by the then Secretary of State for Energy after receiving recommendations from an interdepartmental panel of officials. In addition to N. M. Rothschild, a further seven companies were invited to tender. Their identity is commercially confidential. The contract was awarded to the tenderer offering the best value for money. The value of the contract, which is still continuing, is commercially confidential.

Nitric Acid

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has authorised the importation of nitric acid from the United States Hanford plant for use in the reprocessing at Sellafield.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* The Department of Trade and Industry has responsibility for granting import licences. The import of nitric acid from the United States Hanford plant will be subject to import licensing. Applications for import licences are commercially confidential.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the Departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office document, "Focus on Ability".

The Attorney-General: The information for the Departments for which I am responsible as at 1 July 1994 is set out in the table.

The Treasury Solicitor's Department also employs people with disabilities who are not registered, but the numbers are not readily available.

Each of the Law Officers' Departments is an equal opportunities employer.

	Registered disabled staff		*Non-registered disabled staff*	
	Proportion Per cent.	*Number*	*Proportion Per cent.*	*Number*
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	—	—	—	—
Crown Prosecution Service	0.5	31	0.6	41
Serious Fraud Office	—	—	2.25	3
Treasury Solicitor's Department	2.2	11	n/a	n/a

ENVIRONMENT

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government are planning to complete its review of radioactive waste policy.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) on Tuesday 6 December, *Official Report*, column *132*.

Greenpeace

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, columns *109-10*, what possible causes of Greenpeace's high readings were investigated apart from the misuse of equipment.

Mr Atkins: The radiological measurements made by Greenpeace personnel at the Drigg low level radioactive waste disposal site were just one component of the complaints made by Greenpeace following its illegal entry. Each component was investigated thoroughly by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

The Greenpeace complaint provided no reliable evidence of unauthorised disposals of low level radioactive waste, least of all from its radiological monitoring of waste in the disposal trench.

HMIP considered the breadth of the findings from its investigations and found no evidence to support the Greenpeace contention that radioactive waste of levels in excess of those permitted had been disposed of at Drigg.

Energy Efficiency Advertising

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *109*, who carried out the monitoring of the advertising campaigns run by his Department; and what were the conclusions of this monitoring, with particular regard to projected energy savings flowing from the campaigns and cost-effectiveness of the campaigns.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The "Helping the Earth Begins At Home" campaign was monitored by BMRB International, which tracked significant changes in public knowledge, attitudes and intended energy saving behaviour. The current "Wasting Energy Costs The Earth" campaign, which is closely synchronised with the private sector, therefore places more emphasis on individual actions and is being monitored by National Opinion Poll.

Consultants

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *112*, if he will list those firms of consultants which are known centrally by his Department to have worked for his Department in 1992–93 and 1993–94.

Sir Paul Beresford: Firms of consultants known centrally to have worked for the Department in 1992–93 and 1993–94 are those employed specifically in connection with the market testing programme.

The list, excluding those employed direct by the agencies, is as follows:

Amtec Consulting
Andersen Consulting
Capita Management Consultancy Ltd.
Castle Management Consultants
Civil Service College
Coopers and Lybrand
CSL Group
Dun and Bradstreet
Mr P. Dworkin
Hoskyns Group plc
PA Consulting Group
Prime Strategy Consultants
Ray Tilly Associates
Shreeveport Limited
Smith and Williamson
SPT (Simon Thorpe)
Symonds Facilities Management plc
Mr. J. Wormald

Planning (Funds)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what controls exist on the use to which local authorities may put planning gain money and on the geographical area in which it may be spent; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: The use to which local planning authorities put money received in connection with agreements under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and the geographical area in which such money may be spent, will largely depend on the precise terms of the agreement, which will be registered as a local land charge.

Recycling

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what considerations he proposes to bear in mind in formulating an approach to legislation to increase the recovery and recycling of packaging waste.

Mr. Atkins: Clauses 76 to 78 of the Environment Bill, which is currently before Parliament, empower the Secretary of State, subject to certain conditions, to make regulations placing on particular industry sectors a producer responsibility obligation in relation to the waste which arises from their products, and the packaging around them. Individual companies may choose to discharge the obligation by acting alone or by joining an "exemption scheme" which will organise recovery and recycling operations on their behalf.

The Government propose to legislate using these powers to provide a framework for an industry-led approach to increase the recovery and recycling of packaging waste. This is in response to requests from industry to overcome the potential problem of "free-riders" who might seek to avoid their share of the responsibility to act. The legislative framework will serve to deliver our recovery and recycling obligations under the EC directive on packaging and packaging waste. It will build on the work of the former producer

responsibility group and the working representative advisory group, which has now been formed with the backing of some 50 major companies.

The proposed powers are wide in scope and allow a variety of different approaches to suit the circumstances of different waste streams, should legislation be necessary or appropriate. In reaching a conclusion on the best approach for packaging waste, we propose to bear in mind the following considerations:

(i) the need to be confident that the available options can ensure that the targets set by the packaging directive will be met;

(ii) the practicality, cost-effectiveness, potential benefits as against the likely costs, taking account of environmental and economic considerations, and fairness of the available options;

(iii) the desirability of minimising regulatory burdens on business;

(iv) the desirability of business choice in the manner in which the obligation is satisfied, both in terms of the provision of an individual compliance route which is reasonable and practicable, and the potential for multiple exemption schemes to co-exist;

(v) the compatibility of the available options with existing EC and domestic law, for example to ensure that they do not create a barrier to trade with other member states in the Community;

(vi) the need to take account of competition policy, for example to ensure that the regulations do not have the effect of distorting competition unnecessarily;

(vii) the desirability of business freedom and flexibility to control and administer collaborative schemes run on its behalf and of minimising the role of the public sector agencies, compatible with effective enforcement;

(vii) the desirability of targeting as closely as possible those responsible for determining the content, nature and amount of packaging used for a particular product.

In drawing up the statutory obligation for individual businesses, consistent with these considerations, the main issues concern the coverage and nature of the obligation. On the coverage of the obligation, there are options encompassing all those businesses which are involved in some way with packaging or packaged products; or a narrower obligation, perhaps on those who make use of packaging for products which they manufacture or control; or some combination of the two. In reaching a view, we will take into account market characteristics, the nature of the recovery and recycling operations, and evidence of the willingness of different business sectors to work together, as well as the need to minimise the extent of the legislative burden placed on industry. In the event that the regulations were found not to work there would, however, be scope for changing the obligation.

The second main issue concerns the nature of the legal obligation. Value from packaging waste is recovered in a variety of ways. Detailed involvement by an enforcement agency in monitoring a large number of processes for those businesses involved in packaging would require significant resources and is likely to prove expensive for the businesses concerned. We will therefore seek to define the producer responsibility obligation in a simple and straightforward way which:

(a) is intended to achieve our obligations under the packaging directive;

(b) allows wide discretion to industry as to how to respond;

(c) is amenable to external auditing. The scope for independent certification is an important objective in minimising the burdens of the regulatory approach.

Officials from my Department and the Department of Trade and Industry are continuing discussions with a wide range of interested parties in the packaging industry. Once we have formulated a set of proposals, we will bring forward a consultation paper on these issues.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to increase the funds available for the home energy efficiency scheme in the current financial year.

Mr. Gummer: I am pleased to announce that we have been able to increase the provision for the home energy efficiency scheme by £8.85 million, bringing the total available for grants in 1994–95 to about £77 million. This is a welcome boost to a successful and high quality scheme.

Departmental Funding

Mr. Coe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to change his Department's cash limits and running costs limits for 1994–95.

Mr. Gummer: The Housing Corporation non-voted cash limit, covering grants and capital expenditure financed by the Housing Corporation in England, will be increased by £5,832,000 to £1,484,540,000. The increase will allow additional expenditure of £2,177,000 on city challenge projects, and of £3,655,000 on the corporation's approved development programme.

The regeneration initiatives non-voted cash limit will be increased by £2,612,000 from £292,853,000 to £1,295,465,000. The changes reflect a transfer of £2,177,000 to the Housing Corporation cash limit to cover additional expenditure on city challenge projects; a transfer of £715,000 from the regeneration initiative cash limit to allow increased payments on urban programme loan charges within class VII, vote 3, regeneration initiatives; and an increase of £5,504,000 to allow the issue of an all—purpose supplementary credit approval in respect of East Manchester regeneration programme expenditure. The increase is covered in full by take-up of part of the entitlement to capital end year flexibility announced by the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *729–34*.

The cash limit for class VII, vote 5—central environmental services and so on—will be reduced by £2,500,000 from £439,645,000 to £437,145,000. This change reflects a reduced requirement for grant in aid by the National Rivers Authority. The savings will be transferred to the Housing Corporation cash limit to cover increased expenditure on the Housing Corporation's approved development programme.

The cash limit for class VII, vote 6—property holdings and other services to Government—will be increased by £1,000 to £3,000. This reflects the token supplementary

estimate for this vote. Property holdings gross running costs limit will be increased by £135,000 to £19,976,000.

The cash limit for class VII, vote 7—administration—will be reduced by £612,000 from £227,347,000 to £226,735,000. This reflects the net position after a number of small transfers, the most significant being transfers to the Department of National Heritage of £184,000 in respect of the conservation unit, and of £255,000 to the Housing Corporation cash limit to cover increased expenditure on the Housing Corporation's approved development programme. The Department of the Environment's gross running costs limit will be reduced by £2,316,000 from £227,465,000 to £225,149,000. In the main, this reduction is due to savings made to enable the Department to capitalise early retirement costs.

The cash limit for class VII, vote 8—revenue support grant, payments of non-domestic rates, Valuation Office services, and so on, England—will be reduced by £900,000 from £29,634,332,000 to £29,633,432,000 to reflect savings in expenditure by, and on behalf of, the Valuation Tribunals. The savings will be transferred to the Housing Corporation cash limit to cover increased expenditure on the Housing Corporation's approved development programme.

The local government reorganisation non-voted cash limit will be reduced by £9,540,000 from £54,200,000 to £44,660,000. This reduction consists of £9,440,000 for deemed debt supplementary credit approvals and £100,000 for local government residuary body borrowing provision.

The running costs limit for the Office of Water Services—class VII, vote 9—will be increased by £254,000 from £9,106,000 to £9,360,000 under end-year flexibility arrangements for running costs announced by the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *729–34*. This will be offset by reductions on capital expenditure so no overall increase in the cash limit is required.

The cash limit for class VII, vote 11—PSA Services—will be reduced by £40,000 from £98,661,000 to £98,621,000. This reflects a transfer to Property Holdings to cover senior staff costs. The net running cost limit on this vote will also be reduced by £40,000 from £98,261,000 to £98,221,000.

All increases will be offset by savings or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Agencies

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many employment agencies provided social work or social care staff for each of the last five years;

(2) how many employment agencies provided domiciliary care staff for each of the last five years.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is not available in the form requested. However, it is estimated that immediately prior to the abolition of licensing on 3 January 1995, there were about 3,000 licensed employment agencies which had indicated that their field of activity might include domiciliary or social care work.

I also refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State on 30 November 1992, *Official Report*, column *55*.

Careers Service

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he has of the cost of market testing the careers service; and if he will detail *(a)* the transaction costs and *(b)* the tendering costs.

Mr. Paice: The process by which my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State is meeting his duty to provide the careers service is competitive tendering, not market testing.

I have no information on the costs of compiling bids; they were met by the bidders. The costs to the Employment Department were about £300,000, which were found from existing resources. They included £220,000 on staff and associated costs for a small team of administrators—1994–95—and £74,000 on a prospectus and publicity for tendering in 1994–95. In addition, some staff from the 10 Government offices were involved. Further figures could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list which of the careers services that have gone out for tender have *(a)* remained in-house, *(b)* been won by the private sector and *(c)* are still outstanding.

Mr. Paice: This information is not yet available. No contracts have been awarded. Preferred bidders have been selected for post-tender negotiation and the contracts will be announced after negotiations are complete.

Tele-workers

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently employed as tele-workers; and what is his estimate of the number that will be employed in 2000.

Mr. Oppenheim: I regret that the requested information is not available.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the principal components of the league tables by which he measures the effectiveness of training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Paice: The most recent table of inter-TEC performance comparisons consisted of the following indicators:

1. The cost per output point for youth training and youth credits;
2. The number of national vocational qualifications per 100 leavers for youth training and youth credits;
3. The cost per output point for training for work;
4. The number of NVQs per 100 leavers for TfW;

5. The number of positive outcomes per 100 leavers for TfW;
6. The percentage achievement against the investors in people commitments target;
7. The performance of the TEC in relation to the Government's YT guarantee.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give details of the rules for approving spending projects by the training and enterprise councils to spend surpluses earned in contracts with his Department.

Mr. Paice: Training and enterprise councils are required to agree annual business plans and three-year corporate plans with the Department. Where an operating surplus occurs, a TEC is contractually required to use it solely on activities agreed with the Department to further the objectives of its corporate plan and business plan. Where projects have been specifically identified in an agreed business plan, a TEC may carry them out without further agreement. Separate approval is required for the use of surpluses on projects not specifically identified in the business plan, although meeting the plan's objectives. For such a project, the Department needs to be satisfied that it is in accordance with the aims of the plan and represents value for money. The TEC also needs to show that it has the authority to implement the project under its memorandum and articles of association, that the project is financially viable and that it is not in conflict with other parts of the TEC operating agreement or with Government policy. TECs are under a general contractual obligation to provide value for money on the expenditure of all funds which derive from the Government.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the principal elements of the debenture held against each of the training and enterprise councils at the commencement of each financial year.

Mr. Paice: The Department agreed the same debenture arrangements with all training and enterprise councils when they were first set up. The debenture gives the Department a charge over all of a TEC's fixed and floating assets. I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Training Providers

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training providers will have to close as result of the reduction in expenditure on training for work announced in the Budget.

Mr. Paice: Training and enterprise councils contract with training providers for the delivery of training for work. It is a matter for TECs to decide with whom they will contract according to the scale and nature of the training required locally. Government regional offices are currently negotiating with TECs for 1995–96 contracts.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list for *(a)* Islwyn, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Great Britain the number of persons and percentage of persons in (i) full-time work and (ii) part-time work earning (1) less than £1.50 an hour, (2) between £1.50 and £2.50 an hour and (3) between £2.50 and £3.50 an hour breaking these figures down by gender;

(2) what is the *(a)* mean hourly rate of pay, *(b)* median hourly rate of pay and *(c)* modal hourly rate of pay for (i) full-time work and (ii) part-time work in Islwyn;

(3) if he will list the current average hourly pay rate in Islwyn for full-time work in *(a)* hairdressing, *(b)* retail trade, *(c)* clothing manufacturing and *(d)* hotel and catering sectors.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information for Islwyn is not available.

Information available from the new earnings survey for Wales and Great Britain is provided in the table:

Employees whose pay for the survey pay period was not affected by absence—distribution of gross hourly earnings showing numbers and percentages. April 1994

	Below £1.50		*£1.50 to £2.50*		*£2.50 to £3.50*	
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Full-time males						
Wales	0	0	4,741	1.1	18,964	4.4
Great Britain	9,000	0.1	66,000	0.7	292,000	3.1
Full-time females						
Wales	0	0.1	2,000	0.7	24,000	9.9
Great Britain	6,000	0.1	50,000	0.9	427,000	7.7
Part-time males						
Wales	0	0.9	3,000	5.4	15,000	29.5
Great Britain	17,000	1.5	48,000	4.3	269,000	23.9
Part-time females						
Wales	9,000	3.8	5,000	2.1	57,000	24.1
Great Britain	43,000	0.9	116,000	2.4	1,099,000	22.8

Note:
Estimates of numbers of employees are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Labour Statistics

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of persons in Islwyn in full-time work in *(a)* hairdressing, *(b)* the retail trade, *(c)* clothing manufacturing and *(d)* hotel and catering sectors in the last five years, also expressing these numbers as a percentage of the work force.

Mr. Oppenheim: The available information is from the periodic censuses of employment and is shown in the table.

The information for hairdressing and clothing manufacturing, is confidential under the Statistics of Trade Act 1947.

Number of full-time jobs in the retail trade[1] in Islwyn, September of each year

Year	Number	Per cent.
1987	700	5.3
1989	400	3.3
1991	700	5.8

[1] Class 64/65 of the standard industrial classification 1980. 1. Percentages are of total number of employees rather than the total work force.

Number of full-time jobs in the hotel and catering sectors[1] in Islwyn, September of each year

Year	Number	Per cent.
1987	200	(1.4)
1989	200	(1.6)
1991	100	(1.0)

[1] Class 66 of the standard industrial classification 1980. 1. Percentage are of total number of employees rather than the total work force.

Departmental Funding

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to change his Department's cash limits and running costs limits in 1994–95.

Mr. Portillo: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, these changes will be made:

(a) the cash limit for class V, vote 1, Department of Employment: programmes and central services, will be increased by £14,414,000 from £2,302,056,000 to £2,316,470,000. The increase in the cash limit arises from additional Employment Department group restructuring costs, training and enterprise councils' administrative costs and Skills Training Agency costs of £36,514,000 offset by programme underspends of £15,300,000 and running costs underspends of £6,800,000;

(b) the cash limit for class V, vote 2, Department of Employment: Employment Service, will be reduced by £15,300,000 from £738,529,000 to £723,229,000;

(c) the single running costs limit for class V, vote 1, Department of Employment: programmes and central services, and class V, vote 2, Department of Employment: Employment Service, will also be increased by £14,414,000 from £1,437,932,000 to £1,452,346,000. The increase reflects the take-up of £12,614,000 in respect of end-year flexibility arrangements for running costs expenditure, as announced by my right hon. Friend, the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *729–34*, and a transfer of £1,800,000 from class V, vote 3, Health and Safety Executive;

(d) the cash limit on class V, vote 3, Health and Safety Executive and Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, will be reduced £1,800,000 from £212,779,000 to £210,979,000 as a result of a transfer to class V, vote 1, Department of Employment: programmes and central services;

(e) the Health and Safety Executive running costs limit will be reduced by £1,800,000 from £179,124,000 to £177,324,000 as a result of a transfer to class V, vote 1, Department of Employment: programmes and central services.

The increases will be offset by savings, transfers or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Palestinian Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the actual or estimated level of funding from the Overseas Development Administration budget to Palestinian non-governmental organisations in each of the years 1991 to 1995; and if he will list the organisations funded.

Mr. Baldry: We fund the programmes of a number of British non-governmental organisations which provide assistance to Palestinians. The majority of these work with Palestinian partner organisations. We estimate that since 1991–92, our expenditure through such agencies operating in the occupied territories has been:

Year	£
1991–92	953,000
1992–93	1,271,000
1993–94	1,280,000
1994–95 (to date)	845,000

In addition, Palestinians have benefited from assistance provided through non-governmental organisations working in the Lebanon.

Overseas Aid

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the European Community attribution of overseas aid by recipient country in 1993–94.

Mr. Baldry: Country by country figures for EC aid spending in 1993-94 are not readily available.

For the calendar year 1993, total payments on aid from EC budget, as set out in the draft EC general budget for 1995, were:

	mecu
Food aid and humanitarian aid	774.7
Asia and Latin America	354.0
Mediterranean	351.5
Eastern and central europe	719.5
Other co-operation measures (includes co-operation with NGOs and aid to South Africa)	338.3
Total	2,538.0

The cost to the United Kingdom of this expenditure was as shown in the table, based on an average exchange rate for 1993 of £1 = ecu 1.2829, and a United Kingdom share of the EC budget for 1993 of 16.52 per cent.

	£ million
Food aid and humanitarian aid	99.8
Asia and Latin America	45.6

	£ million
Mediterranean	45.3
Eastern and central europe	92.7
Other co-operation measures	43.6
Total	327.0

World Health Organisation

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what mechanisms exist for the Government to review the value for money of contributions to the World Health Organisation for its work in the developing world.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom has been active in seeking reforms necessary to ensure that its assessed and voluntary contributions to the World Health Organisation achieve the optimum value for money. For instance, the United Kingdom has chaired the committee of the WHO executive board set up to review the role of WHO. In addition, the United Kingdom targets its voluntary contributions to specific WHO-managed programmes on those that tackle priority problems in developing countries and has established a set of procedures by which to assess their effectiveness.

International Atomic Energy Authority

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much was given to the International Atomic Energy Authority out of the overseas aid budget in 1993–94; and on what grounds.

Mr. Baldry: In 1993–94, the Overseas Development Administration gave the IAEA an accountable grant of £500,000 to cover the cost of selected projects, aimed at sustainable development, in developing countries who are signatories of the non proliferation treaty. This grant was paid as part of the £2.5 million pledged by the UK over five years commencing 1991–92 to encourage countries who are signatories of the non-proliferation treaty in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Bilateral Emergency Aid

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which 10 countries have received most out of the bilateral emergency aid budget in the last 10 years; and what amounts they have received.

Mr. Baldry: It is not possible to provide comparable country-specific information on the bilateral emergency aid programme for years before 1987–88. The top 10 bilateral emergency aid recipients between 1987–88 and 1993–94 are given in the table.

Top 10 ODA bilateral emergency aid recipients 1987–88 to 1993–94

Country	Expenditure (£ million)
Ethiopia	100.8
States of ex-Yugoslavia	89.9
Sudan	78.0
Mozambique	59.3
Iraq	47.3
Pakistan	30.2
Malawi	29.3

Top 10 ODA bilateral emergency aid recipients 1987–88 to 1993–94

Country	Expenditure (£ million)
Somalia	25.5
Bangladesh	21.1
Angola	17.8

Note: There is no United Kingdom aid to the Government of Iraq. The amounts recorded as emergency aid to Iraq are provided through UN agencies and NGOs for Iraqi citizens.

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which 10 countries have received most out of the aid and trade provision of the overseas aid budget in the last 10 years; and what amounts they have received.

Mr. Baldry: The top 10 recipients of the aid and trade provision expenditure between 1984 and 1993–94 are given in the table:

Country	Expenditure (£ million)
China	117.6
Malaysia	82.2
Indonesia	44.5
Turkey	43.2
Zimbabwe	40.9
Kenya	31.4
India	30.9
Philippines	25.0
Morocco	21.9
Ghana	19.7

Nigeria

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what British aid to Nigeria was spent in 1993 to 1995.

Mr. Baldry: At the time of the annulment of democratic elections in June 1993, British aid to Nigeria was supporting projects in education, agriculture, forestry, health, energy and public administration. There was also residual expenditure from balance of payments agreements signed in 1989 and 1990. Since June 1993, new aid has been confined to projects bringing direct benefits to poor Nigerians in the health/water, education and natural resources sectors. This accords with EU guidelines agreed last year. We have also met outstanding commitments to projects already under way in June 1993.

Africa

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the European Community's attribution of overseas aid to Africa in 1993–94.

Mr. Baldry: For the calendar year 1993, total payments from the European Development Fund—most of the beneficiaries of which are in sub-Saharan Africa—were 1,337 million ecu or £1,042 million[1]. A country by country breakdown of cumulative expenditure from successive European development funds is available in the

Commission report "EU-ACP Co-operation", a copy of which has been placed in the library.'

United Kingdom contributions to the European Development Fund totalled £172 million in the UK financial year 1993–94.

Expenditure from the European Community budget in 1993 on the "Programme of positive measures regarding South Africa" amounted to 60.4 million ecu or £47.1 million.

[1]At an average exchange rate for the year of £1 = 1.2829 ecu.

Departmental Cash Limits

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made in the 1994–95 cash limit for expenditure by the Overseas Development Administration.

Mr. Baldry: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit on the external assistance vote-class II, vote 5—will be reduced overall by £24,176,000 from £1,923,943,000 to £1,899,767,000. The overall reduction is the net effect of a decrease of £30,500,000 due to overspend on European Community budgetary spending on aid for developing countries in 1993; a decrease of £2,700,000 under roll-over arrangements in respect of the Commonwealth Development Corporation's excess cash holding at the end of 1993–94; an increase of £8,964,000 in respect of new provision for certain aid and trade provision projects which are no longer being financed under the authority of the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980; and an increase of £59,000 in respect of the eventual transfer of the Crown Agents to an independent foundation. Pending parliamentary approval of the new provision for certain aid and trade provision projects, urgent expenditure, estimated at £4,627,000, will be met by a repayable advance from the contingencies fund.

Zambia and Zimbabwe

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give figures for each of the last five years, including current expenditure plans, for balance of payments support for Zambia and Zimbabwe paid for from *(a)* the overseas aid budget and *(b)* any other source.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* Expenditure from the overseas aid budgets is as follows:

Bilateral programme aid to Zambia and Zimbabwe 1989–90 to 1993–94 (£000)

	Zambia	*Zimbabwe*
1989–90	—	53
1990–91	30,000	[1]–6
1991–92	12,500	7,500
1992–93	27,500	22,500
1993–94	25,000	15,000

[1] Undisbursed programme aid repaid by Crown Agents.

During the current financial year, 1994–95, for Zambia we have already spent £12.5 million and plan to disburse a further £12.5 million shortly, and for Zimbabwe we plan to disburse £15 million programme aid subject to confirmation from the IMF board that the Government's economic reform programme is on track.

We do not have figures for other donors' balance of payments support for Zimbabwe.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list, for each year since 1988, including current expenditure plans, expenditure on aid to *(a)* Zimbabwe and *(b)* Zambia in (i) cash terms and (ii) real terms, broken down according to the principal objectives for British aid as stated in the British aid overseas aid annual review 1994.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* Tables containing the information have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of publications produced by his Department assessing the performance of British aid in *(a)* Zambia and *(b)* Zimbabwe.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* Recent published reports on British aid projects in Zambia and Zimbabwe are listed in ODA's catalogue of evaluation studies, copies of which are in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list, for each of the last five years, total aid expenditure to *(a)* Zambia and *(b)* Zimbabwe in support of structural adjustment programmes; and if he will give these figures as a proportion of total aid expenditure to these countries.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* A table showing support for economic reform has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by his Department or agency.

Mr. Newton: No training course undertaken by staff of the Privy Council Office in the last 12 months has cost in excess of £5,000. I am not responsible for any agencies.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Visits

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has to visit Belfast, South.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 26 January, *Official Report,* column *300,* to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), if he will list the representations he has received concerning the impact of reduced activity by the Countryside Council for Wales on the commitment arising from the biodiversity convention under the Rio treaty; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have now received three such representations—from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Wales Wildlife and Countryside Link and a member of the public. My right hon. Friend has no plans to privatise the Countryside Council for Wales.

Cabinet Office Funding

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals there are to change the 1994–95 cash limit or running costs limit for the Cabinet Office: other service vote.

The Prime Minister: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for the Cabinet Office: Other Services, class XIX, vote 1, will be increased by £1,500,000 from £44,833,000 to £46,333,000. At the same time the running costs limit will be increased by £1,000,000 from £43,214,000 to £44,214,000.

The increases reflect transfers from the Cabinet Office: Office of Public Service and Science, class XVIII, vote 1, of £500,000 for central services and £1,000,000 running costs coverage in respect of functions already transferred to class XIX, vote 1.

Both increases are offset by inter-departmental transfers and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by the Department or agency.

Mr. Dorrell: The breakdown of expenditure over the last 12 months by the Department of National Heritage, including its two executive agencies, Royal Parks and Historic Royal Palaces is as set out. The breakdown covers individual courses or series of courses where the total costs exceeds £5,000.

(a) Training for the Department of National Heritage

(1) Title: Introduction to WordPerfect 6 For Windows

Objectives: To make staff aware of the functions available within WordPerfect 6 For Windows enabling competent use in their everyday work.

Training Provider: Harley-West.

Staff Responsibilities: Open to all grades upon receipt of the software upgrade of WordPerfect 6 on their Personal Computers.

Cost: £5,170 (for a series of courses)

Post Course Evaluation: By Information Services Branch of DNH and by the provider, Harley-West.

(2) Title: Introduction to Excel 5

Objectives: To give the user a good understanding of spreadsheet design, commands etc, to help them become competent in the use of the software in their everyday work.

Training Provider: Harley-West

Staff Responsibilities: Those staff who have financial management responsibilities.

Cost: £6,227.50 (for a series of courses)

Post Course Evaluation: Information Services Branch of the DNH and by the provider, Harley-West.

(3) Title: Promotion Board Interviewing Skills Course for Board Members

Objectives: Awareness of procedures which underpin a Promotion board. To provide a full understanding of the importance of good interviewing techniques including assessing candidates fairly and accurately.

Training Provider: Recruitment and Assessment Services

Staff Responsibilities: Staff within the Department who have volunteered to sit on Promotion Boards.

Cost: £6,050 (for a series of courses)

Post Course Evaluation: By Personnel Division of the DNH and by Recruitment and Assessment Services.

(4) Title: Performance Management Course

Objectives: To familiarise and prepare staff for the introduction of the newly created Performance Appraisal System.

Training Provider: KMPG Marketing Consultancy

Staff Responsibilities: For all staff in the Department.

Cost: £93,990.61 (for a series of courses)

Post Course Evaluation: By Personnel Division within the DNH and by the provider, KMPG Marketing Consultancy

(b) *Training for the Historic Royal Palaces Agency (HRPA) and Royal Parks Agency (RPA)*

HRPA: Tower of London

(1) Title: Customer Care and Interpersonal Skills

Objectives: To develop 'dealing with people skills' of the Warding staff in the Yeoman body, the Jewel House and sales staff in the Retail Department.

Training Provider: MSB Training

Staff Responsibilities: All front of house staff dealing with the public.

Cost: £13,500

Post Course Evaluation: By Personnel Unit within the Agency and by the provider MSB Training

HRPA: Hampton Court Palace

(1) Title: Customer Care and Interpersonal Skills

Objectives: To develop 'dealing with people skills' of the State Apartment Warding Team.

Training Provider: MSB Training

Staff Responsibilities: All front of house staff dealing with the public.

Cost: £31,192 (for a series of courses)

Post Course Evaluation: By Personnel unit within the Agency and by the provider MSB Training

RPA:

(1) Title: Objective Setting and Appraisal Workshops

Objectives: Direct staff performance towards the Agency goals. Raise standards of performance and appraisal.

Training Provider: RTCC Training Consultancy Company Ltd

Staff Responsibilities: All staff excluding constables of the Royal parks Constabulary.

Cost: £10,562 (for a series of courses)

Post Course Evaluation: End of course review conducted jointly by the Personnel Unit and by the course provider.

Summary

The total cost of the training and tuition outlined above was £138,692.11.

National Lottery

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the weekly revenue to the Football Trust and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts since 1 April 1994; what is his estimate of the national lottery's impact on the work of these two bodies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: Details of the weekly revenue to the Football Trust and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts since 1 April 1994 are shown in the table. It is for the foundation and the Football Trust to assess the extent of any impact that the national lottery may have on their operations. I understand that the foundation is considering how best to adjust its grant regime to complement the national lottery, in particular through a greater element of revenue funding. I welcome this.

Week	*FT/RPBD*[1] £	*FT/STB*[2] £	*FSA*[3] £
2 April 1994	472,938	290,772	1,384,512
9 April 1994	455,776	260,358	1,368,005
16 April 1994	496,706	299,212	1,489,597
23 April 1994	460,668	284,011	1,381,482
30 April 1994	467,729	287,575	1,401,470
7 May 1994	465,822	257,018	1,396,952
14 May 1994	446,456	321,889	1,338,873
21 May 1994	453,330	285,620	1,359,497
28 May 1994	442,890	292,099	1,328,156
4 June 1994	425,367	240,062	1,275,652
11 June 1994	439,093	297,768	1,316,772
18 June 1994	437,215	291,187	1,311,169
25 June 1994	428,668	268,868	1,285,525
2 July 1994	426,861	268,395	1,280,104
9 July 1994	419,999	262,881	1,259,535
16 July 1994	428,982	246,560	1,286,472
23 July 1994	431,189	265,883	1,293,081
30 July 1994	415,037	248,205	1,235,054
6 August 1994	417,838	243,639	1,253,026
13 August 1994	429,801	250,760	1,288,889
20 August 1994	435,782	247,901	1,306,816
27 August 1994	453,486	249,846	1,359,927
3 September 1994	460,306	262,087	1,380,386
10 September 1994	453,154	273,094	1,358,920
17 September 1994	459,028	270,485	1,376,437
24 September 1994	467,589	274,187	1,402,085
1 October 1994	471,486	254,502	1,413,657
8 October 1994	467,954	255,235	1,402,557
15 October 1994	473,433	260,026	1,420,043
22 October 1994	473,752	259,998	1,419,991
29 October 1994	468,851	255,899	1,406,937
5 November 1994	479,946	279,026	1,439,882
12 November 1994	473,315	256,843	1,420,410
19 November 1994	455,816	248,092	1,367,132
26 November 1994	450,908	243,429	1,354,540
3 December 1994	448,161	227,548	1,343,960
10 December 1994	460,085	236,057	1,379,731
17 December 1994	924,477	535,887	2,772,122
26 December 1994	116,368	2,955	349,055
31 December 1994	160,420	1,329	481,210
7 January 1995	393,654	189,906	1,180,499
14 January 1995	404,662	205,343	1,213,509

[1] Funding received from the pools companies, representing a 2.5 per cent. reduction in pool betting duty.

[2] Funding received from the pools companies from spotting the ball and spot the ball competitions.

[3] Funding received from the pools companies, representing a further 2.5 per cent. RPBD; and from a 5p in the pound levy on pools coupons.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of *(a)* the revenue earned for the Exchequer to date by national lottery ticket sales, *(b)* the interest earned on the moneys lodged in the national lottery distribution fund prior to disbursement by the lottery distribution bodies and *(c)* the revenue accrued to the Exchequer from any of the funds under *(b)* above invested in gilt-edged securities.

Mr. Dorrell: Lottery duty collected by Customs and Excise for the period to the end of December 1994 was £44,348,381. Interest earned to date by the national lottery distribution fund through investment of the proceeds of the lottery, and which accrues to the good causes, totals £661,699. No revenue accrues to the Exchequer from the investment of the NLDF in gilt-edged securities; all gains are for the benefit of the good causes.

Electricity Companies (Sponsorship)

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is his estimate of the amount spent on sponsorship of arts, sporting and other local community events by *(a)* Northern Electric and *(b)* the other regional electricity companies.

Mr. Dorrell: Detailed information on the sponsorship activities of individual companies is not held by my Department.

Departmental Funding

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what changes he proposes to make to his Department's cash limits and running costs limits for 1994–95.

Mr. Dorrell: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

(i) The cash limit of class XI, vote 1, museums and galleries, will be increased by £4,226,000 from £223,122,000 to £227,348,000 to increase provision for the Government indemnity scheme by £200,000 and for assets accepted in lieu of tax by £4,160,000.

(ii) The cash limit for class XI, vote 3, libraries, will be increased by £6,500,000 from £139,303,000 to £145,803,000 to increase provision for British Library St. Pancras project.

(iii) The provision for class XI, vote 4, home broadcasting, will be increased by £8,438,000 from £1,826,205,000 to £1,834,643,000 to provide extra funds for the British Broadcasting Corporation of £10,107,000, additional provision for the Independent Television Commission to reimburse certain independent television companies who paid excess levy to the consolidated fund in 1992 of

£330,000, and to meet certain reimbursement costs in respect of the overpayment of television broadcasting licence fees of £390,000.

(iv) The cash limit for class XI, vote 5, film, tourism, sport and broadcasting, will be increased by £3,122,000 from £129,653,000 to £132,775,000 to reflect the increased receipts in respect of tourism grant repayments of £250,000, the appropriation in aid of certain receipts from the Sports Council of £459,000, increased provision for the Broadcasting Standards Council and for broadcasting regulatory services of £1,244,000, and to provide provision for the commemorations to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of world war II of £3,000,000.

(v) The cash limit for class XI, vote 6, royal palaces, Historic Royal Palaces Agency, Royal Parks Agency, historic buildings, ancient monuments and national heritage, will be increased by £2,154,000 from £194,962,000 to £197,116,000. The increase is the net result of additional provision of £1,438,000 for urgent capital works and maintenance expenditure on certain historic buildings and £100,000 in the Royal Parks; and to cover the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England superannuation costs of £675,000.

(vi) The cash limit for class XI, vote 7, administration, has been increased by £283,000 from £21,600,000 to £21,883,000. This is required to provide for the transfer of functions of the conservation unit from the Department of the Environment to the Department of National Heritage. As a result, the Department's gross running cost limit will be increased by £281,000 from £27,928,000 to £28,209,000.

(vii) The cash limit for class XI, vote 8, Office of the National Lottery, has been increased by £500,000 from £2,500,000 to £3,000,000. This is required to meet the capital costs of setting up Oflot's new offices and as a result of firmer costs being produced for consultancy, professional and legal advice associated with the grant of licences. Consequently, the Departments running costs limit will be increased by £266,000 from £2,070,000 to £2,336,000. A sum equal to the net provision required will be paid from the national lottery distribution fund to the consolidated fund as extra receipts.

(viii) The increases will be offset by savings and charges to the reserve, and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

EDUCATION

Private Schools

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for Eduction how many and what percentage of the school-age population, aged five to 16 years, are being educated in private schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: In England in January 1994 there were 411,200 pupils aged five to 16 in independent schools. This represents 6.2 per cent. of pupils aged five to 16 in all schools.

Nursery Education

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many four-year-olds are in receipt of nursery education; and what percentage of the total number of children in that age group that constitutes.

Mr. Forth: In January 1994, 48,000 four-year-olds, who were also aged four at the previous 31 August in England were being taught in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools, representing 11 per cent. of the relevant age group. The number of pupils who reached age four during the autumn term is not collected centrally.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the absenteeism rates for *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Teachers' Pensions Agency in 1994.

Mr. Forth: Information about sickness absence rates for 1994 in the Department, including the Teachers' Pensions Agency, is not yet available.

Schools, Warwickshire

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the current number of children of statutory school age in Warwickshire schools other than grant-maintained schools; and what was it in 1990.

Mr. Robin Squire: In January 1994, 57,900 pupils aged five to 16 were being taught in primary, middle secondary and special schools maintained by Warwickshire local education authority. In January 1990, the corresponding figure was 60,100.

"The World at War"

Mr. Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will encourage all secondary schools in the public sector to show the Thames Television film "The World at War" every four years.

Mr. Forth: Decisions on the use of any particular television programme or other source material as a teaching aid in schools are a matter for individual schools and teachers. However, the Government have taken steps to ensure that pupils are taught about the second world war by ensuring that it remains a compulsory part of the history curriculum taught to pupils aged 11 to 14 in maintained schools in England and Wales. In addition, and in view of the importance of the forthcoming national commemorations of the end of the second world war, the Department has commissioned the production of educational packs for all primary and secondary schools on the ending of the second world war and the significance of VE and VJ days.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what information he has *(a)* on the capital borrowing allocation given to each local education authority, the bid submitted by each authority and the number of pupils in the area and *(b)* the same information for grant-maintained schools within each local education authority area.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on local education authority capital bids for 1995–96 was given in the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) on 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *955–58*. Information on capital borrowing allocations for 1995–96 was given in the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) on 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *119–20*. Information on numbers of

pupils in maintained schools and grant-maintained schools by local authority area, as at January 1994, is attached.

The information requested on capital bids and allocations for grant-maintained schools are a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the Funding Agency for Schools to write to the hon. Member with this information.

Pupils in maintained schools in each LEA in England January 1994

	Primary and secondary schools	
	LEA maintained	*Grant-maintained*
Corporation of London	214	0
Camden	19,204	2,381
Greenwich	35,060	0
Hackney	24,328	0
Hammersmith	13,839	1,237
Islington	22,872	0
Kensington and Chelsea	8,659	944
Lambeth	20,645	4,593
Lewisham	31,281	421
Southwark	27,771	4,133
Tower Hamlets	32,729	891
Wandsworth	19,197	7,181
Westminster	16,690	0
Barking	25,858	0
Barnet	33,023	9,769
Bexley	30,746	3,287
Brent	26,095	8,997
Bromley	27,777	11,803
Croydon	37,245	4,680
Ealing	31,667	7,408
Enfield	35,880	5,791
Haringey	28,999	0
Harrow	27,140	528
Havering	31,123	3,877
Hillingdon	19,487	15,171
Hounslow	31,998	2,123
Kingston upon Thames	15,409	3,149
Merton	22,967	0
Newham	39,071	582
Redbridge	33,944	1,125
Richmond upon Thames	18,817	0
Sutton	17,257	7,572
Waltham Forest	29,571	2,099
Birmingham	157,626	14,802
Coventry	48,838	0
Dudley	42,652	5,054
Sandwell	50,056	653
Solihull	33,066	559
Walsall	41,666	6,366
Wolverhampton	39,205	2,404
Knowsley	27,365	731
Liverpool	79,806	2,366
St. Helens	29,394	0
Sefton	46,429	0
Wirral	50,684	2,107
Bolton	41,408	3,261
Bury	27,348	232
Manchester	68,616	0
Oldham	41,105	0
Rochdale	32,590	2,010
Salford	34,474	430
Stockport	41,614	0
Tameside	34,297	2,371
Trafford	29,429	3,083
Wigan	49,486	0
Barnsley	34,232	0
Doncaster	51,327	0
Rotherham	43,141	0
Sheffield	69,039	2,505
Bradford	81,961	5,565
Calderdale	28,562	4,709
Kirklees	61,327	1,267
Leeds	111,871	1,184
Wakefield	50,792	0
Gateshead	30,117	0
Newcastle upon Tyne	39,343	0
North Tyneside	30,957	0
South Tyneside	25,593	0
Sunderland	49,493	0
Isles of Scilly	291	0
Avon	133,408	1,710
Bedfordshire	78,655	9,567
Berkshire	99,627	9,833
Buckinghamshire	87,878	11,653
Cambridgeshire	82,757	17,274
Cheshire	150,600	2,927
Cleveland	101,539	0
Cornwall	69,508	0
Cumbria	64,282	9,773
Derbyshire	125,694	17,272
Devon	134,476	4,983
Dorset	77,498	9,591
Durham	94,042	0
East Sussex	86,330	0
Essex	143,358	76,532
Gloucestershire	55,272	21,714
Hampshire	197,332	19,180
Hereford and Worcester	93,080	3,643
Hertfordshire	134,073	19,099
Humberside	141,179	341
Isle of Wight	17,712	0
Kent	180,360	51,103
Lancashire	207,730	7,103
Leicestershire	137,141	3,270
Lincolnshire	65,275	22,410
Norfolk	92,362	11,347
North Yorkshire	103,253	0
Northamptonshire	83,709	12,466
Northumberland	50,371	650
Nottinghamshire	154,815	1,837
Oxfordshire	76,359	81
Shropshire	57,225	3,989
Somerset	63,860	631
Staffordshire	158,531	4,470
Suffolk	92,379	0
Surrey	105,591	13,139
Warwickshire	66,750	4,783
West Sussex	93,110	0
Wiltshire	69,765	12,927
England	6,618,649	556,699

The numbers of pupils are a headcount of pupils of all ages on roll. Information on pupils is derived from returns made by the schools to the Department in January each year (annual schools census—form 7).

Does not include special schools.

Head Lice

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made of the incidence of the problem of head lice in schools; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Neither the Department for Education nor the Department of Health, which leads in this subject,

conducts surveys of the incidence of head lice in schools. There are limited benefits in holding such information centrally because the incidence fluctuates so quickly and widely. However, figures maintained by the pharmaceutical industry show that around 2.5 million units of head lice treatment are supplied through retail pharmacies each year.

The Government seek to combat this distressing problem through advice to teachers, children and parents as part of health promotion in schools.

Departmental Funding

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what changes she has to announce to cash limits and running costs on votes within her responsibility for 1994–95.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limits for class X, vote 1—schools, research and miscellaneous services—vote 2—higher and further education—and vote 6—Office of Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in England—will be amended. The changes are as set out:

Class and vote	*Current cash limit* £	*Change* £	*Revised cash limit* £
X.1	800,296,000	−12,500.000	787,796,000
X.2	5,672,793,000	+3,415,000	5,676,208,000
X.6	76,901,000	−12,500,000	64,401,000

The reduction in cash limits on class X, vote 1 and vote 6 are made as a contribution towards offsetting the increase of £117.5 million sought via a supplementary estimate for class X, vote 3—student awards, loans and compensation payments—which is not cash limited.

The opportunity is being taken to provide for the appropriation in aid to class X, vote 1 of additional receipts from the Welsh office, representing contributions to the Centre for Information on Language Teaching, and from OFSTED, representing their contribution to the costs of the third international maths and science study. There will be no increase in net provision on the vote as a result.

The increase of £3,415,000 on class X, vote 2 is to be made available to the Higher Education Funding Council for the costs of students attending diploma in social work courses and funding of probation training. The opportunity has also been taken to provide for the appropriation in aid of additional receipts from the scale of properties by the Royal College of Art to support increased capital expenditure by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. This increase will be offset by transfers of £2,946,000 from the Department of Health and £469,000 from the Home Office and increased receipts, and will not therefore add to the planned total for public expenditure.

The reduction to the cash limit on class X, vote 6 arises principally because fewer independent registered inspectors than expected put themselves forward to lead primary and special school inspections. A number of the inspections planned for 1994–95 have therefore been postponed.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made by the United Nations towards achieving its target of human rights monitors in Rwanda.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 26 January, 79 human rights monitors were in Rwanda. The eventual target is 147. We expect more to be deployed shortly.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with representatives of the United Nations in regard to assisting the Rwandan authorities in bringing those responsible for human rights violations to justice;

(2) what discussions he has had with the United Nations regarding the establishment of an international criminal tribunal for Rwanda.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 30 January, *Official Report*, column *490*.

Kenya

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has made to the Kenyan Government about events in Nakuru just before Christmas involving compulsory dispersal of victims of ethnic clashes;

(2) if he will seek a report from the United Nations Development Programme in Kenya about the forced closure of Maela camps, in Nakuru on 23 December, and place that report in the Library;

(3) if he will ask the high commission in Nairobi for a report on the forced closure of Maela camps on Friday 23 December, and the number of people removed and their destination; and if he will place that report in the Library.

Mr. Baldry: The UNDP has not published a report on the dispersal at Maela. However figures from them, confirmed by the British High Commission in Nairobi, indicate that up to 2,500 displaced people were moved from Maela, on or soon after 23 December 1994. Of these, some 1,200 were resettled on Agricultural Development Corporation land in the area; the rest were taken to locations in central province.

We have made clear to the Kenyan Government at high level our concerns about the way in which the dispersal was carried out. We support the joint Kenya Government-UNDP programme which is addressing the needs of displaced people in Kenya both financially and through the High Commission's participation in Nairobi in the National Committee for Displaced Persons. We are keen to see the programme continue in an orderly fashion.

European Council

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement

on forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union.

Mr. Goodlad: The following meets are planned:

Date	*Business*
February 6-7	Foreign Affairs Council
February 20	ECOFIN
February 20-21	Agriculture Council

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

6 to 7 February: Foreign Affairs Council

Provisional agenda.

Adoption of the agenda

Approval of the list of "A" items

Resolutions adopted by the European Parliament at its part-session (Strasbourg, 16-20 January 1995)

Commission report on the setting up of the WTO, policy debate on the sectoral negotiations (aeronautics, steel, negotiating directives on services) and on new subjects (environment, Social standards)

Negotiations under article XXIV-6 of GATT following Enlargement: adoption of negotiating directives

Relations with the countries of cEntral and eastern Europe

Commission report on the preparation of the White Paper

Current state of negotiations with the Baltic Countries

Slovenia: Adoption of negotiating directives

Stability pact, including submission by the Commission of the report on accompanying measures

Former Yugoslavia, in particular:

financing the Mostar administration in 1995

Chechnya

Ukraine: European Union action programme for nuclear safety progress report

Mediterranean policy

(poss) Relations with Israel

Preparation for the 13th meeting of the EC-Israel cooperation council at ministerial level.

Mid term review of the Lomé IV and 8th EDF preparation for the second ministerial conference to renegotiate the fourth ACP-EC convention (Brussels, 16 and 17 February 1995)

Rum: discontinuation of the ACP and OCT import quotas and measures to be adopted within the framework of Poseidom

(poss) Preparation for the Panama meeting with the San Jose group (23 and 24 February 1995)

Adoption in the official languages of the communities of a common position on the directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data.

20 February, ECOFIN

Presentation by Commission of work programme within ECOFIN's area of competence

Follow up to Essen European Council

Fight against money laundering. Examination of Commission report

Fight against fraud. Commission work programme for 1995

Preparation for meeting with associated countries of central and Eastern Europe.

20 to 21 February: Agriculture Council

Reform of the wine regime

Reform of the sugar regime

Set-aside (biomass)

CAP financing

Rules for the recovery of FEOGA securities

Amending directive 64/432 (trade in live animals).

Human Rights

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has received from human rights organisations regarding human rights violations in Rwanda and Nigeria;

(2) what investigation he has made of human rights violations in Rwanda and Nigeria regarding *(a)* the welfare of refugees and *(b)* allegations of killings taken place.

Mr. Baldry: We have received many representations from human rights organisations, hon. Members and members of the public concerning human rights in Nigeria and Rwanda.

Britain fully supported the UN Commission of Experts' investigation into the atrocities committed in Rwanda last year and subsequently co-sponsored the resolution that established the International Criminal Tribunal which is now being set up in Rwanda and which aims to bring the organisers of the genocide to justice. We have also made it clear to the Rwandan authorities that we hold them responsible for the safety of returning refuges and internally displaced persons.

We are well aware of the recent reports of extra-judicial killings in Nigeria. The European Union has made efforts to establish the truth of the allegations, but the results have been inconclusive. We continue to watch the situation closely.

Departmental Funding

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further changes he proposes to make in his Department's diplomatic wing cash limits and running costs limits for 1994–95.

Mr. Goodlad: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made.

The cash limit for class II, vote 1, overseas representation, will be increased by a token amount of £1,000 from £688,207,000 to £688,208,000. Parliamentary authority will be sought for additional provision for higher than expected expenditure on running costs, other current expenditure and capital as a result of adverse overseas price expenditure and capital as a result of adverse overseas price movements; to take up capital provision of £13,940,000 under the end-year flexibility scheme, as announced by the then Chief Secretary of the Treasury on 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *729-34*, and to reflect inter-departmental transfers totalling £239,000 net. These increases are offset by reduced running costs and by increased appropriations in aid.

The gross running costs limit on class II, vote 1 will be reduced by £12,715,000 from £512,892,000 to £500,177,000. This is a net decrease taking account of

transfers between departments, adjustment for adverse overseas price movements and additional VAT receipts.

The cash limit for class II, vote 2, other external relations, will be increased by a token amount of £1,000 from £456,842,000 to £456,843,000. Parliamentary authority will be sought for additional expenditure in respect of certain international organisations and for adverse overseas price movements. The increase will be met by increased appropriations in aid and by provision from elsewhere in the vote.

The cash limit for class II, vote 4, the British Council, will be increased by £2,119,000 from £97,499,000 to £99,618,000 in respect of adverse overseas price movements. The increase will be met from the reserve.

All the increases will be offset by savings or charged to the reserve, and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Primary School Pupils

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of pupils enrolled at each maintained primary school in the constituencies of Belfast, West and Belfast, North, in each of the past five years.

Mr. Ancram: Information requested is as set out:

North Belfast

School	*Enrolments*				
	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Holy Cross Boys' PS	441	439	439	430	443
Holy Family Boys' PS	291	290	284	291	228
Our Lady of Lourdes CB PS	506	526	545	572	580
Our Lady's Girls' PS	466	458	462	463	463
Edmund Rice CB PS	439	427	416	418	417
Holy Family Girls' PS	303	305	285	285	268
Holy Cross Girls' PS	223	217	245	248	243
Mercy PS	708	674	628	602	593
St. Vincent De Paul PS	247	254	247	235	214
St. Mary's Star of the Sea	256	253	253	244	236
St. Therese of Lisieux PS	471	501	500	494	482
Star of the Sea PS	243	260	269	289	305
Sacred Heart Boys' PS	305	311	344	377	399
St. Patrick's Boys' PS[1]	220	213	413	425	376
St. Patrick's Girls' PS[1]	214	211	413	425	376

[1] St. Patrick's Boys' and St. Patrick's Girls' amalgamated in 1991 to form St. Patrick's Primary School.

West Belfast

School	*Enrolments*				
	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
St. Catherine's PS	232	255	253	261	264
St. Gall's Monastery PS	317	325	329	336	350
St. John's Girls' PS	92	88	111	109	125
St. Mary's Boys' and Girls' PS	119	115	110	102	102
St. Aidan's CB PS	384	378	376	411	382
St. Bernadette's Girls' PS	399	391	391	383	385
St. Paul's Boys' PS	191	203	216	239	218
St. Teresa's Boys' PS	336	334	339	343	347
St. Teresa's Girls' PS	307	296	290	302	305
Holy Trinity Boys' PS	416	435	449	472	465
St. Oliver Plunkett Boys' PS	384	374	379	363	387
St. Oliver Plunkett Girls' PS	391	376	394	380	380
Holy Trinity Girls' PS	409	421	430	418	403
St. Bride's PS	694	700	710	739	755
St. John the Baptist Girls' PS	625	639	646	664	679
St. John the Baptist Boys' PS	723	725	738	757	753
St. Mary's Girls' PS	197	189	214	214	218
St. Paul's PS	135	127	140	183	171
St. Malachy's PS	290	277	291	287	299
St. Peter's PS	535	517	495	492	474
St. Joseph's PS	253	264	266	261	257
St. Comgall's PS	152	159	153	137	122
St. Kevin's Boys' PS[1]	311	325	328	647	673
St. Kevin's Girls' PS[1]	261	278	298	647	673
Holy Child Boys' PS[2]	364	354	366	366	764
Holy Child Girls PS[2]	321	329	354	371	764
Bunscoil Ghaelach PS	361	370	382	387	371
Gaelscoil Na Bhfal	—	—	—	97	122

[1] St. Kevin's Boys' and St. Kevin's Girls' amalgamated in 1992 to form St. Kevin's Primary School.
[2] Holy Child Boys' and Holy Child Girls' amalgamated in 1993 to form Holy Child Primary School.

Patients Charter

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost to public funds of the production, printing, distribution and advertising of the patients charter when launched in 1991; and how many copies were printed.

Mr. Moss: The total cost to public funds of the launch of the Northern Ireland charter for patients and clients in March 1992 was £85,328. This was made up of £17,900 for production, £49,318 for printing and £18,110 for distribution. There were no advertising costs. Some 17,000 copies of the full charter and 1 million copies of the summary guide were printed.

Super Dump, Magheramorne

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how objectors to the proposal for a super dump at Magheramorne, County Antrim former limestone quarry will be able to know that their response to the Blue Circle published planning application has been received at the Department of Environment Northern Ireland planning service if no acknowledgement is issued to each objector who writes to the Department of Environment, Northern Ireland.

Mr. Moss: All representations received will be acknowledged.

Fishing

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many fishing boats over 10m there were at Portavogie harbour; how many persons were employed in the fishing industry in Portavogie in 1985; and what are the current figures.

Mr. Ancram: Information on the number of fishing boats at Portagovie harbour over 10m length in 1985 is not available but there were 62 vessels of 40ft and over in length at 31 December 1985. The comparable figure at 31 December 1994 was 68 vessels, six of which are to be taken out of the fleet under the decommissioning scheme. In February 1985 it was estimated there were 586 full-time and part-time persons employed at Portagovie in fish catching, processing and ancillary services. The comparable estimate in February 1994 was 454 persons.

Agricultural Land

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has showing the proportion of agricultural land which was tenanted in Northern Ireland for *(a)* 1965, *(b)* 1970, *(c)* 1980, *(d)* 1990 and *(e)* the latest available date.

Mr. Ancram: The requested information is not readily available. However, in general terms, tenancies do not feature to any meaningful extent as a basis of land tenure in Northern Ireland and the proportion of agricultural land involved in tenancies is therefore negligible.

TREASURY

Housing Benefit

12. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much a 1 per cent. increase in interest rates increases Government expenditure on housing benefit.

Mr. Aitken: Interest rate changes do not affect expenditure on housing benefit which provides assistance towards rents.

Public Sector Debt

13. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the current public sector debt and its forecast growth.

Mr. Aitken: Net public sector debt stood at 38.3 per cent. of GDP at end-March 1994. It is forecast to peak as a share of GDP at end-March 1996, and to decline thereafter.

Budget (Effects)

14. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of how much an individual on five times average earnings will gain from his last Budget.

Sir George Young: Tax measures taking effect over the next year are expected to cost the richest 20 per cent. of households an average of £3.90 a week compared to £2.30 a week averaged across all households. Pensioners, on average, will be no worse off. The effect for any particular individual will vary with their household composition and spending pattern.

Investment Levels

15. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the level of general and local government investment in 1997–98; and what it is currently, in real terms.

Mr. Aitken: General Government capital expenditure at 1993–94 prices is projected to be £15.2 billion in 1997–98 of which £5.9 billion is projected to be by local authorities. In the current year, we estimate the capital expenditure figure will be £16.8 billion of which local authorities will contribute £7.9 billion.

Private Finance Initiative

16. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on recent progress under the private finance initiative.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I announced in the Budget that we are on target to sign contracts in 1995 under the private finance initiative leading to £5 billion of capital investment. Since then, additional projects worth a further £1 billion have been identified and are being taken forward.

Vehicle Excise Duty

17. **Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the vehicle excise duty for lorries in the light of the discrepancy between revenue raised and total cost to public funds revealed by the Royal Commission on environmental pollution.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Vehicle excise duty for lorries is reviewed before each Budget.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reduce United Kingdom road tax in respect of international hauliers.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer reviews vehicle excise duty before each Budget, taking account of a number of factors, including the competitive position of international hauliers. Vehicle excise duty for most lorry classes has been frozen in the past five budgets.

Public Limited Company Directors

18. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the initiative of the Confederation of British Industry to investigate the structure within which the pay and conditions for public limited company directors is determined.

Mr. Aitken: I welcome the group set up under Sir Richard Greenbury to review this matter and look forward to their proposals. The CBI initiative gives positive proof of the private sector's willingness to respond positively to public concerns.

27. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the initiative of the Confederation of British Industry to investigate the structure within which the pay and conditions for public limited company directors is determined.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. member to the reply I gave the hon. member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) earlier today.

Single European Currency

19. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the EU will establish a single currency; and what assessment he has made of the benefits and disbenefits of United Kingdom participation.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made it clear he does not expect conditions to be right for any move to a single currency in 1997. Whether the United Kingdom would benefit from a later move to a single currency would depend a great deal on whether significant convergence had been achieved among the member states concerned. When and if the timing of any moves to stage 3 becomes clearer, the Government have ensured that United kingdom participation could not occur without the approval of a full Act of Parliament.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will undertake a compliance cost assessment with regard to the obligations likely to be imposed upon the United Kingdom's financial institutions in order to be prepared for the possible adoption of the single European currency; what discussions he, his Department, or the Bank of England have had on such obligations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: At the appropriate time, the Government will make an assessment of the costs and benefits of participating in a single currency, should this question arise. In carrying out their functions, both the Treasury and the Bank of England maintain a wide range of contacts with financial institutions. In this context, a number of them have raised the question of the implications for the United Kingdom financial sector and the wider United kingdom economy of a single European Currency.

Growth Rates

20. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the growth rates over the past two years for each EC country; and if he will list them, with the least growth first.

Mr. Nelson: The UK achieved the highest growth rate of any major EU economy over the last two-years for which full year data are available. EU member countries' growth rates over the two-year period 1992 to 1993 were as set out:

	Percentage change real GDP 1992–93
Finland	–6.4
Sweden	–4.0
Spain	–0.7
Germany	–0.3
Belgium	0.1
Italy	0.1
France	0.5
Portugal	0.8
Greece	0.8
Austria	1.4
Netherlands	1.6
UK	1.6
Luxembourg	2.2
Denmark	2.7
Ireland	7.1

Monetary Conditions

21. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the European Finance Ministers to discuss monetary conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: European Finance Ministers discuss monetary conditions as a matter of course in meetings of the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers of the European Union—ECOFIN.

There is strong agreement that, to sustain the recovery, it will be necessary to maintain progress towards price stability. This commitment to sustaining low inflation depends to a large extent on the conduct of macroeconomic and structural policies.

Inward Investment

22. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has that the business taxation regime has encouraged inward investment into Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: A business takes a large number of factors into account when deciding on the location of international investment, and it is difficult to isolate the role of tax or any other factor. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom has the lowest rate of tax amongst the major industrial countries. This is one of the reasons why, in 1993, the UK attracted more than 40 per cent. of inward investment into the European Union from both the USA and Japan.

Non-aid Debt

23. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to write off non-aid debt

from developing countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: The Government have sought agreement for their Trinidad terms proposals launched by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in 1990. In December 1994, the Paris Club group of official creditors agreed to implement these terms in full. These offer reductions in the stock of eligible debt at a benchmark of 67 per cent. to the poorest, most severely indebted countries on a case by case basis.

Demand

24. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the level of total demand in the economy.

Mr. Aitken: Total final demand rose by 0.5 per cent. in the third quarter of 1994 to a level of 3.8 per cent. above its previous peak in the second quarter of 1990.

Trade Figures

25. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the present trend in trade figures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The United Kingdom's recent trade performance has been much better than expected: latest figures show a current account surplus, the first since 1987; and exports growing at 13 per cent., more than double the rate for imports. Prospects remain excellent. The CBI reports export optimism for the year ahead at its highest level since 1973.

Job Creation

Mrs. Roe: To as the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the effect of the Budget on job creation.

Mr. Aitken: The Budget contained a package of measures, estimated to cost £700 million in a full year, to improve work incentives and reduce the cost to employers of taking on unemployed people. The Budget also underlined the Government's commitment to sound public finances and low inflation, which are necessary for a sustainable recovery and falling unemployment.

Fraud

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken or intends to take to enable the Inland Revenue to exchange information with the Department of Social Security and other agencies to assist in the detection of fraud; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The Government's determination to detect fraud is reflected in existing arrangements for the Inland Revenue to share information with other Government Departments relevant to specific risks. Under plans announced in the Budget, the Inland Revenue will be exchanging more information with Customs and Excise, but the effectiveness of the inland Revenue's own work is largely dependent on its ability to obtain information from taxpayers. This information will be given more freely if taxpayers are assured that it will be treated as confidential. The need to provide privacy is extremely important to the Inland Revenue because it encourages openness by taxpayers in providing the fullest information on which the Revenue can base assessments of tax.

Foreign Vehicles

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce a tax on foreign vehicles entering the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has no such plans.

Redundancy Terms

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will place a copy of the Treasury document, "Information on Outplacement Services and Redundancy Terms", in the Library;

(2) what are the redundancy terms for Treasury civil servants contained in the documents "Information on Outplacement Services and Redundancy Terms".

Mr. Nelson: Redundancy terms for Treasury civil servants are contained in the document "Information on Outplacement Services and Redundancy Terms". They apply, under the civil service compensation scheme formerly section 10 of the principal civil service pensions scheme, to permanent civil servants with more than one year's service. These terms operate throughout the civil service and are not unique to the Treasury. Details of the redundancy terms can be found in the civil service compensation scheme 1994 which was laid before Parliament on 20 December 1994.

I have arranged for a copy of the document "Information on Outplacement Services and Redundancy Terms" to be placed in the House Library.

EU Economic and Social Committee

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the annual cost of the United Kingdom contribution to the Economic and Social Committee of the European Union in the current year and over the past five years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Member states contributions are made in respect of the whole of the Community budget, and not to particular parts. On the assumption that our overall financing share, after abatement, applies equally to all parts of the budget then, as a matter of arithmetic, the United Kingdom's contributions to the Economic and Social Committee for 1995 and the previous five years are as set out:

Year	*Economic and Social Committee annual cost £ million*[1]	*United Kingdom share of Community revenue (after abatement) Percentage*[2]	*Implied United Kingdom contributions to the ESC £ million*
1990	31,838,027	15.0	4,775,704
1991	33,776,369	11.7	3,951,835
1992	37,881,157	12.5	4,735,145

Year	Economic and Social Committee annual cost £ million[1]	United Kingdom share of Community revenue (after abatement) Percentage[2]	Implied United Kingdom contributions to the ESC £ million
1993	43,554,261	12.1	5,270,066
1994[3]	57,835,872	11.6	6,708,961
1995[3]	57,412,830	12.7	7,291,429

[1] The annual costs for 1990–1993 are outturn figures. For 1994, the figure is taken from the 1994 adopted Budget. For 1995, the figure is taken from the draft general budget.
[2] Calculated from the revenue tables for the adopted budgets for the years in question.
[3] Includes appropriations for the joint organisational structure with the Committee of the Regions.

Unearned Income

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total unearned income of the top 1 per cent. of tax payers for each year since 1990–91 divided into income from *(a)* shares and securities, *(b)* bank and interest-bearing accounts, *(c)* building societies accounts and deposits, *(d)* rents, *(e)* pensions and annuities and *(f)* other.

Sir George Young: Estimates for the top 1 per cent. of taxpayers are given in the table for 1991–92 and 1992–93, the latest year for which a breakdown of unearned income is available. Income from pensions is not included in the table as this is classified as earned rather than unearned.

£ billion

	Dividends	Bank and building society interest	Rents	Other unearned income
1991–92	3.6	1.9	0.5	1.8
1992–93	3.0	1.1	0.5	1.8

World Economic Forum

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals in regard to the financing of environmental protection and environmentally friendly manufacturing have been put forward by Her Majesty's Government to the world economic forum in Davos in Switzerland, which started on 26 January.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None.

Economic Growth

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average growth of the economy between the years February 1974 to 1979 and 1979 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: Average growth in real GDP—gross domestic product at constant factor cost—between the years 1974 to 1979 is 2 per cent. Between 1979 and the present day, average growth in GDP is 1.9 per cent.

Public Bodies (Running Costs)

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the Registry of Friendly Societies running costs limits in 1994–95.

Mr. Nelson: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the running costs limit for class XVII, vote 10 will be increased by £158,000, from £8,365,000 to £8,523,000. The increase will be offset by additional appropriations in aid and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The increase in the running costs limit is made up of two components: first, to meet unexpected additional expenditure of £108,000 in legal costs resulting from the Lloyds/Cheltenham and Gloucester case; and second, to carry out an investigation in support of prudential supervision by the sector, at an estimated cost of £50,000.

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the National Investment and Loans Office cash and running costs limits in 1994–95.

Mr. Nelson: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVII, vote 11 will be increased by £199,000 from £1,000 to £200,000. The additional provision is required to cover a shortfall in fees payable on loans to local authorities. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure. The running costs limit will be reduced by £25,000 from £1,334,000 to £1,309,000.

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the Central Statistical Office's cash and running costs limits in 1994–95.

Mr. Nelson: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XVII, vote 13 will change from £48,002,000 to £48,062,000 and the running costs limit will decrease by £641,000 from £48,463,000 to £47,822,000.

These changes reflect a transfer of £60,000 from the Department of Employment, class V, vote 1, in respect of funding for the international passenger survey and the transfer of £701,000 to non-running costs. These changes do not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions departmental officials met representatives of Ian Greer Associates *(a)* formally and *(b)* informally on 26 January to discuss matters relating to their clients' interests.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* To my knowledge there were no meetings, formal or informal, between Treasury officials and representatives of Ian Greer Associates on 26 January 1995.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Parkhurst Prison

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who authorised the removal of the governor from his duties and prison staff from Her Majesty's prison, Parkhurst.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 2 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking who authorised the removal of the Governor from his duties and prison staff from Her Majesty's Prison, Parkhurst.

The decision that the Governor of Parkhurst should be moved from his duties at Parkhurst, for operational reasons, was taken by me and the Directors of Custody, Security and Personnel. I should make it clear that he was neither sacked nor suspended. He will be assisting the further inquiries which have now to take place into the escapes and will then take up a non-operational post in Prison Service Headquarters. Authorisation for the sending of any other staff closely involved in the events of 3 January on detached duty pending the further investigations (including the disciplinary investigation) and in their own interests was given in principle by me in conjunction with the Directors of Personnel and Custody.

I want to make it quite clear that these moves are entirely without prejudice to the disciplinary investigation, which will take place as soon as Sir John Learmont's assessment of security has been completed, or to any disciplinary proceedings which may follow the disciplinary investigation.

"Red Book of Captain Ramsey"

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state the circumstances in which the "Red book of Captain Ramsey", mentioned in his answer of 29 March 1994, *Official Report*, column *614*, was returned to private hands; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the entries in the "Red book of Captain Ramsey" made when he was imprisoned under regulation 18B.

Mr. Howard: No. Records do not show the movements of "Captain Ramsey's Red Book". I therefore cannot comment on its current whereabouts or how it reached its present owner. As the book is private property and is not held by the Government, the question of my placing copies of extracts in the Library does not arise.

Prisoners

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he or the Director of Prison Services has received to the effect that the testing of prisoners for cannabis use encourages the use of harder drugs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 2 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question enquiring about representations received to the effect that the testing of prisoners for cannabis use encourages the use of harder drugs. The Secretary of State has not received any specific representations; I have received one letter recently which touched on the issue.

We are aware that heavy users of cannabis may retain the drug in their bodies for much longer than light users of cannabis or users of harder drugs. This has been taken into account in the development of the drug testing policy within prisons and we are taking a number of precautions to ensure that prisoners are not encouraged to move from cannabis to harder drugs in the mistaken belief that they will more easily escape detection.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on *(a)* sentence planning for all sentenced prisoners and *(b)* custody plans for remand prisoners.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 2 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what progress has been made on extending sentence planning to all sentenced prisoners and custody plans for remand prisoners.

Sentence planning was introduced for longer term prisoners (serving 4 years or more) in October 1992 and for prisoners serving 12 months and over in November 1993. It is undertaken for all young offenders in Young Offender Institutions. In addition, some establishments have extended the process to prisoners serving under 12 months and remand prisoners.

An extensive review of all aspects of sentence planning is currently underway. Consideration will then be given to extending it formally to a wider group of prisoners, including the introduction of custody plans for remand prisoners.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were serving four years or more on *(a)* 30 June 1979, *(b)* 30 June 1984 and *(c)* 30 June 1989.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 2 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many prisoners were serving four years or more on *(a)* 30th June 1979, *(b)* 30th June 1984 and *(c)* 30th June 1989.

The following information is for prisoners with sentence lengths of over four years, including those serving life sentences.

Year	*Number*
1979	5,678
1984	6,191
1989	12,112

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what national studies his Department is undertaking into vulnerable prisoners.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 2 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what national studies are being undertaking into vulnerable prisoners.

The Prison Service is currently conducting a review of arrangements for the management of vulnerable prisoners. In addition, a research study commissioned to examine the effectiveness of integrated regimes between vulnerable and ordinary prisoners is in progress at Risley prison and other establishments.

Advertisements

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions and in what circumstances in the last five years advertisements have been placed in newspapers or periodicals which have been described as being issued by or on behalf of Ministers in his Department rather than on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Howard: No advertisements have been placed in newspapers or periodicals in the past five years which have been described as being issued by or on behalf of Ministers in my Department.

Prison Population

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the prison population of the United Kingdom in 1991, 1992 and 1993; and what is the current figure.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Ellyn Llwyd, dated 2 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent question asking about the size of the prison population of the United Kingdom in 1991, 1992 and 1993; and about the current figure.

The available information is given in the attached table. The latest available figure for the prison population for the United Kingdom is 56,836. This uses figures for 27 January for England, Wales and Scotland and for the end of November from Northern Ireland.

Average population in custody[1] United Kingdom

Year	*Average population*
1991	52,532
1992	52,884
1993	52,136

[1] Includes prisoners held in police cells.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the absenteeism rates for *(a)* the United Kingdom Passport Agency and *(b)* his Department in 1994.

Mr. Howard: I regret that information on sick absence for the Department as a whole in not yet available.

A special exercise by the United Kingdom Passport Agency has shown that the average number of working days lost through sick absence for the calendar year 1994 is 14.09 days. This figure is calculated by including non-working days which fall within the period of sick absence.

Licensed Premises

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many licensed premises in each region have applied for children's certificates.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The changes to the Licensing Act 1964 which enable licensees to apply to the licensing justices for children's certificates came into effect on 3 January 1995. No information about the number of applications made is yet held centrally.

Asylum Division

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department from what date the reorganisation of the asylum division, with separate allocations of staff to deal with incoming or existing cases, took effect.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: From July 1993.

Blakenhurst Prison

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the latest figure of the number of assaults on prisoners at Blakenhurst prison;

(2) what is the latest figure for the number of assaults on custody officers at Blakenhurst prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 2 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the number of assaults on prisoners and on custody officers at Blakenhurst prison.

The latest information is for assaults proved at adjudication during the calendar year 1994. Figures for 1993 were published in "Statistics of offences against prison discipline and punishments, England and Wales, 1993" (cm. 2664).

Provisional figures are that in 1994 there were 23 assaults on prisoners and 89 on staff (includes a number of assaults on others).

The current rate of assaults at Blakenhurst, relative to the size of the prisoner population, is comparable to the average of other local prisons.

Suicidal Prisoners

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in implementing the chief inspector of prisons' recommendation of November 1994 in respect of monitoring of suicidal prisoners.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 2 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question on the progress on implementing the Chief Inspector of Prisons'

recommendation of November 1994 on the monitoring of suicidal prisoners.

In his Annual Report for 1994, Judge Tumim commented that a better way of continuous monitoring of suicidal prisoners should be found.

Twenty four hour monitoring is carried out where it is considered appropriate in the clinical judgement of the medical officer. However, care has to be exercised to ensure that lack of privacy does not create a feeling of oppression which exacerbates suicidal feelings. In November 1994 an Instruction to Governors was issued which prescribed that 15 minute watches should only be used as a supplement to other supportive precautionary measures, such as cell sharing.

Probation Service

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* probation orders, *(b)* community service orders and *(c)* combination orders were held by the probation service in England and Wales on (i) 30 June 1992, (ii) 30 June 1993 and (iii) 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information relating to 31 December is published annually in "Probation Statistics England and Wales"—table 1.3 of the 1993 issue—copies of which are in the Library. The table gives the information for 30 June; figures for 1994 are not yet available.

Persons supervised by the probation service, England and Wales

	30 June 1992	*30 June 1993*
Probation orders	51,884	46,695
Community service orders	30,807	36,180
Combination orders	Nil[1]	5,072

[1] Introduced on 1 October 1992.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many posts he estimates were lost from the probation service in England and Wales during the financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information recorded in probation services returns of staff establishment shows an increase of about 570 posts between 31 March 1993 and 30 June 1994, the latest date for which information is currently available.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many probation service officers or their equivalent were employed by the probation service in England and Wales in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1980, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The number of probation services' officers—formerly ancillaries—employed by probation services in England and Wales since 1980 is as follows:

1980 : 913
1990 : 1,918
1993 : 2,104

Information about 1970 is not readily available in the form requested.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff and at what levels were employed by the probation service in England and Wales on 30 June 1991, 30 June 1992, 30 June 1993 and 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information is given in the table.

Staff employed by probation services in England and Wales, in post at 30 June, full time or part time, by grade and type.

Probation Officers	*30 June 1991*	*30 June 1992*	*30 June 1993*	*30 June 1994*
Chief	55	55	55	54
Deputy and assistant chief	230	252	268	270
Senior	1,152	1,195	1,261	1,274
Main grade	5,747	6,013	6,294	6,419
Total	7,184	7,515	7,878	8,017
Non-probation grade staff				
Probation services officers[1]	1,955	2,043	2,116	2,145
Clerical/secretarial	4,407	4,553	4,697	4,735
Administrative	689	745	832	936
Other non-probation grade staff[2]	3,088	3,095	3,131	3,011
Hostel staff	843	981	1,141	1,187
Total non-probation grade staff	10,982	11,417	11,917	12,014
Total probation staff	18,166	18,932	19,795	20,031

[1] Formerly ancillaries

[2] Figures include sessional supervisors on community service schemes, staff employed in student training units and on miscellaneous functions.

Figures exclude hostel staff.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average number of court reports compiled per qualified probation officer in England and Wales in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The average number of reports completed per main grade probation officer was 52.5 in 1992 and 51.1 in 1993—table 12.3 of "Probation Statistics, England and Wales 1993". The information for 1994 is not yet available. The figures for probation officers are on the basis of whole-time equivalents of established main grade probation officers on field work duties excluding temporary and trainee officers.

The Wolds Prison

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number and types of instances where the required level of service has not been provided or specific contract terms have not been met by Group 4 since the start of the contract to run The Wolds prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 2 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Group 4 and the Wolds prison.

There has been one default notice. This was issued as a result of the escape of a prisoner from hospital, early in 1994.

Departmental Reports

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the internal report and project on violence in prisons.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 2 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the Prison Service project to reduce violence against staff.

The position on this project remains unchanged from that given in my letter of 20 December in reply to your earlier Question (Hansard 20 December, col 251), in which I indicated that there are no plans to publish the internal report which contains the preliminary results.

Prisons

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to limit use of private cash in prisons.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 2 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what plans there are to limit private cash in prisons.

The Secretary of State announced in the House on 19 December 1994 that a system under which prisoners would have to earn privileges would be introduced. At the same time, he stated that, as part of this new approach, the amount of private cash that prisoners are permitted to spend would be reduced. Detailed plans for the implementation of this policy are currently being finalised.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the progress which has been made in respect of improvements in co-operation between Prison Service establishments in close proximity to each other.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 2 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what assessment he has made of the progress in respect of improvements in co-operation between prison service establishments in close proximity to each other.

Community prison clustering arrangements are being developed in the Kent and East Anglia Areas; where co-ordinated regime provision and population management procedures are working satisfactorily. In addition, opportunities are being taken by other prisons in close proximity to share resources. Examples include the merger of Thorp Arch and Rudgate prisons and co-operation between Blakenhurst, Brockhill and Hewell Grange prisons.

Police (Overtime Payments)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were *(a)* the total and *(b)* the average overtime payments for police officers in each police force in England and Wales for each year since 1990.

Mr. Maclean: The table shows overtime costs for each police force in 1992–93 and 1993–94. Figures for earlier years are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The average overtime payment has been calculated by dividing the total cost of overtime for the force by its recorded police strength as at 31 March in the year in question.

Police overtime	*Total cost 1992–93* £	*Average per officer* £	*Total cost 1993–94* £	*Average per officer* £
Avon and Somerset	6,483,805	2,113	3,411,264	1,125
Bedfordshire	2,465,006	2,110	2,005,596	1,742
Cambridgeshire	3,482,000	2,753	2,452,994	1,942
Cheshire	4,442,473	2,328	2,849,688	1,498
City of London	2,173,705	2,635	2,414,334	2,704
Cleveland	1,645,093	1,113	1,860,389	1,302
Cumbria	2,355,384	1,969	1,772,714	1,510
Derbyshire	3,258,958	1,781	2,606,392	1,432
Avon and Cornwall	6,061,765	2,083	4,308,050	1,478
Dorset	1,729,899	1,329	1,496,308	1,154
Durham	1,670,907	1,210	1,850,700	1,338
Dyfed Powys	2,142,357	2,215	1,385,499	1,436
Essex	5,628,590	1,917	5,897,104	2,008
Gloucestershire	1,539,963	1,340	1,986,563	1,714
Greater Manchester	24,271,289	3,438	15,174,820	2,178
Gwent	1,553,956	1,548	1,381,970	1,392
Hampshire	7,107,374	2,170	6,577,017	2,011
Hertfordshire	2,324,840	1,368	2,721,585	1,618
Humberside	3,280,068	1,614	3,583,821	1,758
Kent	5,598,524	1,780	6,013,068	1,912
Lancashire	6,967,479	2,173	4,521,393	1,426
Leicestershire	3,875,318	2,147	2,165,623	1,187
Lincolnshire	2,343,488	1,953	2,090,057	1,734
Merseyside	13,660,235	2,926	9,685,750	2,064
Norfolk	3,484,596	2,420	2,926,125	2,022
Northamptonshire	2,804,613	2,339	2,043,539	1,747
Northumbria	10,559,857	2,964	6,289,065	1,748
North Wales	2,351,525	1,729	2,037,388	1,507

Police overtime	Total cost 1992–93 £	Average per officer £	Total cost 1993–94 £	Average per officer £
North Yorkshire	3,001,970	2,155	2,155,751	1,636
Nottinghamshire	2,582,689	1,110	2,176,532	935
South Wales	5,553,765	1,749	4,840,639	1,546
South Yorkshire	7,415,640	2,446	6,150,043	2,034
Staffordshire	3,716,068	1,705	3,555,875	1,610
Suffolk	2,358,621	1,901	1,937,984	1,604
Surrey	3,244,020	1,916	2,761,499	1,655
Sussex	6,215,486	2,066	4,857,135	1,614
Thames Valley	9,882,241	2,574	9,822,938	2,514
Warwickshire	1,836,204	1,800	1,679,423	1,606
West Mercia	4,261,532	2,075	3,097,475	1,504
West Midlands	11,628,414	1,672	9,948,439	1,418
West Yorkshire	7,933,671	1,575	7,361,286	1,459
Wiltshire	2,387,129	1,887	1,653,739	1,308
Metropolitan	76,857,000	2,900	71,113,000	2,567

Electric Shock Equipment

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which companies he has issued with section 5 firearm licences for the storage, handling or development of electro-shock equipment since 1988.

Mr. Maclean: No company has been granted authority specifically to store, handle or develop electric shock weapons in the last three years. Information about the granting of authority for these purposes in earlier years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

British Visitors Passports

Sir John Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many British visitors passports were issued in each of the years 1992, 1993, and 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The number of British visitors passports issued in each of the last three years was:

1992: 2,058,977

1993: 1,972,312

1994: 1,812,237

National Criminal Intelligence System

Mr. Byers: To ask the secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *552-53*, on the cost of developing the computer for the national criminal intelligence services, how many police officers were trained to use the new computer system; what is the cost of this training; how many police forces now share computer facilities; and if there is a requirement that a police authority establishing its own computer facilities must ensure that it is compatible with computers operated by other police authorities.

Mr. Maclean: As the integrated national criminal intelligence system did not proceed beyond the design stage, no police officers were trained to use the system. All police forces share some of their computer facilities; for example, through their use of the police national computer. The national strategy for police information systems, which was launched by my right hon. and learned Friend in November 1994 sets out arrangements for ensuring compatibility and interoperability between computers operated by different police forces.

Speeding

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of persons prosecuted for speeding offences last year and the year before was male.

Mr. Maclean: The readily available information relates to the percentage of findings of guilt for speeding offences which had been committed by males and was 92 per cent. in 1993.

Figures for 1994 are not yet available.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to enable the Metropolitan police to create a financial reserve.

Mr. Howard: I have arranged to make available to the Metropolitan police £20 million to help create a financial reserve. This sum represents the total value of savings the force has said that it expects to make against the cash limit for 1994–95. The reserve will be available for use in subsequent years outside the Metropolitan police non-voted cash limit and I am reducing the 1994–95 cash limit by £20,000,000 from £1,616,511,000 to £1,596,511,000 accordingly. The relevant sum of police current grant will be paid as a special grant under section 1 of the Police Act 1909.

This new flexibility is, I know, welcomed by the commissioner and the receiver.

Criminal Justice Act 1993

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of state for the Home Department, when he expects to implement the remaining confiscation provisions in the Criminal Justice Act 1993.

Mr. Howard: The Drug Trafficking Act 1994, which enters into force tomorrow, implements and consolidates the following drug trafficking confiscation provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1993: sections 7 to 15, 24(1) to (11), section 25 and consequential amendments in schedule 5. These include new powers to obtain a

revaluation of the defendant's proceeds of drug trafficking within six years of conviction and to confiscate the proceeds of drug traffickers who abscond or who die after conviction.

The following confiscation provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1993 are also being brought into force tomorrow by means of Commencement Order No 8: sections 24(12) to (15), 27, 28 and 36 to 43, together with related provisions in schedules 5 and 6. The provisions mainly amend the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991, which provides for the confiscation of the proceeds of terrorist related activity in Northern Ireland.

With these measures the implementation of the Criminal Justice Act 1993, except part I of that Act, is complete. A further announcement about the implementation of part I will be made in due course.

Charity Commission Funding

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes he has made to the cash limits and running costs limits for the Charity Commission for 1994–95.

Mr. Howard: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class VIII, vote 4, Charity Commission, will be increased by £300,000 from £24,924,000 to £25,224,000 and the running costs limit by £200,000 from £23,254,000 to £23,454,000. The increases reflect a transfer of £300,000 from Property Holdings as a contribution towards the Charity Commission's removal and fitting out costs incurred during the relocation of its Liverpool office. The transfer represents part of an estate rationalisation scheme.

Departmental Funding

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for changes to the 1994–95 cash limits and running costs within his responsibilities.

Mr. Howard: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class VIII, vote 3, Home Office administration, immigration, probation and police support services, England and Wales, will be increased by £20,422,000 from £1,212,721,000 to £1,233,163,000. This includes the take-up of £13,650,000 running costs end year flexibility and £7,591,000 claim on the reserve. Transfers are also being made of £154,000 from the Department of National Heritage in respect of royal palace security work and £3,000 in respect of administration of additional housing costs allowance.

In consequence of these changes, the Home Office gross running cost limit will be increased by £13,653,000 from £1,706,176,000 to £1,719,829,000.

The amount required has been reduced by a diminution in provision for administration of justice of £5,000,000; and by transfers of voted provision of £487,000 to the Crown Prosecution Service in respect of forensic science service charges: and £469,000 to the Department for Education for additional places for probation students. Additional spending on ethnic minority grants and DTELS residual privatisation will be offset by increased appropriations in aid.

Prison Escapes

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many escapes occurred from prisons in the Greater London region in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* the last year for which figures are available;

(2) how many escapes occurred from prisons in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answers 18 January 1995]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 2 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the number of escapes from prisons generally and the number from the Greater London region in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* the last year for which figures are available.

The information you request is shown in the table below:

Year	*Escapes from Prisons*	*Escapes from Greater London Prisons*
1979	97	[2]n/a
1984–85	114	[2]n/a
1985–86	117	[2]n/a
1993–94	[1]171	11

[1] Excludes non-Key Performance Indicator escapes (i.e. those recaptured within 15 minutes).
[2] Information not available

Recruitment

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to his Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 27 January 1995]:* Excluding the Prison Service, the Home Office spent £869,816 in 1994 on recruiting staff to the Department. This figure excludes salary costs. Some 850 staff were recruited. Figures for the Prison Service could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Stop and Search

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many stop and search incidents took place in each division of the Metropolitan police in each of the last three years; and if he will provide the ethnic breakdown of those stopped and searched.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* Figures are not available for 1992, 1993 or, at present, for the final quarter of 1994. The tables give the divisional breakdown for each area of the Metropolitan police district, by ethnic appearance, for the first three-quarters of 1994.

	White	Black Afro Caribbean	Indian/Pakistani/ Bangladeshi	Other ethnic minority	Unknown	Total
1 Area						
Belgravia	2,881	534	149	313	104	3,981
Brompton	2,617	1,210	149	1,045	75	5,096
Notting Hill	519	705	31	298	0	1,553
West End Central	4,459	1,241	273	835	1	6,809
Charing Cross	3,576	740	222	723	707	5,968
Paddington	1,710	1,713	289	655	300	4,667
Marylebone	1,488	714	170	246	169	2,787
Fulham	866	522	28	53	15	1,484
Hammersmith	1,192	1,029	93	114	329	2,757
2 Area						
Hampstead	848	239	49	57	4	1,197
Kentish Town	1,031	350	184	113	257	1,935
Holborn	1,830	682	119	188	106	2,925
Holloway	3,108	1,728	188	509	0	5,533
Islington	2,340	886	113	242	0	3,581
Barnet	1,377	92	38	70	0	1,577
Golders Green	674	187	64	62	95	1,082
West Hendon	1,003	200	65	73	0	1,341
Harrow	1,024	233	122	19	4	1,402
Wembley	531	428	238	23	35	1,255
Kilburn	1,017	1,500	135	90	152	2,894
Ealing	1,456	981	264	99	99	2,899
Southall	1,046	534	1,106	30	188	2,904
Hornsey	638	566	37	108	87	1,436
Tottenham	1,945	2,462	149	736	3	5,295
3 Area						
Hackney	2,178	2,111	205	318	361	5,173
Stoke Newington	2,396	3,392	303	1,229	0	7,320
Limehouse	1,342	403	231	76	246	2,298
Whitechapel	2,208	805	2,239	173	267	5,692
Barkingside	1,845	189	124	72	350	2,580
Ilford	1,539	389	349	73	111	2,461
Leyton	1,306	972	411	97	98	2,884
Havering	2,102	88	21	28	470	2,709
Forest Gate	1,680	1,212	1,033	139	0	4,064
Dagenham	1,780	188	56	26	20	2,070
Plaistow	1,485	627	380	64	164	2,720
Edmonton	1,734	621	134	631	95	3,215
Enfield	3,422	258	67	371	235	4,353
Chingford	976	513	192	46	131	1,858
4 Area						
Southwark	2,385	485	93	111	267	3,341
Peckham	3,126	2,678	66	226	879	6,975
Walworth	3,329	2,155	87	268	14	5,853
Catford	2,003	677	35	92	16	2,823
Lewisham	3,596	3,283	139	331	92	7,441
Orpington and Bromley	4,574	389	45	55	24	5,087
Plumstead	1,643	266	53	49	192	2,203
Greenwich	4,743	823	115	161	314	6,156
Bexleyheath	3,929	43	64	18	0	4,054
Croydon	2,657	618	112	61	112	3,560
South Norwood	849	390	42	25	7	1,313
Epsom and Sutton	2,257	116	44	59	0	2,476
5 Area						
Brixton	988	1,970	24	124	316	3,432
Streatham	1,779	1,573	105	96	498	4,051
Vauxhall	2,881	2,145	113	210	255	5,604
Hounslow	1,324	137	383	29	0	1,873
Chiswick	1,483	368	305	69	1	2,226
Twickenham	1,101	176	80	56	352	1,765
Spelthorne	1,370	21	15	21	0	1,427
Kingston	2,044	81	47	43	0	2,215
Wandsworth	1,761	952	118	82	249	3,162
Battersea	1,239	1,418	93	41	66	2,857
Hillingdon	2,391	147	285	69	3	2,895
Merton	2,754	439	74	93	149	3,509
Heathrow	231	32	34	16	0	313

Crime Victims (Telephone Hotline)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date the telephone hotline for crime victims was established; how many calls have been made to it; how many staff have been employed to operate the hotline; how many hours a day it is in operation; and what has been the total cost of operating the service since its inception.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 2 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the Victim's Helpline.

The Helpline started operation on 5 December 1994 and by 26 January had received 49 calls. Three staff are available at any one time, undertaking other duties when they are not taking calls. Initial start-up costs for staff training, telephone lines and equipment, and other items were £8,400. Subsequent running costs are estimated to be in the region of £6,000.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have made applications since the enactment of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993; how many of these applications have been determined; and how many applicants whose cases have been detained have *(a)* been granted refugee status, *(b)* been granted exceptional leave to remain and *(c)* been refused.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: During the period 1 August 1993 to 31 December 1994, 20,255 decisions were taken on 41,765 applications for asylum which were lodged during the same period. A further 1,935 of these applications were withdrawn.

As at 30 January 1995, 471 persons who had sought asylum and had their application for asylum refused, were detained. This figure includes people awaiting removal following refusal of the application and dismissal of any appeal and those whose appeal was still pending. Information on the number of persons who have had an initial decision on their claim for asylum and who had at some time in the application stage spent time in detention, is not available.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the cases unresolved at the date the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 came into force remain unresolved.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: At 31 December 1994—the latest date for which information is available—an estimated 35,700 asylum applications which were lodged prior to the implementation of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, 26 July 1993 were outstanding.

WALES

National Park Authorities

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice he has given to local authorities and other bodies in Wales about the potential establishment of the national authorities provided for in the Environment Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have today issued advice to the local authorities in Wales about the national park authorities which I intend to establish for the three national parks in Wales should the Environment Bill receive Royal Assent. I have placed a copy of this advice in the Library of the House.

The advice also covers the interaction between the national park provisions in the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 and the Environment Bill, and the effect that local government reorganisation will have on the process of establishing Welsh national park authorities.

Further guidance will be issued once the Environment Bill is enacted and comments are being sought from the local authorities and other bodies in the interim.

The national park authorities in Wales will operate with the same purpose and duties, and with the same relationship towards their constituent local authorities as those in England.

Health Services (Resources)

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has now reached decisions about the allocation of resources for hospital, community and family health and related services for Wales for 1995–96.

Mr. Redwood: I announced on 14 December, an additional £114 million for the national health service in Wales for 1995–96. This brings total NHS spending to £2,191 million. Within this sum I now propose to allocate £1,620 million to hospital and community health services and the cash limited element of the family health services in Wales. This amount will be distributed as follows: health authorities will receive £1,364.7 million for revenue purposes, an increase of £69.3 million or 5.3 per cent. over 1994–95 plans. They will also receive £118.7 million for capital investment.

£69.5 million is due to be invested in education and training for NHS staff. Family health services authorities will receive £12.6 million to meet their support costs and £50.8 million for general medical service practice costs. A further £3.6 million will be provided as contributions toward FHSA-related services; most notably as contributions toward the running cost of England and Wales bodies and centrally administered services.

In addition, authorities and trusts will be expected to generate efficiency savings of at least 3 per cent. This amounts to some £49 million including £3.25 million savings in management costs. These savings, together with the £82 million cash increase, will be available to meet inflationary and other pressures and enable further investment to be made in patient care.

Details of the allocations to health authorities and family health authorities and the provisional external financing limits for NHS trusts is contained in a statement which has been placed today in the Library of the House.

Departmental Cash Limits

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes he proposes to make to the cash limits for his Department for the current financial year.

Mr. Redwood: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limit on class XV, vote 2 will be reduced by £8,000,000 from

£153,581,000 to £145,581,000; the cash limit on class XV, vote 4 will be increased by £6,810,000 from £570,153,000 to £576,963,000, the cash limit on class XV, vote 8 will be reduced by £7,230,000 from £1,511,411,000 to £1,504,211,000; and the cash limit on class XV, vote 10 will be reduced by £1,000,000 from £2,214,412,000 to £2,213,412,000.

The decrease on the cash limit for vote 2 results mainly from lower than expected expenditure on agricultural and environmental schemes and slippage on arterial drainage, flood and coast protection grant schemes. The increase in the cash limit for vote 4 will provide for an additional £4,500,000 for the Higher Education Funding Council for equipment and building maintenance, £2,000,000 for equipment to expand the modern apprenticeship scheme and £310,000 for the enterprise initiative consultancy scheme transferred from class IV, vote 1.

The net decrease in the cash limit for vote 8 allows mainly for an additional £2,500,000 for improvements to the community dental service and a transfer of £9,757,000 of provision to class XV, vote 7 in respect of a revised estimate of drug expenditure for GP fundholders. This transfer comprises part of a spring supplementary estimate for class XV, vote 7 of £23,051,000.

The reduction of £1,000,000 in the cash limit for vote 10 results mainly from lower than expected unit costs at the Valuation Office Agency.

None of the proposed changes will add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Educational Funding Councils

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she proposes to make additional resources available this year to the educational funding councils.

Mr. Redwood: Yes. I have announced today that, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, I will be making £4.5 million available to the Higher Education Funding Council. Because of underspendings elsewhere, I am also able to allocate a further £3.5 million to the funding councils.

I have decided to provide an extra £5.5 million in total to the Higher Education Funding Council and an extra £2.5 million to the Further Education Funding Council.

The £5.5 million for the higher education sector will be made available for information technology developments, for facilities to support students with special needs and for projects to increase efficiency in estate management.

The additional £2.5 million for the Further Education Funding Council is in addition to £4.5 million extra funds made available earlier in the year and will be used to assist colleges in meeting equipment needs to cater for the growing number of students and new educational initiatives.

Forestry

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many stands of woodland in Wales under the control of Forest Enterprise are currently offered for sale.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Thirty.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many disposals of woodlands were made by Forest Enterprise in Wales in 1992, 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Forestry Commission sold 55 woodlands in 1992, 79 in 1993, and 85 in 1994.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hectares of wooded land under the control of the Forestry Commission and Forest Enterprise there are in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: At 31 March 1994, the Forestry Commission's Forest Enterprise managed 124,931 hectares of woodland in Wales.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many access agreements have been completed by Forest Enterprise and the Forestry Commission in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Twenty-three.

Agriculture

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current number of agricultural holdings in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is estimated that there are currently 36,600 holdings in Wales. This total includes an estimate of 6,800 very small holdings derived from the 1989 census of minor holdings.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total acreage of agricultural land in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The total area of agricultural land at 1 June 1994, the latest date for which information is available was 1,689,000 hectares. This total was derived from the 1994 June agricultural census and includes estimates for very small holdings from the 1989 census of minor holdings. Also included are estimates for areas of common rough grazing which are not collected in these two censuses.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many agricultural holdings there were in Wales in 1990.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There were an estimated 36,500 holdings in Wales at 1 June 1990. This total includes an estimated 6,800 very small holdings derived from the 1989 census of minor holdings.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has showing the proportion of agricultural land which was tenanted in Wales for *(a)* 1965, *(b)* 1970, *(c)* 1980, *(d)* 1990 and *(e)* the latest available date.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The proportion of land on holdings that is rented by their occupiers has been collected in the June agricultural census since 1969. The following table shows the available information.

Proportion of rented agricultural land in Wales[1]

Year	*Percentage*
1970	38.3
1980	29.8
1990	24.0
1994	22.9

Source:
June agricultural and horticultural census.
Note:
[1] Estimates for minor holdings are included except for 1970.

Common Land

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hectares of registered common land there are currently in Wales.

Mr. Gwilyn Jones: The latest information available is that published by the Countryside Commission in 1989 which was obtained from the registers of common land held by local authorities. The total for Wales was estimated to be 185,300 hectares.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the GDP in Wales expressed as a percentage of the United Kingdom average figure in each year from 1990 to 1993.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is shown in the following table:

GDP per head in Wales as a percentage of United Kingdom GDP per head—at factor cost, current prices

Year	*Percentage*
1990	84.6
1991	85.0
1992	83.4
1993[1]	84.7

Note:
[1] Provisional
Source:
CSO

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current GDP in Wales expressed as a percentage of the average United Kingdom figure.

Mr. Redwood: The latest available data are for 1993, when GDP per head in Wales, at factor cost, was estimated to be 84.7 per cent. of the United Kingdom figure.

Wales Tourist Board

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times he or other Ministers met representatives of the Wales tourist board in 1994.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Twice.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met with the Council of Welsh Districts to discuss the progress of local government reorganisation in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I met a delegation from the Council of Welsh Districts on 7 June last year to discuss progress with reorganisation.

Less Favoured Areas

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total acreage of land in Wales classed as less favoured areas.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The less favoured area classification of agricultural land applies to an estimated 1,365,900 hectares—81 per cent. of all agricultural land.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total number of the holdings in Wales in the less favoured areas as on 31 December 1994.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A farm holding is normally classed as being in the less favoured areas if more than half of its land is within the boundaries of the areas designed as being less favoured. At 31 December 1994 there were an estimated 23,400 such holdings in Wales. This total includes an estimate of 3,400 very small holdings derived from the 1989 census of minor holdings.

Police Authorities

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State when a final announcement on the standard spending assessments for police authorities in Wales will be announced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I announced my decisions on police funding for 1995–96 on 30 January, *Official Report*, column *533*. The House will have the opportunity shortly to debate my decisions.

Public Bodies

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current number of non-departmental public bodies operating in Wales; and what is their combined annual budget.

Mr. Redwood: Details of the Welsh Office's executive and advisory non-departmental public bodies will be included in "Public Bodies 1994", to be published in the next few days. Total expenditure in 1994–95 is expected to be £948.1 million.

Smallholdings

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many council-owned rented smallholdings there are in each of the existing Welsh counties.

Mr. Redwood: At 31 March 1994, the numbers of county council smallholdings rented or available for rent in each of the existing Welsh counties were as follows:

	Number
Clwyd	154
Dyfed	163
Gwent	92
Gwynedd	178
Mid Glamorgan	4
Powys	219
West Glamorgan	2
South Glamorgan	35

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the principal elements of the debenture held against each of the training and enterprise councils at the beginning of each financial year.

Mr. Redwood: The same debenture arrangements were agreed with all TECs when they were first set up. The debenture protects the Department against any debts it is owned by a TEC by providing a charge over all of the TEC's assets. A copy will be available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of the procedure and criteria for his Department's approval of training and enterprise council projects for spending surpluses earned on training

contracts with his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Training and enterprise councils are required to give details of their proposals for the utilisation of surpluses in their business plans which are submitted to the Welsh office each year. TEC business plans are approved as part of the process by which annual contracts are agreed with TECs. Separate approval is required for spend of surplus on projects not identified in the business plan.

TEC proposals for utilising surpluses are assessed against the following criteria as set out in the TEC operating agreement.

The proposals must be:

(i) within the terms of the TEC's memorandum and articles of association;

(ii) consistent with the terms of the operating agreement;

(iii) not in conflict with current Government policy;

(iv) financially prudent and take account of independent professional advice where appropriate;

(v) practical and represent good value for money.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many expenditure projects have been submitted from each of the training and enterprise councils; if he will give details of the main projects awaiting his approval; and how long each project has been awaiting his approval.

Mr. Redwood: TEC proposals for expenditure across the whole range of training, education and enterprise activities are set out in the annual business plan which is integral to the contracting process with the Welsh Office. This contractual relationship is commercial in confidence.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what league tables he has set up to evaluate the relative effectiveness of the training and enterprise councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: A table of inter-TEC performance comparisons covering all TECs in England and Wales was published on 25 August 1994. A copy is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the aggregate level of surpluses of the Welsh training and enterprise councils at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Redwood: The latest information on the aggregate level of surpluses of training and enterprise councils in Wales is contained in the appropriation accounts for 1993–94, volume 11, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Schools

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the average school rolls in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in each local education authority in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: The average size of LEA and grant-maintained primary and secondary schools, in terms of number of pupils, in each local education area in Wales as at January 1994 is given in the following table.

	Primary schools	*Secondary schools*
Clwyd	167	836
Dyfed	103	793
Gwent	214	909
Gwynedd	105	666
Mid Glamorgan	189	919
Powys	99	610
South Glamorgan	257	1,052
West Glamorgan	231	884

Business Links

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of his proposed expenditure on *(a)* telecommunications and data links and *(b)* other items on the proposed new business links organisations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have approved expenditure of £1 million in 1994–95 and £0.5 million is potentially available in 1995–96 as start-up finance for the new arrangements. It supports the provision of information and new training and communications facilities.

In addition, European regional development fund resources are available in 1995–96 to pump prime the business development consortia in both industrial south wales and rural Wales.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of the business links organisations to provide a one-stop shop service for small and medium-sized enterprises that he proposes; and what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the training and enterprise councils concerning their participation.

Mr. Redwood: In June 1994, my "Prospectus for Improving Business and Enterprise Support Services in Wales" invited local authorities, training and enterprise councils and other local partners to put forward proposals for improving the co-ordination of business support services in Wales. The prospectus set out general guidelines. All seven training and enterprise councils were part of the eight successful consortia bids which I approved last month.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by his Department or agency.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the headings under which

the Child Support Agency returns data each month to Ministers on the operations of the agency.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Frank Field, dated 2 February 1995:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the headings under which the Child Support Agency returns data to Ministers.

The six headings under which the Agency reports monthly performance to Ministers are as follows; Targets; Maintenance Assessment; Operational Accounting; Reviews and Appeals; Customer Service and Quality; Recovery Plan Implementation and Other Issues.

I hope that this is of help.

Income Support (Housing Costs)

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, columns *82–83*, when he expects to be able to publish figures for 1994 on the assistance towards mortgage interest and rents to recipients of income support.

Mr. Roger Evans: Information on local authority tenants and private and housing association tenants for 1994 will be available when the housing management information statistics are published in late August or early September. Information on income support mortgage interest recipients is available from the February 1994 quarterly statistical inquiry and is set out in the table. We expect information for May 1994 to be available in March.

	February 1994
Number of Income Support recipients with mortgage interest included in the assessment	548,000
Average weekly cost	£37.98
Implied annual cost	£1,082 million

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand, average amount to the nearest penny and annual expenditure to the nearest million.
2. The implied annual expenditure has been calculated from the average weekly amount at the time of the enquiry.

Source:
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry February 1994.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of individuals who may not be able to obtain insurance to cover the payment of their mortgages in the event of becoming unemployed and income support no longer being available.

Mr. Roger Evans: No such estimate has been made. We expect the proposals for income support mortgage interest will stimulate the insurance market and more comprehensive cover will develop. The Association of British Insurers has said that there is no reason why anyone meeting the criteria to obtain a mortgage should be refused insurance. We recognise that in some circumstances insurance may not be available. For this reason, pensioners will be protected under the new scheme. We shall be considering the position of other groups during the consultation period.

Advertising

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on which occasions in the last five years his Department has placed newspaper advertisements arising from Government Bills from his Department *(a)* before proceedings in Standing Committee on the Bills have begun and *(b)* on the publication of a White Paper relating to the Bill.

Mr. Hague: In the past five years, this Department has placed press advertisements on three occasions on the publication of a White Paper relating to a Bill.

"Security, Equality and Choice: the future for pensions"—July 1994;

"Ending Discrimination Against Disabled People"—January 1995;

"Improving Child Support"—January 1995.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many occasions and in what circumstances in the last five years advertisements have been placed in newspapers or periodicals which have been described as being issued by or on behalf of Ministers in his Department rather than on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Hague: The office of Minister for Social Security and Disabled People has a Government-wide remit and as such all advertisements relating to this area are described as issued on behalf of the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People. These campaigns are:

Everyone needs access for a better living environment (Enable) March 1994;

Government measures aimed at tackling discrimination against disabled people, July 1994;

You and Disability, December 1994; and

Ending discrimination against disabled people, January 1995.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what factors were taken into account in deciding to place the advertisement, "Ending discrimination against disabled people", in *The Guardian* newspaper on 25 January, and that on child support in *The Daily Telegraph* on the same date.

Mr. Hague: As part of a series of insertions in a variety of publications between 18 and 26 January 1995, *The Guardian* was selected because of the society supplement on that day. Other insertions are as follows:

The Guardian, 18 and 25 January 1995
The Independent, 19 and 26 January 1995
Community Care w/c 23 January 1995
Care Weekly w/c 23 January 1995

The child support advertisement appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* on that day as part of a series of inserts in a variety of national newspapers as follows:

The Independent, 24 January 1995
Daily Express
Daily Star
The Sun
The Daily Telegraph, 25 January 1995
Today, 26 January 1995
Belfast Telegraph
Daily Record, 27 January 1995
The Independent, 28 January 1995
The Sunday Telegraph, 29 January 1995
The Observer
The Independent on Sunday
The Mail on Sunday
News of the World
Sunday Mirror
The People

Advertisements are booked to achieve value for money and to reach appropriate audiences.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the cost of the advertising campaign entitled, "Ending discrimination against disabled people";

(2) in which newspapers, journals or periodicals the advertisement headed "Ending Discrimination against Disabled People" has appeared; and what are the future plans for using the advertisement.

Mr. Hague: The advertisement, "Ending discrimination against disabled people", has appeared in the following publications:

The Guardian 18 and 25 January 1995
The Independent 19 and 26 January 1995
Community Care w/c 23 January 1995
Care Weekly w/c 23 January 1995.

The cost of the advertising campaign was £16,581. There are no future plans for using this advertisement.

Benefits

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each of the past 30 years *(a)* the number and percentage of unemployed who draw national insurance benefit only, *(b)* the number and percentage claiming unemployment benefit and income support, *(c)* the number and percentage claiming income support only, *(d)* the number and percentage claiming housing benefit only and *(e)* the number claiming no benefit.

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the table. Information relating to unemployed claimants claiming housing benefit is not kept.

Number and percentage of claimants by benefit entitlement

Thousands

Year	*Total unemployment count (100 per cent.)*	*Unemployment Benefit only*	*Unemployment Benefit and Income Support*	*Income Support only*	*No Benefit*
		(Percentages of total count are shown in parenthesis)			
1965	319	139 (43.6)	24 (7.5)	75 (23.5)	81 (25.4)
1966	295	128 (43.4)	25 (8.5)	65 (22.0)	78 (26.4)
1967	543	260 (47.9)	76 (14.0)	94 (17.3)	114 (21.0)
1968	559	236 (42.2)	70 (12.5)	135 (24.2)	119 (21.3)
1969	532	218 (41.0)	63 (11.8)	129 (24.2)	122 (22.9)
1970	576	237 (41.1)	65 (11.3)	140 (24.3)	134 (23.3)
1971	736	302 (41.0)	94 (12.8)	177 (24.0)	163 (22.1)
1972	873	343 (39.3)	114 (13.1)	255 (29.2)	161 (18.4)
1973	621	196 (31.6)	58 (9.3)	234 (37.7)	133 (21.4)
1974	546	176 (32.2)	59 (10.8)	190 (24.8)	121 (22.2)
1975	808	301 (37.3)	95 (11.8)	251 (31.1)	161 (19.9)
1976	1,200	446 (37.2)	141 (11.8)	413 (34.4)	200 (16.7)
1977	1,229	408 (33.2)	130 (10.6)	489 (39.8)	202 (16.4)
1978	1,283	413 (32.2)	113 (8.8)	511 (39.8)	246 (19.2)
1979	1,106	366 (33.1)	85 (7.7)	466 (42.1)	188 (17.0)
1980	1,304	489 (37.5)	105 (8.1)	486 (37.3)	225 (17.3)
1981[1]	2,195	940 (42.8)	225 (10.3)	735 (33.5)	294 (13.4)
1982	2,573	731 (28.4)	251 (9.8)	1,202 (46.7)	390 (15.2)
1983	2,864	713 (24.9)	253 (8.8)	1,539 (53.7)	359 (12.5)
1984[1]	2,999	750 (25.0)	223 (7.4)	1,661 (55.4)	364 (12.1)
1985[2]	—	— —	— —	— —	— —
1986	3,079	732 (23.8)	194 (6.3)	1,684 (54.7)	469 (15.2)
1987	2,752	645 (23.4)	152 (5.5)	1,514 (55.0)	442 (16.1)
1988	2,264	504 (22.3)	132 (5.8)	1,254 (55.4)	374 (16.5)
1989	1,649	278 (16.9)	100 (6.1)	997 (60.5)	274 (16.6)
1990	1,432	251 (17.5)	48 (3.4)	914 (63.8)	220 (15.4)
1991	2,048	453 (22.1)	102 (5.0)	1,212 (59.2)	280 (13.7)
1992	2,546	545 (21.4)	124 (4.9)	1,564 (61.4)	313 (12.3)
1993	2,759	543 (19.7)	116 (4.2)	1,765 (64.0)	335 (12.1)
1994	2,551	428 (16.8)	113 (4.4)	1,729 (67.8)	281 (11.0)

Notes:

[1] February figures are given: figures for May are not available due to industrial action.

[2] Figures not available due to industrial action.

1. Figures and percentages are as at second Thursday of May each year.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Percentages have been rounded to one decimal place.
4. Figures are based on a 100 per cent. count.
5. Component parts may not sum to totals due to rounding.
6. Income support replaced supplementary benefit in 1988.
7. Supplementary benefit replaced the national assistance scheme in 1966.

Sources:

Before November 1978: 100 per cent. count of the registered unemployed.
From November 1978: 100 per cent. count of the registered unemployed claimants.
From November 1992: 100 per cent. count of unemployed claimants.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pension awards have been made by the War Pensions Agency to service personnel *(a)* who are claiming to suffer from gulf war syndrome and *(b)* who have claimed disablement as a result of being the subject of tests and studies at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down.

Mr. Arbuthnot: No awards have been made in respect of alleged Gulf war, or Desert Storm, syndrome, which is not recognised as a discrete medical condition. Eleven awards have been made in respect of ex-service personnel making such claims, but in all cases the awards were for recognised medical conditions.

The other information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Family Credit

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of family credit claimants currently employed in schools, who have lost or will lose benefit as a result of the ruling by Social Security commissioners in October 1994; what plans he has to monitor the situation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: Precise information is not available but we estimate that there may be about 7,500 people who work in schools, or similar establishments, who have been affected by the commissioner's decision. Although these people may have lost eligibility for family credit, many have been able to claim income support. We have been monitoring the situation closely and intend to amend the regulations, to reverse the effects of the commissioner's decision, at the earliest opportunity, following consultation with the Social Security Advisory Committee and the local authorities associations.

Mucous Membrane Disease

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give details, including dates, duration and numbers attending, of all specialist training courses held since January 1994 on the industrial disease mucous membrane PD4 for experienced medical practitioners employed by the Benefits Agency Medical Services Section which has responsibility for Northumberland and Tyne and Wear.

Mr. Hague: All the doctors employed by the Benefits Agency medical services and the doctors who act as independent adjudicating medical practitioners assessing disablement benefit have had access to an up-to-date paper on prescribed disease D4—inflammation or ulceration of the mucous membrane of the upper respiratory passages or mouth produced by dust, liquid or vapour—prepared by a senior medical adviser of the Department of Social Security in January 1995.

In addition, two full-time medical advisers from the Northumberland and Tyne and Wear areas attended a one day international symposium on PD D4 on 20 June 1994.

Net Incomes

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much the real net incomes after housing costs of *(a)* the poorest 10 per cent. and *(b)* the richest 10 per cent. of householders with children have changed since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Reliable estimates of the changes in the real net incomes for the top 10 per cent. and bottom 10 per cent. of householders with children are not available. The following table gives the information for the top 20 per cent. and bottom 20 per cent. The latest period for which information is available is 1991–92, that is the two calendar years combined.

Information is given both before and after housing costs.

The fall in income for the bottom 20 per cent. was due mainly to the decline in employment among couples with children and the increased in lone parenthood.

Percentage change in real incomes of top 20 per cent. and bottom 20 per cent. of families with children, 1979 to 1991–92

percentage change

	Quintile 1 bottom 20 per cent.	*Quintile 5 top 20 per cent.*
Before housing costs	(–2)	51
After housing costs	(–12)	49

Notes:

1. The figures relate to the top 20 per cent. and bottom 20 per cent. of individuals in families with children.
2. Percentage growth estimates are calculated from the median income of each quintile.
3. Estimates in brackets () are particularly uncertain; see Appendix 5 Of "Households Below Average Income 1979 to 1991–92"—a copy of which is in the Library—for details of the tests applied to estimates of changes in real incomes.

National Insurance

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the increase in employees' national insurance contributions since 1979.

Mr. Arbuthnot: In 1979, not contracted-out employees paid national insurance contributions at a flat rate of 6.5 per cent. of earnings. Currently, all employees pay an initial contribution of 2 per cent. on earnings up to the lower earnings limit of £57 a week and then at 10 per cent. on the balance of earnings up to the upper earnings limit of £430 a week. As a result, the percentage of earnings paid in contributions rises progressively as earnings increase; from 2 per cent. for those earning at the lower earnings limit to just under 9 per cent. for those earning at the upper earnings. limit. The present structure benefits the lower paid more. Employees earning up to about £130 a week pay less contributions now than they would have done if the flat 6.5 per cent. contribution rate and structure in force in 1979 still applied.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the budgets for departmental running costs for each of the past five years for which figures are available for *(a)* his Department, *(b)* Historic

Scotland, *(c)* the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency, *(d)* the Scottish Fish Protection Agency, *(e)* the Scottish Office Pensions Agency, *(f)* the Student Awards Agency for Scotland, *(g)* Scottish Home and Health Department Prison Service, *(h)* the Scottish Courts Administration, *(i)* the General Register Office (Scotland), *(j)* Registers of Scotland and *(k)* the Scottish Records Office.

Mr. Lang: The information is set out in the table below.

Agencies came into being on various dates during this period. To give a consistent time series a full five-year run of figures has been prepared irrespective of when the agencies were created. The table shows outturn expenditure since information is not readily available over the full five-year period on a budget basis.

£ million

	1989–90 Outturn	*1990–91 Outturn*	*1991–92 Outturn*	*1992–93 Outturn*	*1993–94 Outturn*
(a) Scottish Office Administration	114.7	123.5	142.9	155.5	152.0
(b) Historic Scotland	8.6	9.8	11.4	12.7	12.6
(c) Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	3.8	4.0	4.0	4.5	4.7
(d) Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	9.5	10.0	10.8	11.2	12.1
(e) Scottish Office Pensions Agency	3.8	3.9	4.0	4.2	4.5
(f) Student Awards Agency for Scotland	1.7	1.9	2.1	2.3	2.6
(g) Scottish Prison Service	97.9	105.0	119.4	114.8	135.3
(h) Scottish Courts Administration	26.0	33.0	36.8	39.3	40.0
(i) General Register Office (Scotland)	6.2	8.5	13.5	8.3	7.6
(j) Registers of Scotland	14.6	20.8	26.3	28.6	27.5
(k) Scottish Record Office	2.9	3.3	3.8	4.1	4.0

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the figures for total full-time equivalent staff for each of the past five years for which figures are available for *(a)* his Department, *(b)* Historic Scotland, *(c)* the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency, *(d)* the Scottish Fish Protection Agency, *(e)* the Scottish Office Pensions Agency, *(f)* the Student Awards Agency for Scotland, *(g)* the Scottish Home and Health Department Prison Service, *(h)* the Scottish Courts Administration, *(i)* the General Register Office (Scotland), *(j)* Registers of Scotland and *(k)* Scottish Records Office.

Mr. Lang: The total full-time equivalent staff in post figures for the Scottish Office, its executive agencies, associated departments, Scottish courts administration and Registers of Scotland for the years from 1990 to 1994 are shown in the table.

Staff in post (full time equivalent) 1990 to 1994.

Figures as at 1 April.

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
The Scottish Office Core	6,275.0	5,475.0	5,247.5	4,923.0	4,835.0
Scottish Office Agencies[1]					
Historic Scotland	—	610.5	630.5	642.0	636.0
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	—	196.5	215.5	226.5	250.0
Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	—	—	138.5	142.0	138.0
Scottish Office Pensions Agency	—	—	—	164.5	175.5
Scottish Prison Service	3,999.5	4,004.0	4,228.5	4,625.0	4,498.5
Other:					
Scottish Courts Administration	887.0	928.0	939.0	952.0	977.0
General Register Office	303.0	332.5	309.0	271.5	246.5
Scottish Record Office	113.5	119.0	117.0	114.5	115.5
Registers of Scotland	997.0	1,204.5	1,336.5	1,257.5	1,187.5

[1] On 5 April 1994 the Student Awards Agency for Scotland was established. Staff are counted in the Scottish Office core prior to that date.

Egg Market

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what percentage of the Scottish egg market is supplied by egg producers in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* the Republic of Ireland;

(2) what percentage of the Scottish egg market is supplied by Scottish egg producers;

(3) from which countries eggs are imported into Scotland; and what percentage of the Scottish egg market each country has.

Sir Hector Monro: There is no reliable information on the size of the Scottish egg market or the share of its supplies from different sources.

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisation engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by his Department or agency.

Mr. Lang: The list of courses paid for from the Department's central budget for developmental training is set out below. Information about agencies is not held centrally. Staff members taking part in the courses listed

undertake a wide range of administrative and professional duties within the Department. The Department operates a system of evaluation which involves participants, line managers and training professionals and ranges from validation of the event itself to the effect of the training on the work of the Department.

Courses costing more than £5,000

Course	*Cost*	*Aim*
Effective Manager I	£17,273	To help course members to operate effectively as managers by making the best use of their staff resources. The course provides a comprehensive introduction to the manager's task and develops relevant awareness and skills.
Effective Manager II	£16,852	To improve course members' effectiveness as managers by helping them to meet new demands facing them by extending and enhancing their capabilities in areas selected according to individual needs.
Policy Programme II	£15,214	To enhance and develop policy-related skills building on a foundation of knowledge. By the end of the module students should be able to demonstrate written and oral policy skills in drafting, briefing and presenting. This is the second stage of the central Policy Programme and provides a body of skills essential to its completion.
Leadership Development for Managers	£17,719	To increase middle managers' understanding of their role as active leaders by expanding their knowledge of current thinking about leadership and practising the appropriate skills that will enable them to be more effective leaders.
EC Personal Development	£16,094	To enable participants to identify their strengths and preferences at work and to give an indication of competences and skills that need further development for their future career.
Introduction to Management for Senior Staff: Resource Management	£9,835	To develop a practical understanding and awareness of the essentials of resource management.
Policy Programme I (2 courses)	£29,563	To train managers for active involvement in policy work by examining the outline structure of central Government and the pressures and constraints on civil servants working within it. By the end of the module students should be able to describe the key elements of the government framework.

Note:
All these courses were provided by the Civil Service College.

Beaches

Mr. Malcolm Bruce : To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* beach rangers are working in Scotland and *(b)* beaches are patrolled by beach rangers; and what is the estimated size of coastline of the beaches patrolled.

Sir Hector Monro: District and islands councils are responsible for management of beaches in their control. Information on beach rangers is not collected centrally.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what community initiatives he has proposed to clean up Scotland's beaches.

Sir Hector Monro: Beach clean-ups are organised by district and islands councils, "Keep Scotland Beautiful" and other voluntary organisations. Local community groups are often involved in these projects.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many GP fundholding practices there are in *(a)* Fife and *(b)* North East Fife.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are currently four GP fundholding practices in Fife. In addition, one practice is preparing to commence operational fundholding from 1 April 1995. None of these practices is in North East Fife district.

Information Technology

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been allocated to the development of information technology in *(a)* criminal and *(b)* civil courts in Scotland; and what arrangements have been made for (i) judges, (ii) sheriffs and (iii) clerks of court who participate in information technology training courses.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Since 1989, an investment programme at a level of approximately £1.1 million annually has been allocated to information technology provision in the supreme and sheriff courts. Initially, the investment was used primarily to produce a criminal operations system for the sheriff courts and is now being utilised mainly to develop a system to support the handling of civil business in the court of session and the sheriff courts, and to provide personal computers to members of the judiciary. Training is provided either by commercial organisations, under contract, or by the court service training centre, as appropriate.

Courtroom Assaults

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of assault by an accused have taken place in courtrooms in Scotland in the last 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Housing, Irvine

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provisions there were in the agreement reached between Irvine development corporation and Irvine housing association for the lease of development corporation properties for the eventual purchase of these properties by Irvine housing association; and how much money has been received by Irvine development corporation from Irvine housing association under this agreement.

Mr. Stewart: The leases between Irvine development corporation and Irvine housing association contain an option to purchase. No sales have been finalised to date.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the agreement was reached between Irvine development corporation and Irvine housing association for the lease by the association of the corporation's properties; and whether Scottish Office approval was sought and given for this agreement.

Mr. Stewart: The agreement was reached in July 1994. There was no requirement to seek approval from the Scottish Office.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of how the rent levels for tenants of Irvine development corporation compare with the rent levels of tenants of Irvine housing association living in Irvine development corporation tenancies.

Mr. Stewart: None. This is not a matter for my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *468*, if he will make a statement giving further information about how the money spent by Irvine development corporation on the Irvine housing association has been spent.

Mr. Stewart: The expenditure by Irvine development corporation has met start-up costs of Irvine housing association. These have comprised consultancy fees, staffing and the fitting out of the association's offices.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *468*, how much rental income Irvine housing association has collected on behalf of Irvine development corporation; and how much the Irvine housing association has recovered from Irvine development corporation to offset its management and maintenance costs.

Mr. Stewart: The total rents remitted by Irvine housing association were £94,300 as at 31 December 1994. The association has not yet incurred costs on management and maintenance expenditure.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the right to buy of the tenants occupying the Irvine development corporation properties leased to Irvine housing association has been altered by their current tenancy status.

Mr. Stewart: No tenanted stock has been leased by Irvine development corporation to Irvine housing association. There were therefore no tenancy agreements to be altered. The tenancy agreements offered by Irvine housing association are a matter for the association.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many vacant properties Irvine development corporation has let during each of the last five financial years.

Mr. Stewart: The information is shown in the table:

	Number
1989–90	418
1990–91	378
1991–92	404
1992–93	372
1993–94	311

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many residential properties Irvine development corporation expects to lease to Irvine housing association prior to the start of the process of balloting its tenants on the disposal of the housing stock.

Mr. Stewart: Approximately 300 houses.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which housing associations other than Irvine housing association have indicated an interest to Irvine development corporation in bidding for its properties prior to the corporation's wind-up.

Mr. Stewart: Irvine development corporation will shortly be seeking expressions of interest.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what involvement he will have in making the decision on the possible purchase of the properties currently leased by Irvine housing association from Irvine development corporation.

Mr. Stewart: In terms of the guidance issued by the Scottish Office to the development corporations for the disposal of housing, my right hon. Friend will be asked to approve the sale only if the corporation proposes to accept a price below the valuation of the district valuer.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Irvine housing association offered to purchase housing stock from Irvine development corporation; and when he expects Irvine development corporation to make a decision on this offer.

Mr. Stewart: The offer to purchase was received by Irvine development corporation on 12 January 1995. The timing of the corporation's decision on it is a matter for the corporation.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *468*, which of the 183 Irvine development corporation properties leased by Irvine housing association are not the subject of a purchase offer by Irvine housing association to Irvine development corporation.

Mr. Stewart: The 23 houses leased to Irvine housing association after the date on which the district valuer was instructed to value the 160 houses currently under offer are not currently the subject of a purchase offer. Irvine housing association is expected to include the 23 houses in a future bid for Irvine development corporation stock.

Head Lice

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the incidence of the problem of head lice in Scottish schools; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not collected centrally.

Housing Associations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many residential properties belonging to each of Scotland's development corporations have been transferred to housing associations; if he will name the bodies to which these properties have been transferred; what was the number of properties involved in each case; and if he will make a statement on the nature of the agreement which exists in each case.

Mr. Stewart: The information as at 31 January is set out in the table:

Development corporation	*Housing association*	*Number of properties transferred*
Glenrothes	Kingdom	234
	Link	30
	Collydean	190
East Kilbride	Loretto	20
	Link	60
	East Kilbride and District	130
Cumbernauld	Bield	64
	Link	163
	West of Scotland	136
	Gap	57
	YWCA	23
Livingston	Almond	71
	Castle Rock (Livingston)	29
	Edinvar in Livingston	23
	Canmore	92

Information on the terms of the transfer agreements between the Corporations and the housing associations are not held centrally.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the housing associations on which Scottish Homes has spent money establishing or administering up until 31 December 1994; and how much each housing association received in payments.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked the chairman of Scottish Homes, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member with the relevant information.

Agricultural Land

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has showing the proportion of agricultural land which was tenanted in Scotland for *(a)* 1965, *(b)* 1970, *(c)* 1980, *(d)* 1990 and *(e)* the latest available date.

Sir Hector Monro: The answer is as set out in the table:

Percentage

1965	*1970*	*1980*	*1990*	*1994*
41	43	42	39	38

[1] Includes minor holdings.

Departmental Funding

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes he intends to make to the cash limits and running costs provision for 1994–95 within his responsibility.

Mr. Lang: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, I intend to make changes to seven voted cash limits, one non-voted cash block, one non-voted cash limit and four running costs limits:

a. The cash limit for class XIV, vote 3, training programmes, roads and transport services and industrial support, Scotland, will be increased by £25,487,000 from £876,652,000 to £902,139,000. The increase includes a transfer of £400,000 from the Department of Trade and Industry to provide innovation and technology support to small and medium sized businesses: a transfer of £16,000 to class XIV, vote 9 in respect of additional revenue support grant for air passenger duty inter-island services: increased provision of £15,984,000 for roads and transport to meet revised expenditure plans; and increased provision of £9,103,000 transferred from Department of Transport for grants to Strathclyde passenger transport authority to meet the revised costs of supporting rail services resulting from the restructuring of the railways.

b. The cash limit for class XIV, vote 7, housing and environmental services, Scotland will be decreased by £1,018,000 from £433,798,000 to £432,780,000. The reduced cash limit takes account of a reduced requirement of £1,267,000 for housing support grant; and a decrease in provision of £2,000 in appropriations in aid. There is a £250,000 increase in Scottish Homes's grant in aid to assist housing associations in the acquisition of local authority and new town development corporation housing stock. This increase will be fully offset by a reduction in the SO/LA2 non-voted cash limit. Gross running cost provision for Historic Scotland will be increased by £396,000 from £14,704,000 to £15,100,000, which will be offset fully by a matching increase in appropriations in aid for the agency.

c. The cash limit for class XIV, vote 9, revenue support grants, etc, Scotland, will be decreased by £14,000 from £4,882,291,000 to £4,882,277,000. The decrease takes account of a reduced requirement of £100,000 for council tax valuation grant offset by a transfer of £70,000 from Department of Social Security for additional revenue support grant arising from the transfer of Scottish Homes property to the WESLO housing association: and a transfer of £16,000 from class XIV, vote 3 in respect of additional revenue support grant for air passenger duty inter-island services.

d. The cash limit for class XIV, vote 14, hospital, community health, family health (part) and other health services, Scotland will be decreased by £1,712,000 from £3,012,073,000 /to £3,010,361,000. The decrease takes account of a transfer of £1,500,000 to class XIV, vote 13, for changes in the requirements for GP practice fundholders: and a decrease of £212,000 as a result of an increase in the non-voted element of the NHS trusts' external financial limit. Overall, the NHS trusts' external financing limit has been increased by £6,714,000.

e. The cash limit for clause XIV, vote 21, Scottish Office administration, will be decreased by £75,000 from £168,734,000 to £168,659,000 with the provision being transferred to class XIV, vote 22.

f. The cash limit for class XIV, vote 22, Scottish Record Office, will be increased by £75,000 from £9,027,000 to £9,102,000. Within this total, the SRO running cost limit increases by £30,000 from £5,203,000 to £5,233,000 in order to give archive advice to local governments as a result of local government reorganisation. This increase will be offset fully by a matching increase in appropriations in aid. The additional capital provision is needed for the early installation of mobile shelving for the new purpose built repository.

g. The cash limit for class XIV, vote 23, General Register Office (Scotland), will be increased by £1,000 from £5,994,000

to £5,995,000. Within this total, the running cost limit for GRO(S) increases by £95,000 from £7,380,000 to £7,475,000 to offset unforseen delays attributed to the Census output programme. This increase will be mostly offset by excess income related to the census programme and as a result the appropriations in aid increase by £94,000.

h. The cash limit for class XIV, vote 24, the registers of Scotland, will be increased by £1,000 from £1,000 to £2,000. Within this total, running cost provision increases by £611,000 to allow for the compensation payments for the increased number of staff taking voluntary early retirement and also the costs associated with the advancement of the agency's information technology strategy. The increase will be met from additional fee income of £610,000.

i. The non-voted cash limit SO/LA2, which covers housing capital expenditure by local authorities and capital expenditure by new towns, will be reduced by £250,000 from £276,207,000 to £275,957,000. This will fully offset the increase in Scottish Homes's grant in aid in class XIV, vote 7.

j. The overall running cost limit for the Scottish Office together with its agencies, including the new student awards agency for Scotland, will be increased by £396,000 from £338,589,000 to £338,985,000.

k. The non-voted cash limit SO/ERDF which covers European regional development fund payments in Scotland will be decreased by £24,000,000 from £124,000,000 to £100,000,000. This reflects slower than expected claims for payment and delays in new programmes coming on stream. (The cash limit of £124,000,000 was incorrectly shown as £122,977,000 in "Supply Estimates 1994–95: Summary and Guide", printed in March 1994 by HM Treasury, although the figure was correct in the estimate itself).

The net increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many parliamentary answers on health issues have been refused on the grounds of disproportionate cost or information not being held centrally *(a)* as a total and *(b)* as a percentage of all health answers in each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* The number of parliamentary questions on readily identifiable health issues in each of the last five years for which it was not possible to provide an answer because of disproportionate cost is as follows:

Session	*Number*	*Percentage*
1989–90	2	0.6
1990–91	4	1.1
1991–92	0	0
1992–93	2	0.6
1993–94	5	1.1

In addition, the following parliamentary questions were not given a full answer because the information requested was not held centrally:

Session	*Number*	*Percentage*
1989–90	12	3.6
1990–91	13	3.7
1991–92	5	4.3
1992–93	15	4.3
1993–94	35	7.6

Electric Shock Equipment

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment he has made that guidelines relating to the manufacture, marketing and supply of *(a)* electro-shock weapons and *(b)* instruments of torture are being fully complied with; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what further steps he is taking to review the operation of guidelines relating to the manufacture, marketing and supply of *(a)* electro-shock weapons and *(b)* weapons of torture; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* Electric shock weapons are prohibited by section 5(1)(b) of the Firearms Act 1968, and cannot be possessed, manufactured or sold without the authority of the Secretary of State. The procedures for granting or refusing authority to possess prohibited weapons are kept under regular review.

It is not practicable to control trade in the wide range of goods which could be misused for the purposes of torture. The Government are willing to look at any tangible evidence of British companies knowingly involved in supplying materials and expertise for the purposes of repression.

British Rail

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in respect of his meeting with the chairman of British Rail on 24 January *(a)* the specific issues which were discussed, *(b)* the conclusions arrived at over each and *(c)* when he next plans to discuss these and other related matters with the chairman.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* My right hon. Friend and I discussed with the chairman of British Rail a wide range of topics relating to railway matters affecting Scotland. The meeting was private. Further contacts will be arranged as necessary.

Commercial Lobbying

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions in the last four months he or any of his Ministers have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* Ministers receive numerous representations about a wide variety of matters at informal or unofficial engagements but the information requested is not collected.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions in the last four months of which he has knowledge any civil servants in his Department have been approached by commercial lobbying organisations on behalf of their clients at informal or unofficial engagements.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* Officials may receive representations about a variety of matters at informal or unofficial engagements, but the information requested is not collected.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to meet Monklands district

council to discuss matters of environmental concern including *(a)* the Dalmacoulter landfill project and *(b)* the dumping at Kilgarth tip; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* I have no plans to meet Monklands district council to discuss these matters.

The Dalmacoulter landfill gas project was one of eight such projects bidding for support under the Scottish renewables obligation. I understand that the Dalmacoulter bid was the most expensive of all the bids from landfill gas projects and was above the price ceiling recommended by the Director General of Electricity Supply for waste-to-energy projects.

I understand that the City of Glasgow district council is continuing to deposit waste at Kilgarth coup. Any environmental concerns at the site are for the two district councils to resolve.

HEALTH

Nurses

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses were employed by the NHS *(a)* in 1989 and *(b)* at present.

Mr. Sackville: Qualified and unqualified nursing and midwifery staff employed in the NHS, excluding agency staff, in England as at 30 September each year, whole-time equivalents[1].

	Number
1989	
Total	[3]340,590
Student population	[2]62,100
1993	
Total	[3]350,020
Student population	[2]49,040

Source:
Non-medical work force census.
Notes:
[1] All figures are whole-time equivalents, rounded to the nearest 10, as at 30 September of each year.
[2] The student population figure for 1993 includes approximately 28,000 Project 2000 students. Traditional salaried training of nurses is being replaced by non-salaried Project 2000 training which was implemented in 1989, although the student population for 1989 does not contain any project 2000 students. Project 2000 students are supernumerary and not included in workforce numbers.
[3] Figures include practice nurses who are employed and paid by general practitioners.
Source:
PD (stats) B non-medical work force census.
Project 2000 figures obtained from English National Board annual report.

Consultants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what average hours consultants on maximum part-time contracts work for the NHS and how many in the private sector;

(2) what is the definition of reasonable used in deciding how many half-days a consultant may take off for private practice if he or she is full-time or maximum part-time in the NHS.

Mr. Malone: National health service consultants are able to undertake private work as well as NHS work provided that it is not to the disadvantage of the NHS or NHS patients. Consultants employed on a whole-time basis may not earn more than 10 per cent. of their gross NHS earnings from private work. The provisions of the maximum part-time contract allow practitioners to carry out private practice without a specific limit and it is for the employer and the employee to agree the balance between NHS and private work. The actual number of hours spent on NHS work is for local agreement. Consultants on both forms of contract under national terms of service are expected to devote substantially the whole of their professional time to their NHS duties. Information is not available on the average number of hours such consultants work in the private sector.

Mental Illness

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many young people under the age of 14 years have been admitted to psychiatric hospitals with severe emotional problems in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Bowis: "Severe emotional problems" is not a term used in the collection of information.

Senior Citizens

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to implement the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1993 in full, with particular reference to senior citizens.

Mr. Bowis: The implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 was phased in between 1991 and 1993. The core provisions, including those for older people, have all been in force since 1 April 1993.

Childline

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proposals she has for increasing the amount of grant paid to the charity, Childline;

(2) what discussions she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding value added tax paid by Childline.

Mr. Bowis: The overall level of tax reliefs for charities is worth over £1.4 billion a year. The full range of reliefs means that charities are relieved of about one third of their potential VAT bill. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had not discussions with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer about value added tax. Amounts of funding under Section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act (1968) for 1995–96 will be made in due course.

In the past eight years, Childline has received start-up, core and project funding from this and other Government Departments and I am pleased to note that this has enabled it to attract other funding such that its total income last year was £3.9 million and that it has been able to build up assets of some £1.4 million.

Information

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she intends to publish a code on practice on access to health service information.

Mr. Malone: Yes. The code of practice of openness in the national health service will be published during 1995.

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* her agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by the Department or agency.

Mr. Sackville: Decisions on training have been largely devolved to line management. The information the hon. member seeks is therefore not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I understand, however, that courses with per capita costs exceeding £5,000 would be very rare.

One agency sponsored a member of staff for a course where fees exceeded £5,000. The details requested are:

Title: Master of Business Administration

Cost: £6,000

Organisations: Henley Management College

Summary of responsibilities of staff member taking part: Project manager for health facilities engineering team, including strategic management and provision of professional advice.

Objectives: To enhance business management skills to enable the officer to take a more proactive and growing role in the success of the agency. To develop consultancy skills to work effectively in support of health service clients. To develop own major projects.

Course evaluation: An evaluation form is completed by the individual. This is used in a formal evaluation process to access the contribution of the course to overall business objectives and individual development needs. A subsequent review assesses long-term impact on individual and business performance.

Residential and Domiciliary Care

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the latest statistics available showing the proportion of *(a)* residential accommodation and *(b)* domiciliary services which are provided by the independent sector in each local authority area.

Mr. Bowis: The information requested on residential accommodation (excluding nursing homes) is published in table A1 of "Key indicators of local authority social services 1994", copies of which are available in the Library. Information on domiciliary services purchased by local authorities is included in table A3 of the same publication. More recent statistics on the number of residential accommodation places, excluding nursing homes at 31 March 1994 were published in table 1 of "Residential Accommodation in England 1994", Statistical Bulletin 1994/13, copies of which will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authority residential care home beds were provided under part III of the National Assistance Act 1948 by local authority in each of the last five years.

Mr. Bowis: The information requested for England for the period 1988 to 1994 and by local authority for 1994 was published in "Personal Social Services: Residential Accommodation in England 1994", Statistical Bulletin 1994/13. The readily available information by local authority for earlier years was published in "Residential Accommodation for Elderly and for Younger Physically Disabled People: All Residents in Local Authority, Voluntary and Private Homes Year Ending 31 March 1988 to Year Ending 31 March 1993 England", RA/88-93/2(H). Copies of both publications are available in the Library.

Royal Infirmary, Leicester

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make a statement on the length of time the royal infirmary, Leicester takes to perform operations on women;

(2) if she will make a statement on the case of Yvonne Smith and others whose operations at the royal infirmary, Leicester were delayed;

(3) if she will issue guidelines to ensure that there are no delays in the performing of operations on women whose pregnancies have come to an end.

Mr. Sackville: Any delays experienced in these cases are regrettable.

Hospitals take such decisions on the basis of clinical need and these are matters for Leicester royal infirmary national health service trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Philip Hammersley, chairman of the trust, for details.

NHS Trusts (Termination Payments)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answers of 9 December 1994, *Official Report,* column *395,* and 16 December, *Official Report,* columns *831–32,* what were the reasons why severance payments did not conform to the guidance set out in TEL(94)3.

Mr. Malone: The national health service executive has requested additional information about certain payments to establish whether they conformed to guidelines in TEL(94)3. Until this additional information is received and analysed, the NHS executive cannot say whether the level of payment was or was not consistent with the recommended method of calculation.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 19 December, *Official Report,* columns *985–86,* if she will update the table on termination payments made to chief executives and general and senior managers of trusts.

Mr. Malone: The table sets out the latest information about termination payments made since April 1994 which national health service trusts have notified to the NHS Executive, under the arrangements in TEL(94)3.

NHS Trust	*Number of payments*	*Amount £*
Broadgreen Hospital NHS trust	3	4,487
		7,323
		31,078
Bromley Hospitals NHS trust		25,400
Burnley Health Care		245,000
Burton Hospitals NHS trust		7,053
Cheviot and Wansbeck NHS trust	2	10,086
		6,329

NHS Trust	*Number of payments*	*Amount £*
Chorley and South Ribble NHS trust		28,749
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Learning Disabilities NHS trust		11,000
Dudley Priority Health NHS trust	3	37,222
		7,481
		9,639
East Surrey Learning Disability and Mental Health Services NHS trust		36,677
Enfield Community Care NHS trust		35,522
Epsom Healthcare NHS trust		15,000
Fosse Health NHS trust		19,500
Hammersmith Hospitals NHS trust	2	47,616
		75,073
Herefordshire Community Health NHS trust		28,416
Heathlands Mental Health NHS trust		25,008
Hertfordshire Health agency	3	3,000
		3,000
		3,000
Kings Healthcare NHS trust	3	55,573
		1,005
		23,627
The Medway NHS trust	3	12,991
		12,803
		13,501
Mid Anglia Community Health		5,449
Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS trust		31,549
North East Essex mental health services		26,188
North Hampshire Hospitals NHS trust		30,000
North Mersey Community NHS trust		11,300
North Tees Health NHS trust		27,764
Northern Devon Healthcare NHS trust		25,000
Northampton Community Healthcare NHS trust	2	20,259
		19,540
Pilgrim Health NHS trust		7,864
Plymouth Hospitals NHS trust		7,865
Queens Medical Centre Nottingham University NHS trust		77,715
Royal Free Hampstead NHS trust		35,295
Royal Liverpool University hospital	2	47,355
		7,242
Royal Liverpool Children's NHS trust		18,466
Royal United Hospital Bath NHS trust		19,343
Salford Mental Health Services NHS trust		15,847
South Bedfordshire Community Healthcare trust		17,771
South Kent Community Healthcare trust		30,636
South Kent Hospitals NHS trust		8,626
South Warwickshire General Hospitals NHS trust		34,829
Southend Healthcare NHS trust	3	43,908
		29,901
		7,031
Stockport Healthcare NHS trust		21,940
Teddington Memorial Hospital NHS trust		18,750
United Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS trust		30,000
Walsall Community NHS trust		35,000
Walsall Hospital NHS trust		6,926
West Herts Community Health NHS Trust	4	2,633
		2,276
		29,505
		40,000
Wiltshire Ambulance Service NHS trust		27,314
Worcester Royal Infirmary NHS trust		22,167
Worthing and Southlands hospitals NHS trust	2	34,547
		18,200

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *985–86*, how many of those receiving termination payments are still working in the NHS in any capacity.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Private Psychiatrists

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by district health authorities on private psychiatric services over the last five years by authority.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 1 July 1993, *Official Report*, column *616*.

NHS Contracts

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library a copy of the agreement made with the chief executive of the NHS executive between 1986 and 1989 regarding his non-involvement in NHS contracts with IBM.

Mr. Sackville: The agreement between IBM and the Department of Health and Social Security dated 10 February 1986 formed the contractual basis of the secondment of Sir Leonard Peach as director of personnel, national health service management board. It sets out the detailed terms and conditions of his appointment. It would not be appropriate to place a copy in the Library.

The relevant extract from the agreement covering Sir Leonard Peach's non-involvement in NHS contracts with IBM reads:

> "The secondee will not undertake work in any way connected with procurement of products or selection of suppliers in any of IBM's spheres of operation. His work should not in any way relate to IBM or any of its competitors and he will be asked to sign a conflict of interest statement, a copy of which is attached to this contract.
>
> In addition he will absent himself from any discussions on the NHS Management Board or elsewhere, which might lead to DHSS letting a contract or commission to IBM. Also he is required to make a declaration to the Chairman of the NHS Board whenever IBM submits a tender to the DHSS or a Health Authority in England or obtains a contract PROVIDED that such declaration shall only be required in respect of major bids. These are defined as IBM System 370 architectured systems or volume purchase agreements for small systems. In particular, this definition excludes typewriters, personal computers, supplies, single small-system bids and all bids or sales by Agents or third parties."

I regret that it has not been possible in the time available to find a copy of the conflict of interest statement referred to in the first paragraph of this extract.

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many operations have been cancelled at St. Bartholomew's hospital, London, because of bed shortages in the past two years;

(2) how many people were admitted to St. Bartholomew's hospital, London, in 1990–91, 1991–2, 1992–93 and 1993–94;

(3) how many patients were admitted to St. Bartholomew's hospital, London, and through what routes

other than accident and emergency, in 1990–91, 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally. Detailed information may be obtained by contacting Sir Derek Boorman, chairman of the Royal Hospitals NHS trust.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many nursing posts will be lost as a result of the closure of St. Bartholomew's hospital, London;

(2) what will happen to the specialist services currently provided on the St. Bartholomew's hospital site after its closure; and what will happen to existing nursing terms working on specialist wards at St. Bartholomew's hospital;

(3) how many extra beds will be added to *(a)* St. Thomas's hospital, London, *(b)* King's College hospital, London, *(c)* Royal London hospital, *(d)* Homerton hospital, London, *(e)* University College hospital, London and *(f)* Whittington hospital, London to accommodate the extra demand as a result of St. Bartholomew's hospital, London, closure;

(4) to which hospital patients will be referred once St. Bartholomew's hospital, London, has closed.

Mr. Malone: Detailed changes in the deployment of resources at the Royal Hospitals national health service trust and neighbouring hospitals are a matter for local providers and commissioning authorities, taking account of the outcome of the public consultation exercise currently being undertaken by East London and the City health authority.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much extra money is being invested in primary health care and community care to offset the effects of the closure of St. Bartholomew's hospital, London.

Mr. Malone: For 1993–94 and 1994–95, an extra £15 million is being invested in developing primary health care in the East London and the City health district.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people attended the accident and emergency department at St. Bartholomew's hospital, London, in 1990–91, 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94.

Mr. Malone: Figures are shown in the table.

A and E attendances at St. Bartholomew's Hospital by financial year

Year (April/March)	*First attendances*	*Follow-up attendances*	*Total attendances*
1990–91	37,139	5,185	42,324
1991–92	35,184	4,529	39,713
1992–93	31,187	2,740	33,927
1993–94	29,801	2,559	32,360

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she intends to respond to the open letter sent to her on 26 January by the *Islington Gazette* about the future of St. Bartholomew's hospital and of health services generally for the people of Islington.

Mr. Malone: We have no record of receiving any such letter.

Hospitals, London

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average and mean rate of bed occupancy for *(a)* St. Thomas's hospital, London, *(b)* King's College hospital, London, *(c)* Royal London hospital, *(d)* Homerton hospital, London, *(e)* University College hospital, London and *(f)* Whittington hospital, London, in 1990–91, 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94; and what is the estimated increase in journey times for patients in the areas immediately surrounding St. Bartholomew's hospital, London, to travel to these hospitals.

Mr. Malone: Information on the average and mean rates of bed occupancy is not available centrally. Detailed information about individual trusts may be obtained by writing to the appropriate trust chairmen.

Studies have shown that St. Thomas hospital, King's College hospital, the Royal London hospital, Homerton hospital and University College hospital are all within 15 minutes driving time[1] of St. Bartholomew's hospital. The journey time to the Whittington is only slightly longer.

[1] Based on average traffic speed, Monday to Friday off-peak.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current bed capacity of *(a)* St. Thomas's hospital, London, *(b)* Kings College hospital, London, *(c)* Royal London hospital, *(d)* Homerton hospital, London, *(e)* University College hospital, London and *(f)* Whittington hospital, London.

Mr. Malone: The bed capacity of individual hospital sites within hospital trusts is not available centrally. Available information for hospital trusts is shown in the table:

Acute bed numbers in inner London trusts—average available beds 1993–94

Trust	*Acute*
Guys and St. Thomas's Hospital Trust[1]	1,054
King's Healthcare[2]	634
Royal Hospitals NHS Trust[3]	610
Homerton Hospital[4]	321
University College London Hospitals[5]	562
Whittington Hospital NHS Trust	420

[1] Includes Guy's hospital and St. Thomas's hospital.
[2] Includes King's College hospital and Dulwich hospital.
[3] Includes the Royal London hospital, St. Bartholomew's hospital and the London Chest hospital.
[4] Shadow Trust.
[5] Includes University College hospitals and the Central Middlesex hospital.

Acute beds includes:
General patients excluding elderly, younger physically disabled, neonatal cots not in maternity wards, terminally ill/palliative care. Mental illness and maternity beds are not included.

Fertility Treatment

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the policy of each health authority with regard to fertility treatment in general and in vitro fertility treatment in particular, including details of restrictions placed by age and the existence of children by the present or previous relationship.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. It is the responsibility of each individual health authority to determine the local availability of infertility services.

Waiting Times

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the average current waiting times in the accident and emergency departments in *(a)* St. Thomas's hospital, London, *(b)* King's College hospital, London, *(c)* Royal London hospital, *(d)* Homerton hospital, London, *(e)* University College hospital, London and *(f)* Whittington hospital, London.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Hugh Fraser

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will direct the chief executive of the Lewisham hospital trust to reply to the inquiries of 29 November 1994, 20 December 1994 and 18 January from the hon. Member for Lewisham, West relating to the case of Mr. Hugh Fraser.

Mr. Sackville: I understand Lewisham Hospital national health service trust has now sent a full reply.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, whom she has appointed as the new chairman of the Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have recently appointed, in consultation with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for National Heritage, for Scotland and Wales and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Sir Clive Whitmore GCB CVO to be the new chairman of the Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship.

Departmental Cash Limits

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes she plans to make to the cash limits of her Department in 1994–95.

Mrs. Virginnia Bottomley: The cash limit for class XII, vote 1—hospital, community health, family health services, part, and related services, England—will be increased by £9,676,000—from £21,734,116,000 to £21,743,792,000. This allows for an increase of £11,287,000 to the external financing limits of national health service trusts—£25,887,000 in respect of 1993–94 external financing limit end-year flexibility carryforward less £14,600,000 financed from trusts own cash balances—partially offset by transfers of £1,457,000 to class XII, vote 3—Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England—for the work of the Health Education Authority; for part-time training posts for career registrars in the public health laboratory service and a grant towards the renovation of Tadworth Court hospital; £116,000 to class XIV, vote 18—Student awards, Scotland—for orthoptic clinical placements of Glasgow Caledonian university students; £11,000 to—Department of Health and Social Services, Northern Ireland—and £27,000 to class XV, vote 8—hospital, community health, family health services, part, and related services, Wales—for the national poisons information service.

The cash limit for class XII, vote 3—Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England—will be reduced by £1,369,000—from £1,591,256,000 to £1,589,887,000. This reduction allows for a transfer of £2,946,000 to class X, vote 2—higher and further education—for the conversion of social work training courses. The overall decrease is partially offset by a transfer of £1,457,000 from class XII, vote 1 as mentioned above and £120,000 from class XIV, vote 14—hospital, community health, part, and other health services, Scotland—for the work of the clinical standards advisory group.

The Department's gross running cost limit will be reduced by £5,655,000 from £257,853,000 to £252,198,000. This reflects a reallocation of £4,800,000 for capital works, £625,000 for the work of the Mental Health Act Commission and £230,000 for the national aids helpline.

All increases will either be offset by savings, increased receipts or transfers to or from other votes and will not therefore add to the planned total of pubic expenditure.

Overall the external financing limit for NHS trusts is increased by £42,190,000 from £588,264,000 to £630,454,000.

Intensive Care Units

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* intensive care units in London and *(b)* intensive care beds in total there were in each year since 1989.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* Information on the number of intensive care units is not available centrally. Information is provided in the table on the average daily number of available designated intensive therapy beds in London.

In addition to these services provided in units designated as intensive therapy units, intensive therapy can also be delivered in a variety of hospital departments, such as neonatal intensive care, coronary care units, accident and emergency departments, renal units and high dependency units.

1989–90: 484
1990–91: 459
1991–92: 458
1992–93: 480
1993–94: 501

Note:
For the years 1989–90 to 1992–93, Ashford hospital intensive care beds were included in Hounslow and Spelthorne DHA figures as follows: 1989–90, four beds; 1990–91, four beds, 1991–92 four beds, 1992–93, four beds. From 1993–94 Ashford hospital intensive care beds–two have been included in North West Surrey returns and are therefore no longer included in the London figure.

Source:
KHO3 returns.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the EC law which prevents the banning of the export of calves for rearing in veal crates.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the legal opinion that he has

received relating to the export of veal calves and other live animals for slaughter; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: My right hon. Friend the Minister has consulted further on the legality under Community law of measures banning the export of calves, or imposing selective restrictions intended to ensure that they are reared in other member states under conditions corresponding to those applied here by virtue of the Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2126).

Consideration has been given to the best case that could be made in favour of such measures. However, the conclusion that emerges from the legal advice available to him is that such measures cannot be justified, for the following reasons:

there is already in existence a directive on welfare standards for calves which forms part of the Community legislation governing trade in calves and it is advised that the terms of that directive would preclude member states from introducing export restrictions;

Article 36 of the treaty can in some circumstances justify export restrictions, on the grounds of the protection of health and life of animals, which includes animal welfare. That article, however, is only available to member states where there is no Community legislation governing the particular area. But that is not the case here, given the directive on welfare standards;

also it is very probable that measures banning or restricting the export of calves would constitute an unacceptable interference with the operation of the common agricultural policy, as it affects the market for beef and veal;

a total ban on all calf exports could not in any event be justified under article 36, because it would be deemed to be disproportionate;

in addition to the grave difficulties of justifying them legally, and the consequent high risk of their being struck down in court, selective restrictions would present severe practical problems of enforcement.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *71*, what was the age of the cattle exported to *(a)* France, *(b)* the Netherlands, *(c)* Eire and *(d)* Northern Ireland for immediate slaughter.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* I cannot add to my earlier replies as the information is not available. Exports to the other member states were restricted under EC rules to calves under six months of age. Cattle, including calves, to destinations in Northern Ireland would not have been subject to an age restriction.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the policy objectives of Her Majesty's Government for 1995 on the subject of transportation of live animals.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 26 January 1995]:* We shall continue to press for the further detailed Community measures—for example on feeding, watering and rest and on limits on journeys to slaughter—that we consider to be necessary to ensure effective Community-wide safeguards for the welfare of livestock in transit. In the meantime, we shall maintain our existing strict national measures which protect the welfare of livestock, including exported livestock, during transit and which we have recently tightened up. We shall supplement these measures with a code of practice, and will continue to scrutinise all new proposals to export livestock to ensure that only those which meet welfare requirements are allowed to proceed. On the related issue of veal crates on the continent, we shall press, in the Council of Ministers' review of the directive which permits the veal crate, for changes which bring an end to this system of production. It is encouraging that the Commission has agreed to my right hon. Friend's request to facilitate this review by bringing forward to this year its review report scheduled for 1997.

Meat Imports

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he is in a position to ban the import into the United Kingdom of pork and pork products which are not reared in conditions permitted here;

(2) if he is in a position to ban the import into the United Kingdom of veal and veal products which are not reared in conditions permitted here.

Mrs. Browning: It is not apparent that it would be feasible to identify the production methods used for the imported goods mentioned. In any case, I am advised that selective import restrictions of the type proposed would not be compatible with Community law.

New Zealand Flatworm

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are being taken by his Department to support research into and curb the New Zealand flatworm.

Mrs. Browning: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is funding a study to review current knowledge of the New Zealand flatworm in the British Isles, to assess its effects. The results of this research are expected this spring, and will provide a basis on which to assess what further action may be appropriate.

Anglo-European Livestock Exporters Association

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the Anglo-European Livestock Exporters Association.

Mrs. Browning: My ministerial colleagues and I have never met representatives of the Anglo-European Livestock Exporters Association. Nevertheless, officials maintain regular contacts with the association.

Salmon and Sea Trout

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food what initiatives his Department is pursuing to protect and enhance stocks of wild salmon and sea trout; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The National Rivers Authority is responsible, within the policy and legislative framework determined by my right hon. Friends the Minister, and the Secretary of State for Wales, for maintaining, improving and developing salmon and sea trout fisheries in England and Wales. It carries out a range of activities, including habitat restoration, restocking and enforcement of legislation designed to combat illegal fishing. Much of this work is funded by the Government through grant-in-aid. The authority has recently prepared a draft salmon management strategy which considers how salmon stocks might best be managed in the future. In addition, the Government also fund a significant programme of research on wild salmon and sea trout.

Dredging (Docking Shoal)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current situation as regards dredging off the Docking shoal; whether he has given permission to dredge in this area; and what other areas the National Rivers Authority has applied to dredge.

Mr. Jack: Licences for dredging of marine aggregates are issued by the Crown Estate. A Government view on each application is co-ordinated by the Department of the Environment.

The Ministry will in due course be providing its contribution to the Government view on an application from the NRA to dredge Docking shoal. The NRA has also applied to the Crown Estate for a licence to dredge an area known as Race bank.

Pesticides

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health regarding the use and effects of pesticides and any other animal treatments on the animal food chain.

Mrs. Browning: My right hon. Friend the Minister and the Secretary of State for Health are among the Ministers responsible for the regulation of pesticides and regularly discuss such matters. An important part of the regulatory process is consideration of effects on the food chain.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to reduce the amount of pesticides and other chemicals being used in agriculture.

Mrs. Browning: The Government's policy is that pesticide usage should be the minimum necessary for effective pest control compatible with the protection of human health and the environment. This policy is pursued by a variety of means including a rigorous approvals policy, codes of practice for pesticide users and an extensive research and development programme.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food what plans he has to implement more stringent regulations on the use of chemical treatments.

Mrs. Browning: None. Ministers have sufficient powers to ensure the proper protection of health and to safeguard the environment.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what discussions he has had with other countries regarding legislation used in those countries to ban the use of toxins and pesticides;

(2) what proposals he has for legislation to be introduced in this country which will bring this country into line with other countries which have banned the use of pesticides, toxins and chemicals.

Mrs. Browning: The United Kingdom has a well-developed system for regulating pesticides which protects people and the environment while ensuring that those who need them have effective pesticides available. We can and do restrict or ban pesticides where they cannot be used safely. Our system is widely respected abroad and the new Community regime closely resembles it.

Tenanted Land

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has showing the proportion of agricultural land which was tenanted in England for *(a)* 1965, *(b)* 1970, *(c)* 1975, *(d)* 1980, *(e)* 1985, *(f)* 1990 and *(g)* the latest available date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The proportion of agricultural land which was rented as recorded in the June agricultural and horticultural census is as follows:

	Percentage
1965	not collected[1]
1970	48.3
1975	47.8
1980	43.4
1985	40.4
1990	37.0
1994	35.6

Note:
[1] World Census of Agriculture (FAO) records 50.9 per cent. in 1960 for England and Wales combined.

The continuing decline in the proportion of let land is one reason why the main industry organisations all agree that the reforms in our Agricultural Tenancies Bill are badly needed.

Agricultural Wages Board

Ms Harman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people in Islwyn are covered by the Agricultural Wages Board for England and Wales; and what percentage this is of the work force in employment.

Mr. Jack: There were 31 hired workers on agricultural holdings in the district of Islwyn recorded in the June census of 1993. This represents 0.1 per cent. of the work force in employment in that district.

Departmental Cash Limits

Dr. Spink: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes are proposed in his Department's cash limits for 1994–95.

Mr. Waldegrave: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class III, vote 4—Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: agricultural, food and fishing services—will be reduced by £10,045,000 from £372,630,000 to £362,585,000. Within this limit, the estimated provision will be reduced by £6,205,000 on environmentally sensitive area grants and by £3 million on coast protection. The remaining reduction, £840,000, reflects a transfer of funds to the Office of Science and Technology to cover the cost of redundancies arising among staff of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council seconded to Horticulture Research International.

Recruitment

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department spent during 1994 on recruiting staff to his Department and its executive agencies; and how many staff were recruited.

Mr. Jack: In 1994, 411 staff were recruited to the Department and its agencies at a cost of £579,987.

Sheep Exporters

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of the exporters of sheep currently using Brightlingsea have convictions for livestock animal cruelty; and if he will specify the date and nature of the offences.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 23 January 1995]:* Complete information is not available centrally on convictions of exporters and others for offences related to animal welfare.

DEFENCE

Ex-service Men's Organisations

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he and his colleagues in other Government departments have had with ex-service men's organisations regarding the abolition of compensation for noise-induced deafness.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have been asked to reply.

Where disablement due to noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss is assessed at 20 per cent. or more, a war pension is paid.

The Government's proposals to abolish war pension gratuities for noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss causing disablement of less than 20 per cent. were discussed with the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions, which includes representatives of ex-service organisations on 3 December 1992. The Central Advisory Committee is the statutory body with which Ministers, by convention, discuss proposals to amend the war pensions scheme.

The matter has been discussed on several occasions since, including at later meetings of the central advisory committee and of the regional war pensions committees attended by the Minister with special responsibility for war pensions. It has also been raised at meetings he has had with delegations from the Royal British Legion.

Departmental Funding

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will announce changes to the class 1 cash limits and operating costs limited for 1994–95.

Mr. Soames: Subject to parliamentary approval of the spring supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

Class 1 cash limit

Vote	*Current cash limit*	*Change*	*Revised cash limit £000*
1	11,549,651	-25.675	11,523,976

This change decreases the block Defence cash limit by £25,675,000 from £22,761,260,000 to £22,735,585,000. It reflects the net effect of transfers between the Ministry of Defence and other Government Departments and a revision to the estimated costs for redundancy.

The Ministry of Defence operating costs limit will be reduced by £19,181,000 from £17,399,500,000 to £17,380,319,000. This also reflects the net effect of transfers between the Ministry of Defence and other Government Departments, a revision to the estimated costs for redundancy and an overestimate of receipts.

Service Career Review

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with Mr. Bett's review of service career and manpower structures and terms and conditions of service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence expects to receive Mr. Bett's report at the end of March. The terms of reference for the review require Mr. Bett to consult widely within MOD and the services. He very much appreciates the response he has received to his request for ideas and information, both in his visits programme and the extensive questionnaires and surveys which have formed an important part of the review. As part of this continuing dialogue, Mr. Bett and his team are now at the stage of testing elements of their ideas with those concerned in my Department and the services. Not all of these ideas will necessarily develop into recommendations, and others may be modified. There is bound to be speculation, some of it inaccurate and ill-founded, about what the report will recommend, but we regard Mr. Bett's continuing dialogue with us as important to the success of the review. Final decisions on Mr. Bett's recommendations will of course be taken by Ministers, in a process of consultation involving the armed forces and others, following receipt of his report.

Buried Atomic Bombs

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will establish an investigation into the allegations by former Royal Ordnance employee, Harry Southall, that two atomic bombs were buried at the Royal Ordnance site at Pembrey, Dyfed.

Mr. Soames: Until its closure in 1964, the former royal ordnance factory Pembrey was primarily engaged in the production of explosives although, in its final years of operation, it acted as a munition breakdown centre. The factory was never associated with our nuclear weapon programme and at no stage in its operations was the factory used for the production, storage or disposal of nuclear weapons.

Disabled People

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion and number of non-industrial civil servants in the Departments and agencies for which he has responsibility are registered disabled and disabled as defined by the Cabinet Office "Focus on Ability".

Mr. Freeman: My Department monitors its non-industrial staff to gather data on those who have a disability, for which they may or may not be registered. The results from the monitoring show that on 1 July 1994, the Ministry of Defence and its agencies employed 1,096 non-industrial staff who were registered disabled, representing 1.3 per cent. of the total. In addition to this, on 1 October 1994—figures for 1 July are not available—3,050 non-industrial staff, representing 3.7 per cent. of the total, were recorded as having declared some form of disability for which they were not registered.

Live Animal Research

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for defence what plans he has to carry out an investigation into the use of live animals for MOD experiments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: There are no plans to carry out an investigation into the use of live animals for MOD experiments.

Animal experiments are a small but essential part of the MOD's research and development programme. Animal experiments are carried out only when careful consideration of alternatives to the use of animals has shown that there is no adequate substitute and where it is judged essential to use animals for this purpose. The experiments carried out fully meet the spirit and letter of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and are subject to unannounced visits by Home Office inspectors.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many animals were used in research by or on behalf of his Department in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Freeman: Animals used in research include not only those used in animal experiments, but also those used for the provision of tissues, those not used and those used as passive control. The total numbers of animals used in each of the last 10 years is as follows:

1984: 11,445
1985: 7,855
1986: 7,712
1987: 10,628
1988: 10,462
1989: 10,419
1990: 9,270
1991: 7,028
1992: 5,088
1993: 7,329

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of animals used for the testing of military equipment by or on behalf of his Department are kept alive after the experiment has taken place.

Mr. Freeman: No animals are used to improve weapons or ammunition. Experiments involving animals have been used in the development of protective measures against certain weapons and to test procedures relating to submarine crew and aircrew safety. At the completion of experiments, animals are killed humanely in accordance with the project licence granted by the Home Office.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many live animal experiments have been carried out by his Department over each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Freeman: Under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, the number of animal experiments reported to the Home Office as required by the legislation in each of the last three years for which figures are available was as follows:

1991: 6,100
1992: 4,500
1993: 6,796

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research has been conducted by or on behalf of his Department into the application of results of military research on animals to draw conclusions about the effects on humans; and if he will publish this research.

Mr. Freeman: Animal experiments are carried out only when careful consideration of the use of animals has shown that there is no adequate substitute and where it is judged essential to use animals for this purpose. In the context of the work at CBDE Porton Down, which accounts for the majority of the animal experiments carried out by the MOD, it is important to recognise that as there is no group suffering from chemical or biological warfare agents in the population at large, the effectiveness of medical counter-measures cannot be evaluated, unlike drugs developed against naturally occurring illness or disease, using human beings. It is consequently necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of medical counter-measures against chemical and biological weapons using the most appropriate animal model for man. This work is published as appropriate in the scientific literature. In addition, studies of the interaction of drugs with animals have been compared with the interaction of the same drugs in man and a common mechanism has been established. Work on submarine and aircrew safety has been successfully applied to humans and the results published.

Work has also been undertaken to compare the relative mechanical properties of human and animal tissue, and has been presented to scientific conferences and published in the scientific literature. Computer models to predict the response of the human torso to impact and blast injury are also being developed.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research he has commissioned or undertaken into the effectiveness and necessity of using live animals for testing military equipment.

Mr. Freeman: No animals are used to improve weapons or ammunition or to practise surgery. All MOD experimental work with animals is subject to the conditions of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, and related legislation. Before any project involving animals is begun, a project licence must be granted by the Home Office as a critical part of the project licence application is a closely argued justification of the proposed use of animals considering the ethical and scientific issues. At each stage, the use of non-animal alternatives has to be considered and the licence is only granted where no alternatives are possible. Alternatives to the use of animals are used whenever possible. Some such methods have been developed and published in the scientific literature.

In some cases, in vitro methods which do not use living animals have been shown to be scientifically superior.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many experiments by or on behalf of his Department have involved the use of live pigs in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and how many pigs were *(a)* involved and *(b)* killed in each year.

Mr. Freeman: Under the provisions of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, the number of animal experiments reportable concerning live pigs in each of the last five years was:

1989 : 54
1990 : 86
1991 : 102
1992 : 132
1993 : 109

At the end of each experiment, the pig was humanely killed in accordance with the conditions of the project licence issued by the Home Office.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research has been conducted by or on behalf of his Department into the applicability of weapons

research on unconscious animals to draw conclusions about their effect on conscious humans; and if he will publish this research.

Mr. Freeman: No animals are used to improve weapons or ammunition or to practise surgery. Work has been undertaken to compare the relative mechanical properties of human and animal tissue, and has been presented to scientific conferences. Computer models to predict the response of the human torso to impact and blast injury are also being developed.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of animals used for the testing of military equipment by or on behalf of his Department are killed while still under anaesthetic.

Mr. Freeman: No animals are used to improve weapons or ammunition or to practise surgery. The total number of experiments involving animals in 1993 that were reportable to the Home Office under the terms of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 was 6,796. Around 6.5 per cent. of the animals involved were killed while under anaesthetic. All other animals were put down humanely in accordance with the Act.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many animals experiments by or on behalf of his Department took place in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Freeman: All research carried out by the MOD using animals is carried out under the provisions of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. The number of animal experiments reportable to the Home Office in each of the last 10 years was as follows:

1984: 10,941
1985: 6,611
1986: 6,400
1987: 8,300
1988: 8,148
1989: 9,129
1990: 8,146
1991: 6,100
1992: 4,500
1993: 6,796

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many experiments *(a)* involving animals, *(b)* leading to the death of an animal and *(c)* causing injury to an animal were carried out at Porton Down in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham S. Pearson to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 2 February 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many experiments *(a)* involving animals, *(b)* leading to the death of an animal and *(c)* causing injury to an animal were carried out at Porton Down in each of the last five years, and if he will make a statement has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. It is an essential but relatively small part of the work of CBDE that a small number of experiments with animals, mainly mice, rats and guinea-pigs are carried out in order to ensure that the protective measures provided to the Armed Forces are effective and are safe. No animals are used to practice surgery or in work to improve weapons or ammunition performance. The number of animal experiments reported to the Home Office in each of the last five years was as follows:

1989: 9,000
1990: 8,100
1991: 6,100
1992: 4,500
1993: 6,700

In accordance with the conditions of the Project Licences issued by the Home Office, all animals were humanely killed at the completion of the experiments. The Project Licences currently in effect at CBDE cover mild 7, moderate 14, substantial 4 and unclassified 1.

4. It should be recognised that the total number of all animal experiments carried out at CBDE in any one year is less than one half of one percent of all the animal experiments conducted in the United Kingdom. Indeed the number of animal experiments at CBDE has dropped over the past decade. However, the number of experiments carried out in any one year will vary according to the MOD programme. It was recognised during and after the Gulf War that there was an increasing potential biological warfare threat and that it is necessary to strengthen the UK's biological defence capability. This has required the use of more animals.

5. The United Kingdom does not possess chemical or biological weapons and abandoned its capability relating to such weapons in the late 1950s. Consequently, there is absolutely no use of animals to develop or improve chemical or biological weapons. We have to recognise, however, that a number of countries do possess such weapons and it is essential that our Armed Forces are provided with adequate protection against their use and against the use of biological weapons. There is evidence of proliferation around the world in the availability of such weapons and the recent hostilities in the Gulf have demonstrated the reality of that threat which our Armed Forces have to be prepared to face.

6. Animal experiments are carried out at CBDE Porton Down only when careful consideration of alternatives to the use of animals has shown that there is no adequate substitute and where it is judged essential to use animals for this purpose. It is, important to recognise that there is no population suffering from chemical or biological warfare agents in the population at large and consequently the effectiveness of medical countermeasures cannot be evaluated, as can drugs developed against naturally occurring illness or disease, using human beings. It is consequently necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of medical countermeasures against chemical and biological weapons using an animal model for man.

7. The experiments carried out at CBDE involving the use of animals fully meet the spirit and letter of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act of 1986. CBDE is a registered place under the Act and all animal experiments and all the staff involved in them are licensed by the Home Office. Unannounced visits are made by Home Office inspectors to satisfy themselves that the requirements of the Act are met.

8. All work at CBDE is carefully controlled and monitored and is conducted by appropriately qualified personnel to the highest standards. It is vital that the protection provided for our Service personnel against the threat that they may be exposed to chemical or biological weapons should have been developed and tested to ensure safety and efficacy. Our role is to save the lives of the members of the British Armed Forces and this work is of continuing importance to the nation.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the research carried out by or on behalf of his Department using live animals leading to the death or injury of that animal for each of the last five years.

Mr. Freeman: The research carried out was designed to:

investigate gravitiational effects;

demonstrate the results of exposure to different pressures of air or oxygen;

provide effective protective measures for the armed forces against the threat that chemical or biological weapons might be used against them;

provide effective protective measures against conventional weapons.

Facsimile Messages

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reports he has received of facsimile messages to and from royal naval establishments being sent to civilian addresses as a result of mis-dialling; and what proposals he has to eliminate the problem.

Mr. Soames: Three messages containing management information have been reported as having reached *The News*, Portsmouth as a consequence of mis-dialling a Plymouth terminal number. The terminal number in question has been changed, users are being advised and reminded to take care that the correct number has been dialled before material is transmitted.

Sniper Protection Armour

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cabs of logistics vehicles in Bosnia have been fitted with sniper protection armour; and whether any such vehicles so fitted have been detained for any period by any local military or paramilitary forces operating in Bosnia.

Mr. Soames: No logistic vehicles in Bosnia have been fitted with protective armour. However, this equipment is held in theatre and vehicles could be so fitted if this was warranted by operational circumstances.

Emergency Tour Tasks

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names of known or foreseeable emergency tour tasks; what relation the size of units on emergency tour tasks bears to battalion size; and which units are currently on emergency tour tasks and are expected to be in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Soames: The list of current operational tour commitments, and the units undertaking them are set out below. Those units at serials 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 11 are of battalion size—or equivalent in non infantry-arms—those of 14 and 15 are of battalion group size; others are of less than battalion size. In all cases, the minimum manning strength required of the unit to carry out its operational tour commitment is less than that unit's peace establishment. It is not our usual practice to identify those units which are planned to take up operational tour commitments in the future.

NORTHERN IRELAND (NI) OPERATIONAL TOUR PLOT

1. *Armagh Roulement Battalion*
42 Commando Regiment, Royal Marines

2. *Belfast Roulement Battalion*
1st Battalion The Parachute Regiment

3. *Fermanagh Roulement Battalion*
1st Battalion The Cheshire Regiment

4. *East Tyrone Battalion*
1st Battalion The Green Howards

5. *Girdwood Roulement Battalion*
40 Regiment, Royal Artillery

6. *Drumadd Roulement Battalion*
5 Regiment, Royal Artillery

7. *Prison Guard Force*
The Queen's Royal Hussars

8. *NI Roulement Engineer Squadron*
37 Field Squadron, 35 Engineer Regiment

9. *NI Roulement Engineer Search Troop*
37 Field Squadron, 35 Engineer Regiment

10. *NI Roulement Armoured Personnel Carrier Squadron*
4 General Support Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps

UNITED NATIONS FORCES IN CYPRUS (UNFICYP) OPERATIONAL TOUR PLOT

11. *UNFICYP Roulement Regiment*
The Queen's Royal Lancers. Royal Armoured Corps

FALKLAND ISLANDS OPERATIONAL TOUR PLOT

12. *Falkland Islands Roulement Infantry Company Group*
2nd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers

13. *Falkland Islands Roulement Field Squadron*
53 Field Support Squadron, Royal Logistic Corps

UNITED NATIONS PROTECTION FORCE INFANTRY OPERATIONAL TOUR PLOT

14. *Britbat 1*
1st Battalion The Royal Highland Fusiliers
C Squadron Household Cavalry Regiment

15. *Britbat 2*
1st Battalion The Royal Gloucester, Wiltshire
B Squadron Household Cavalry Regiment

Bilateral Cost-sharing Agreement

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the nature of the bilateral cost-sharing agreement under which the United Kingdom Government carry out construction work for the United States military at their bases and other property in the United Kingdom; when this agreement was first started; what is the value of the work currently being carried out; and at which United States bases and facilities this work is currently being carried out.

Mr. Soames: The confidential exchange of notes between the Governments of the United Kingdom and of the United States relating to the cost-sharing arrangement was signed on 4 April 1973. It is not our practice to comment on the details of such arrangements. The value of work currently being carried out is a matter for the United States Government. Work is being carried out under the provisions of the above arrangement at the following main locations and their associated sites:

RAF Alconbury
RAF Brawdy
RAF Chicksands
RAF Croughton
RAF Daws Hill
RAF Edzell
RAF Fairford
RAF Feltwell
RAF Hythe
RAF Lakenheath
RAF Machrihanish
Menwith Hill Station
RAF Mildenhall
RAF Molesworth
RAF St. Mawgan
RAF Upwood
RAF Welford

Mr. John Anderson

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what disciplinary action he has initiated against any of his Department's personnel involved in the arrest of Mr. John Anderson.

Mr. Soames: None. The Ministry of Defence police investigated the complaint under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority. The investigation concluded that there were no grounds for disciplinary action.

Haymes Garth

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to announce the finding of the Peat Marwick investigation into expenditure at Haymes Garth; if he will publish the findings, report and recommendations in full; whether disciplinary action is to be taken against any individual; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: As I said in my answer to the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) on 4 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *85*, we will make a full report to the House on the conclusion of the work which has been set in hand to look into expenditure on Haymes Garth and other official service residences.

TRANSPORT

International Station, Ebbsfleet

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he *(a)* reached and *(b)* announced the decision to site the international station at Ebbsfleet in Kent.

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend announced the Government's decision on 31 August, shortly after the choice was finally settled.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on which occasions his Department had meetings's attended by or arranged with *(a)* Mr. Oliver Colville, *(b)* Decision Makers and *(c)* Blue Circle in connection with the channel tunnel link and the location of the international station.

Mr. Watts: The Department has had no meeting with Mr. Colville. Miss Maureen Tomison of Decision Makers was present on one occasion, when the Ebbsfleet promoter group made a presentation to my predecessor. The delegation was led by the hon. Members for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and for Dartford (Mr. Dunn); representatives of Dartford borough council, Blue Circle, Union Railways and departmental officials were also present. The Department has had numerous meetings on this subject with Blue Circle.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if the channel tunnel route announced in October 1991 was compatible with the location of the international station at Ebbsfleet, Kent;

(2) what were the factors that led to the revision in 1993 of the final line of the route for the channel tunnel link as announced by his predecessor in October 1991; and what consideration underlay the alterations to the location and line of the link at its crossing of the River Thames.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* The route corridor announced in October 1991 offered the opportunity for a station at several locations in north Kent, although not at Ebbsfleet. In his statement of 22 March 1993—announcing that the channel tunnel rail link would run along the Ebbsfleet valley then tunnel under the Thames, to run alongside the London Tilbury and Southend line from north of Purfleet to Barking—the then Secretary of State for Transport made it clear that this route overcame a number of engineering and environmental difficulties associated with the route published in 1991.

Channel Tunnel (Safety)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if *(a)* his Department and *(b)* Channel Tunnel safety authority accepted the view of the inter-governmental commission into the operation of the channel tunnel with regard to fire resistant end barriers and pass doors; and if he will make a statement;

(2) for what reason the inter-governmental commission into the operation of the channel tunnel objected to the request of Eurotunnel to vary the agreed width of the pass doors on the wagons carrying passengers with their cars from 0.7m to 0.6m; to whom this objection was communicated at Eurotunnel and when; and if he will make a statement;

(3) on what date Eurotunnel confirmed its acceptance of the requirement that wagons carrying passengers with their cars on the channel tunnel should have 30-minute fire and smoke-resistant end barriers and that both would have pass doors not less than 0.7m wide; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The CTSA advised the IGC on safety grounds not to accept Eurotunnel's proposed reduction in the width of pass doors. The advice was based on French and British regulations, guidelines and practice for the sizing of emergency exits. The IGC accepted the CTSA's advice and raised a formal objection to the Eurotunnel proposal. This was notified to the joint chief executives of Eurotunnel on 30 April 1990.

Eurotunnel confirmed its acceptance of the wider pass doors in a letter dated 21 March 1991 to the IGC.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek to end the constraint imposed on the inter-governmental commission into the operation of the channel tunnel that prevents it publicising any documentation used in reaching decisions on approval of safety matters relating to the channel tunnel's operation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The requirement to maintain the confidentiality of documents passed between the different parties involved in the channel tunnel is set down in the concession agreement. It arose from the proper concern about the need for confidentiality in a commercial operation. However, Eurotunnel has published its safety case, the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority publishes annual reports on its work, and a number of technical reports has been published.

Transport Police

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what support officers of the British Transport police may given when they are asked by

members of the public for help in a situation outwith their current jurisdiction as a constable;

(2) what support officers of the British Transport police may give when they are asked by members of the Home Department forces for supporting action in situations away from the railway.

Mr. Watts: None, other than that which any member of the public may render to another or to a Home Department police officer.

Runway Capacity, South-East

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has considered the report of the working group to consider runway capacity to service the south-east; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government are firmly committed to enabling the development of additional airport capacity where this makes economic, social and environment sense. The economic benefits to business and industry are clear, as are the average of greater opportunities for leisure travel. The quality of airports in the South-East provides the United Kingdom and London with a vital competitive advantage and make the UK a world centre for commerce and tourism.

The Government wish to ensure that capacity can be made available in response to future demand, but in such as way that recognises and takes reasonable account of the environmental impacts, including the impacts of increased air traffic associated with additional runway capacity.

The working group on runway capacity to serve the south-east—RUCASTE—considered a number of options of increasing runway capacity at airports in south-east England, taking account of the contribution which regional airports can be expected to make. The group considered the need for and the impacts of the provision of additional runway capacity at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stanstead and Luton. It also noted, but did not examine in detail, the suggestion for a new airport in the Thames estuary. The group's report contains no specific recommendations although it concluded that benefits to passengers would justify a further runway at Heathrow or Gatwick by 2010, or at Stanstead by 2015. This conclusion was based on an assumption about the maximum achievable passenger throughput on the existing runways. The report was published in July 1993 and was followed by a period of public consideration. I am grateful to all the participants in the group for their assistance in producing a thorough and useful report.

The Government have concluded that RUCATSE's analysis shows a strong case for additional runway capacity in the south-east; but that more work is needed to inform decisions on any proposals which operators may bring forward for that additional capacity.

Our airports operate on a commercial basis and it is for the operators to bring forward proposals for development, where they see a business case, and take them through the planning processes. In doing so, they need to take account of the overall framework of the Government's airports policy, which indicates the factors that would weigh in Government decisions on such proposals. It has been suggested that the Government should seek to reintroduce traffic distribution rules in order to direct air traffic to use specific airports; the Government have considered this option and concluded that they do not wish to seek to influence the pattern of demand for commercial passenger services by the reintroduction of these rules.

Three important new considerations have emerged since the group reported; these require more work. First, an independent study of runway capacity at Heathrow, sponsored by National Air Traffic Services, BAA plc and the airlines, has produced a report suggesting that there is greater scope for increasing the utilisation of the existing runways at Heathrow than was previously envisaged. Before reaching any decisions, I am asking the CAA, in consultation with BAA and others, to examine further the gains that might be achieved and the environmental impact involved in making better use of the existing infrastructure at Heathrow.

Secondly, I am clear that BAA should not consider the options studied in RUCATSE for a third runway at Heathrow or for a second runway at Gatwick. However, it has been suggested that there may be better, less environmentally damaging, runway options than those considered by RUCATSE. I am therefore asking BAA to examine whether there might be less damaging options for development, such as a close parallel runway at Gatwick.

The above is without prejudice to my or the Secretary of State for the Environment's role in decisions on any future planning applications.

Thirdly, it has become clear that the issue of surface access to airports in the south-east, and particularly the scope for improved public transport links to, and between, the airports need further examination. I note that BAA has initiated a study and I will be commissioning further work on this.

The Government welcome the growth of regional airports. They recognise the benefits of liberalising air services to and from the regions. They also wish to provide the opportunity for the less busy airports in the south-east to develop. In particular, the Government draw attention to the capacity available at Stansted. The Government sought to accelerate these processes recently by liberalising transatlantic arrangements for regional airports, Luton and Stansted. Even on the most optimistic assumptions, however, regional growth will have a limited effect on the demand for additional airport capacity in the south-east. The Government also recognise the valuable contribution that small airfields can play, for example in serving business aviation.

We will continue to address the global impacts of air travel through work at the international level, to meet the goals of sustainable development; but these impacts are of very limited relevance to decisions on capacity at United Kingdom airports.

I expect the further work that I have commissioned to take between two and three years.

Train Accident, Kirkby Stephen

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make a statement about the passenger train collision near Kirkby Stephen on 31 January.

Dr. Mawhinney: The accident happened at about 18.56 after the 16.23 Carlisle-Leeds train was instructed to return to Carlisle because of flooding. Travelling north, the train ran into a landslide and was derailed into the path of the 17.45 Carlisle-Leeds train which was approaching on the adjacent line.

British Rail and Railtrack are conducting a joint injury into the accident. In addition, one of HM railway inspectorate's inspectors visited the scene of the accident and is investigating the circumstances.

HM coroner for the Carlisle area will be holding an inquest into the fatality that occurred, and has indicated that he wishes an inspector from HM railway inspectorate to assist in holding the inquest. The inspector's report under section 8 of the Railway Regulation Act 1871 will be made public.

Privatisation Programmes

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide estimates for the total amount that has been paid to N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd. with respect to any work undertaken by them on privatisation programmes in which his Department has been engaged since 1979 after taking account of inflation.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* The table lists the sales conducted by my Department in which N. M. Rothschild were appointed and the role to which they were appointed. The fees paid to firms appointed within the privatisation programme are commercially confidential.

British Airways—1987
Underwriting sale as secondary underwriters
British Airports Authority—1987
Underwriting sale as secondary underwriters

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* The severance payments made to special advisers in the Department of Transport in each of the last five years are as follows:

Year	*£*	
1990	6,654	December
1991	Nil	
1992	3,197	
1993	Nil	
1994	33,180	August/September—two individuals.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 3 February 1995

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Water Purification Plants

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total number of water purification plants held in storage by the Government; what is the purpose of the storage; how many have been released to assist the recent emergency in Rwanda; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Overseas Development Administration holds no water purification plants in store. If such items are to be supplied for overseas emergencies, they can be obtained rapidly from a variety of sources. No such plants have been directly provided by the ODA for the Rwandan emergency.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by his Department or agency.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for during the last 12 months through central funds is listed at annexe A. Further inquiries concerning courses which may be held locally throughout the Department would incur disproportionate costs.

The Lord Chancellor is responsible for three agencies—HM Land Registry, the Public Record Office and the Public Trust Office. The question concerns specific operational matters on which the chief executives are best placed to provide answers. I have accordingly asked chief executives to reply direct.

List of training and tuition courses with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by The Lord Chancellor's Department during the last 12 months

Course title	*Course objectives*	*Organisation engaged*	*Total cost of each course*	*Summary of responsibilities*	*Evaluation process*
Steeping up on promotion	1. Prepare a detailed personal development plan 2. Develop awareness of current priorities and managing issues facing senior managers 3. Consider wider management topics and their application to the Department	International Training Services Ltd	£8,961(3 stage modular approach)	Senior Managers (Grades 5/6), responsible for policy, legal work and operational matters	End of course evaluation process plus review day
Grade 7 foundation course	1. To introduce Grade 7 staff to the competences and the process of development 2. To identify training and development needs and produce a personal development plan	Price Waterhouse	£11,100(3 stage modular approach) Grade 7 staff responsible for policy, legal work and operational matters End of course evaluation process, follow-up interviews and development planning		

Courses paid for by the Lord Chancellor's Department for members of staff from Magistrates' courts service *Annex A*

Course title	*Course objectives*	*Organisations engaged*	*Total cost of each course*	*Summary of responsibilities*	*Evaluation process*
Mastering effective communication	To learn and practice effective skills for communicating with people in a way that can promote more productive and satisfying relationships at work and elsewhere	Effectiveness training consultants	£7,200 per cohort£81,671 average per year	Course offered to senior managers who had completed the Senior Management Development Programme	Evaluation questionnaire completed at the conclusion of each course

Courses paid for by the Lord Chancellor's Department for members of staff from Magistrates' courts service *Annex A*

Course title	*Course objectives*	*Organisations engaged*	*Total cost of each course*	*Summary of responsibilities*	*Evaluation process*
Diploma in higher education (Magisterial Law Distance Learning) and LLB (Distance Learning) (3 year course)	To enable assistants to obtain the qualifications necessary to be employed as a competent and efficient effective clerk in court	Nottingham Trent University	£149,408 per year	Trainee Court Clerks or people currently in administrative posts who is anticipated should be clerking courts within 2 years	A working group evaluated the benefits by questionnaires to current and former students. A number of students, their line managers or mentors were interviewed. A report was placed before the Training Policy Committee
Distance Learning Law Degree (4 year course)	To enable participants to quality to take courts and to continue to take a professional qualification	Manchester Metropolitan University	£18,836average per year	Trainee Court Clerks or people currently in administrative posts who it is anticipated should be clerking courts within 2 years	Questionnaires after each module
Diploma in Management studies (2 year course)	To raise the level of understanding of management processes and the management environment and to improve managerial performance	Bristol Business School—part of the University of the West of England, Bristol	£24,300average per year	The course is aimed at those either holding or moving into posts carrying essential managerial tasks	Questionnaires completed at the conclusion of each residential module, plus full evaluation study conducted in 1993
Senior Management Development Programme (extending over 6 months)	1. To enable managers within the Magistrates' Courts Service to identify the differences which they want to make both within the organisation and at the level of individual performance. 2. To enable individuals to develop and use their competences in sustaining these differences	Ashbridge Consulting Group—part of Ashbridge Management College	£91,755per cohort £370,830 average per year	Justices Clerks and Deputy Justices Clerks	Questionnaires completed at the conclusion of each module and anlaysed. A full evaluation project took place in 1993
Common Professional Examination Completion Course (1 year)	To confer on the successful student eligibility to proceed to the final professional examinations	Manchester Metropolitan University	£16,548per cohort	Court clerks who hold the Diploma in Magisterial Law and who wish to qualify as a barrister or solicitor	Questionnaires at end of modules
Professional Training and Development	To provide an introduction to training techniques and approaches to learning and teaching, assessment of learning needs of court staff and development of courses to meet those needs, and to use the knowledge and understanding of these skills to conduct evaluation and appraisal	University of Cambridge Board of Continuing Education	£5,300per cohort £59,916 average per year	Course designed for Senior Managers, Administrative and Legal Staff who have significant training responsibilities for Justices staff	Questionnaires after each module. A full study is being conducted

Courses paid for by the Lord Chancellor's Department for members of staff from Magistrates' courts service *Annex A*

Course title	*Course objectives*	*Organisations engaged*	*Total cost of each course*	*Summary of responsibilities*	*Evaluation process*
Senior Manager Development Initiative (SDI)—18 months duration	SDI a process of supported self-development, giving senior managers the opportunity to explore and develop their own managerial performance within a flexible, competence-based approach with supports MCI standards	Development Process (UK) Ltd	£73,757average cost per year	Senior Managers in the Service (usually Clerks of Justices, Clerks to Committee and Deputies)	Questionnaires completed at the conclusion of each module. The course will from part of the rolling programme of evaluations in due course

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 31 January 1995:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply to your question about training.

No individual training or tuition course at the public Record Office has exceeded £5,000. The overall cost of two longer-term, phased, training courses has exceeded £5,000.

1. Title: Senior Management Competences Programme

Objective: To improve the management and specialist skills of senior managers

Organisation engaged: Human Resource Partnership

Total cost: £60,768 (£934 a head)

Responsibilities of staff members: Senior managers throughout the Agency

Process of course evaluation: Invitation to tender and tender board. Individual post-course evaluations and a report from the Training Manager

2. Title: Training for Microsoft Office Computer Software

Objective: To train PRO staff on the new computer software package

Organisations engaged: FMI and Britech

Total cost: £31,537 (£152.35 a head)

Responsibilities of staff members: Staff throughout the Agency

Process of course evaluation: Invitation to tender and tender board. Individual post-course evaluations.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 3 February 1995:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning training and tuition courses in HM Land Registry during the last twelve months with a total cost paid by the Agency exceeding £5,000.

There were two such courses, both relating to Information Systems training, and I can provide the following information:

1. Course Title: Advanced PL1

Objective: To provide the knowledge and skills of advance PL1 facilities to programmers who had at least twelve months experience in using the language.

Supplier: Altergo Education, London

Total cost: £7,840 (inc. VAT)

Trainees: 10 members of Development Groups within the Registry's Computer Services Division whose prime responsibilities are application development.

Evaluation: Course critiques are completed by all trainees following completion of the course to assess how well objectives were met. Managers monitor the effectiveness of the training by evaluating the expected against the perceived improvement in skills and performance.

2. Course Title: Advanced DB2

Objective: To provide PL1 and Assembler programmers with the appropriate knowledge and skills of advanced DB2.

Supplier: Sequel, Milton Keynes

Total cost: £6,909 (inc. VAT)

Trainees: 12 members of Development Groups within the Registry's Computer Services Division whose prime responsibilities are application development.

Evaluation: As for Course No.1 above.

I do hope that this answers the points raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 1 February 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your parliamentary question, listed on 26 January 1995, regarding the Training and Tuition Courses exceeding £5000.

The PTO organised one training course where the cost exceeded £5000. The title of the course was "Mastering Effective Communication" and the key objective was for trainees to develop skills that will help them to:

- Influence others
- Constructively confront unacceptable behaviour in others that will be more likely to effect change and co-operation without defensiveness
- Resolve problems which are based on conflicting needs
- Help others to become more aware of the impact of their behaviour
- Help others to share their problems
- Develop personal power

The training was delivered by Effectiveness Training and Consulting, 11 Western Road, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, RG9 1JL. The cost of the one-week course for eight people was £5712.26, (which included a consultancy fee of £275 for gearing it specifically to PTO needs).

The course was aimed at SEO and HEO grades with staff management roles and/or caseworkers who worked directly with clients or their families.

Evaluation was carried out in the following manner.

- Observation and participation in the course by the Training Manager
- Questionnaire completed by the trainees immediately after the course.
- Follow-up questionnaire and ad hoc interviews with trainees and their line managers three months after the course to clarify what they are now doing differently as a result of the training.

I hope this deals with your query.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

World Summit for Social Development

Ms Lestor: To ask the Lord President of the Council what parliamentary procedure he proposes for pre-summit consideration of the principles of the world summit for social development in Copenhagen in March.

Mr. Newton: I have no current plans for a debate in Government time on the world summit for social development.

HEALTH

Health Care Expenditure

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was Britain's expenditure on public sector health care expressed as a percentage of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available; and what factors account for the relative change since 1979.

Mr. Sackville: The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development collects and publishes figures for health spending. The table shows the figures requested for 1979 and 1990, the latest year for which figures are available for all countries.

Public expenditure on health care—value per capita in $ at current prices using purchasing power parities

	1979	*1990*
United Kingdom	353	825
OECD Average	389	901
United Kingdom as percentage of OECD average	91	92

These figures are not fully comparable because of differences in definitions between countries. In addition, comparisons between expenditure figures alone ignore the efficiency and effectiveness with which resources are used. The national health service improved its efficiency by over a fifth between 1978–79 and 1991–92. In contrast, unit costs in the health care systems of comparable countries have generally risen over the last decade.

Nurses

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 10 January, *Official Report*, column *113*, when the information for the number of qualified nursing staff by specialty for each region in 1994 will become available.

Mr. Sackville: Data for qualified nursing staff by specialty for each region should be available by mid-summer 1995.

NHS Trusts (Termination Payments)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *985-86* regarding termination payments to senior executives, to whom each of the two payments from the Hammersmith Hospitals NHS trust was made.

Mr. Malone: This is a matter for the Hammersmith Hospitals national health service trust.

Rehabilitation Beds

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many long-stay rehabilitation beds in *(a)* London, *(b)* Birmingham and *(c)* Manchester have been closed since 1979.

Mr. Bowis: Long-stay rehabilitation is not a recognised classification for national health service beds.

General Practitioners (Registration)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has had on difficulties encountered by persons who, on moving home try to register with a new general practitioner *(a)* in London and *(b)* elsewhere in England; and if she will make a statement on measures to assist persons encountering such difficulties.

Mr. Malone: None. Family health services authorities have responsibility for assisting any patient who experiences difficulty in registering with a general practitioner.

High-security Psychiatric Services

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to publish her decision on the future of high-security NHS psychiatric services.

Mr. Bowis: The official group announced in my reply on 14 July 1994 to my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson), columns *701–702*, has now submitted its advice. We will announce our conclusions when we have completed our consideration of this advice.

Limb Defects

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she will publish the report of the Advisory Group on Limb Defects.

Mr. Sackville: The group's report has been published today and copies placed in the Library.

I welcome the publication of the group's report which has been prepared promptly. Although defects of the limb which are present at birth are rare, when they occur they are very distressing for the parents and families of the children concerned and speculation on the causes can be a source of worry for women who are pregnant or who are thinking of becoming pregnant. I am particularly glad that REACH—the Association for Children with Hand or Arm Deficiency—which represents many parents of children with limb defects, were able to send an observer to the advisory group and that it has been able to endorse the group's advice.

The causes of most limb defects are unknown. The Government set up the advisory group on limb defects to determine the best way of making progress. The group's report sets out a programme of action which we intend to take forward. The group recommends a detailed, thorough review of all current relevant research and my officials are negotiating with a research team which will undertake this task. The group has also identified three further lines of inquiry and the Department is exploring these.

The advisory group also considered the value of a case-control study of limb reduction defects. Such studies are most appropriate when a strong new hypothesis—for example, that a particular environmental factor might be a cause—has been raised. There is no such hypothesis in the case of limb defects. The advisory group has therefore advised against such a study at present.

The advisory group also reviewed the evidence of possible adverse effects of specific agents such as dioxins and heavy metals. They found no evidence to show that these substances cause limb reduction defects.

The advisory group commended the steps that are being taken by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys to improve the recording and notification of limb defects and birth defects generally, to strengthen the means of monitoring trends, and changes which might merit further investigation.

Hospital Beds, London

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the relationship between the need for hospital beds in London and the number of beds available; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: It is for commissioning authorities to assess health care requirements locally and to secure the appropriate services.

London Implementation Zone

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give the latest available figure for the number of *(a)* practice managers and *(b)* general practitioners in the London implementation zone; and how many there were in September 1990.

Mr. Malone: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) on 6 December 1994, column *198.*

Information on the number of practice managers is not available centrally.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the percentage increase in treatments in casualty departments within the London implementation zone area over the past three years; what plans she has to reduce the number of casualty departments; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The increase in attendances at accident and emergency departments in Greater London over the years 1991–92 to 1993–94 was 2.1 per cent. Health authorities are responsible for planning future demand for casualty facilities.

Cot Deaths

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the budget for health promotional activities on cot death in each of the last five years; and what is the projected budget for the next two years.

Mr. Sackville *[pursuant to his reply, 18 January 1995, c. 481-82]:* I regret that there were errors in the table relating to health promotion activity on smoking in my previous reply. The following table shows the corrected data.

£000

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
DH Spending						
Cot Death	1611	—	21	30	—	—
HEA spending						
Teenage smoking campaign	2,520	1,054	1,199	1,260	—	—
Smoking in Pregnancy	514	564	446	480	—	—
Adult and parental smoking	1,409	3,820	6,611	7,552	4,000	4,000
Birth to five	253	231	77	[1]107	—	—
Pregnancy book	326	328	151	[1]196	—	—
Totals	6,633	5,997	8,505	9,625	4,000	4,000

[1] Provisional figures for the year to date. Further expenditure is planned to the end of the current financial year.

Baby Milk Products

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her Department's assessment of the relative merits of breast feeding and baby milk products; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Based on medical advice, the Government have consistently supported breastfeeding as the best means of feeding a baby. Where a mother is either unable or chooses not to breastfeed, there is a range of suitable infant formulae available.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce measures to implement the World Health Organisation's code of marketing in relation to baby milk products.

Mr. Sackville: The Infant Formula and Follow-on Formula Regulations 1995 on the composition, labelling and marketing of these products were laid before Parliament on 16 January 1995 and will come into force on 1 March 1995. The regulations implement relevant European Community legislation which is based on the principles of the World Health Organisation international code of marketing of breast milk substitutes which the United Kingdom supports.

Generic Prescribing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the proportion of generic prescribing for each family health services authority divided by *(a)* general practitioner fundholders and *(b)* non-fundholders in each of the last three years.

Mr. Malone: The information will be placed in the Library.

NHS Contracts

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the value of NHS contracts with non-NHS

providers *(a)* in total, *(b)* by each regional health authority, *(c)* by each general practitioner fundholding practice, *(d)* by each trust hospital and *(e)* by each district health authority.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 20 January 1995]:* The value of national health service contracts with non-NHS providers for 1993–94 in total was £357,354,000. A breakdown of this total by each regional health authority, by family health services authority—for general practice fundholders—and by each trust hospital and each district health authority will be placed in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits Agency Medical Services

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list all *(a)* specialist medical and *(b)* general training courses by duration and numbers attending since January 1993 for experienced medical practitioners employed by the Benefits Agency medical services section which has responsibility for Northumberland and Tyne and Wear;

(2) if he will give the total number of experienced medical practitioners employed by the Benefits Agency medical services section which has responsibility for Northumberland and Tyne and Wear;

(3) if he will give the total budget by year since 1993 for training courses provided for experienced medical practitioners employed by the Benefits Agency medical services section which has responsibility for Northumberland and Tyne and Wear.

Mr. Hague: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Bill Etherington, dated 2 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for the number of experienced medical practitioners employed by the Benefits Agency's Medical Services (BAMS) in Northumberland and Tyne and Wear. In addition, you require the total budget since 1993 for training courses in Northumberland and Tyne and Wear and a list of all courses for experienced medical practitioners attended since that date.

There are ten medical advisers employed by the BAMS in the Northumberland and Tyne and Wear area. In addition, there are approximately one hundred and thirty six medical practitioners who undertake examinations in connection with a variety of benefits on a sessional basis. These medical practitioners are not employed by BAMS, but are paid a sessional fee for the work they undertake.

I have provided at Annex A information relating to budget figures for training courses in the Northumberland and Tyne and Wear area as requested.

At Annex B is information relating to the specialist medical training undertaken since January 1993 by the ten medical advisers employed by the BAMS in Northumberland and Tyne and Wear.

At Annex C I have provided details of general training courses attended.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A

Budget for BAMS' training courses in the Northumberland and Tyne and Wear area

	Locally held training budget £	*Centrally held training budget*[1] £
1993–94	1,500	200,000
1994–95	1,500	[2]3,000,000

[1] Of the centrally held training budget, approximately ten per cent. is spent in the North East, which includes the Northumberland and Tyne and Wear area.

[2] The increase in the centrally held budget is due to an increase in training arising from the introduction of Incapacity Benefit.

Annex B

Nature	*Duration*	*Number of medical advisors*
Disability equality training	2 days	1
Occupational asthma	2 days	2
Continuing medical education	2 days	7
Chronic bronchitis and emphysema	3 days	9
Training in reading X-rays	1–2 times weekly for 4 months	9
Radiation protection course	1 day	1
GP refresher training	4 days	1
PD D4 symposium	1 day	2
Incapacity Benefit procedures	1 day	10
Incapacity Benefit training	5 days	7

Annex C

Nature	*Duration*	*Number of medical advisers*	*Number of sessional doctors*[1]
Total quality management	1 day	10	—
Influencing through assertiveness	4 days	1	—
Effective presentation	4 days	1	—
Communication catalyses change	4 days	10	—
How adults learn	2 days	1	—
Potentially aggressive situations	1 day	10	—
Potentially aggressive situations	2 hours	—	76
Equal opportunities	1 day	10	76
Being a manager	2 days	4	—
Recruitment/selection interviewing	3 days	3	—
Stress management	2 days	1	—

[1] The Potentially Aggressive Situations course and the Equal Opportunities course were also made available to doctors who undertake sessional work.

Child Support

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated cost for reprogramming information systems because of changes to the Child Support Act 1991 announced on 23 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. Nigel Jones, dated 2 February 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the cost of reprogramming information systems following the changes to the Child Support Act 1991 announced on 23 January 1995.

The estimated cost of reprogramming the Child Support Agency's information systems is £0.65 million.

I hope that this is of help.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the absenteeism rates for *(a)* the Child Support Agency, *(b)* his Department, *(c)* the Benefits Agency, *(d)* the Contributions Agency, *(e)* the Information Technology Services Agency, *(f)* the Resettlement Agency and *(g)* the War Pensions Agency in 1994.

Mr. Hague: Information on sickness absence rates for 1994 will not be available until later in the year.

Life-threatening Illnesses

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy on the provision of rights for those suffering from life-threatening illness not already identified in the Disability Discrimination Bill.

Mr. Hague: The Bill does not seek to identify specific illnesses but establishes a framework definition of those who would be protected by the proposed rights. This is that a person has a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Further details on the interpretation of disability are given in schedule 1 of the Bill.

Income Support

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated cost of restoring income support to unemployed 16 and 17-year-olds.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

Severe Hardship Allowance

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the number of *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful claims for the severe hardship allowance in each month since its introduction; and if he will give these figures as a percentage of the total number of claims.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the tables.

Month	*Successful*	*1988 Per cent.*	*Unsuccessful*	*Per cent.*
January	—	—	—	—
February	—	—	—	—
March	—	—	—	—
April	—	—	—	—
May	—	—	—	—
June	—	—	—	—
July	—	—	—	—
August	—	—	—	—
September	234	69	107	31
October	311	63	183	37
November	594	70	259	30
December	488	69	224	31

Month	*Successful*	*1989 Per cent.*	*Unsuccessful*	*Per cent.*
January	705	65	387	35
February	760	59	518	41
March	1,012	65	554	35
April	999	64	562	36
May	952	69	427	31
June	1,133	63	666	37
July	1,173	67	569	33
August	1,250	69	571	31
September	1,291	70	558	30
October	795	65	410	35
November	791	65	433	35
December	895	69	409	31

Month	*Successful*	*1990 Per cent.*	*Unsuccessful*	*Per cent.*
January	1,440	70	625	30
February	1,386	67	693	33
March	1,671	67	822	33
April	1,332	72	511	28
May	1,660	67	831	33
June	1,608	72	631	28
July	1,755	72	681	28

Month	Successful	1990 Per cent.	Unsuccessful	Per cent.
August	1,963	70	832	30
September	1,611	74	575	26
October	1,841	74	642	26
November	1,788	76	566	24
December	1,323	77	398	23

Month	Successful	1991 Per cent.	Unsuccessful	Per cent.
January	2,540	75	838	25
February	2,711	75	912	25
March	2,799	76	899	24
April	3,277	77	973	23
May	3,589	79	941	21
June	3,490	82	761	18
July	4,478	81	1,085	19
August	4,242	80	1,056	20
September	4,301	80	1,107	20
October	4,613	80	1,168	20
November	4,317	82	972	18
December	3,442	84	651	16

Month	Successful	1992 Per cent.	Unsuccessful	Per cent.
January	6,908	85	1,228	15
February	6,187	83	1,281	17
March	6,551	83	1,384	17
April	6,781	82	1,440	18
May	6,627	82	1,414	18
June	7,308	81	1,688	19
July	8,075	82	1,771	18
August	7,702	83	1,570	17
September	7,350	81	1,692	19
October	7,418	80	1,838	20
November	6,783	78	1,885	22
December	5,716	80	1,467	20

Month	Successful	1993 Per cent.	Unsuccessful	Per cent.
January	10,797	85	1,850	15
February	9,202	81	2,103	19
March	10,840	83	2,145	17
April	10,759	86	1,762	14
May	10,101	85	1,744	15
June	10,238	86	1,695	14
July	11,298	88	1,578	12
August	10,879	87	1,568	13
September	10,385	88	1,484	12
October	7,841	87	1,135	13
November	9,331	88	1,315	12
December	6,857	88	963	12

Month	Successful	1994 Per cent.	Unsuccessful	Per cent.
January	12,348	89	1,522	11
February	11,190	88	1,517	12
March	12,518	88	1,636	12
April	8,892	87	1,317	13
May	10,953	86	1,824	14
June	9,587	83	1,896	17
July	9,731	81	2,264	19
August	9,322	82	2,030	18
September	8,268	83	1,726	17
October	7,149	82	1,590	18

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost to the national insurance fund of all current holders of an appropriate personal pension with an annual income of *(a)* £2,000 or below *(b)* up to £3,000, *(c)* up to £4,000, *(d)* up to £5,000, *(e)* up to £6,000, *(f)* up to £7,000, *(g)* up to £8,000, *(h)* up to £9,000 and *(i)* up to £10,000 opting back into state earnings-related pensions.

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 25 January 1995]:* Information is not available in the form requested. Any estimates of the total cost to the national insurance fund of current holders of appropriate personal pensions opting back into the state earnings-related pension scheme would depend on a large number of unknown factors: these include how long the people concerned would remain contracted in to SERPS, how long they would otherwise have contributed to APP schemes and what their future earnings would be. The table gives illustrative estimates of the cost arising, in selected future years, from contributions paid solely in the single year in which the individuals concerned are assumed to contract into SERPS.

Extra SERPS expenditure in selected years if APP holder in low earnings bands opt back into SERPS for one year. £ million 1994–95 prices

APP holders with earnings under (£per annum)	*2010-11*	*2020-21*	*2030-31*	*2040-41*	*2050-51*
2,000	—	—	—	—	—
3,000	0	0	0	0	0
4,000	0	0	1	1	0
5,000	0	1	2	2	1
6,000	0	2	4	5	3
7,000	1	3	10	10	5
8,000	1	5	15	15	10
9,000	2	10	25	25	15
10,000	2	10	30	35	20

Notes:
1. Little extra cost until 2010 as most APP holders are under age 45.
2. Estimates of numbers affected based on data for 1992–93, the most recently available, used to estimate proportions of APP holders in respect of people in the earnings bands quoted.
3. Earnings under £2,000 would not accrue SERPS so no financial effect in respect of that year.
4. Earnings have been used, as a breakdown by income is not available.
5. The year in which opting back into SERPS is assumed to take place is 1994–95.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Burma

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government will take with regard to the recent Burmese military offensive against the Karen people.

Mr. Goodlad: Together with our European Union partners, we intend to express our concern directly to the ruling military regime in Burma about the recent attacks on the headquarters of the Karen ethnic group. We will be pressing for clarification of their commitment to national reconciliation and democratic reform.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures Her Majesty's Government have taken to promote bilateral trade with Burma; and what account is being taken of the Burmese Government's human rights violations.

Mr. Goodlad: We try to ensure that British firms are aware of trade opportunities in Burma not covered by the EU arms embargo, but we offer no financial support to them.

We remain acutely concerned about the continued abuse of human rights in Burma. We and our European Union partners have made it clear to the ruling military regime that normalisation of our relations depends on progress in key areas, including human rights.

Public Funding

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what public funds were made available in the current financial year and what changes are likely for the year 1995–96 for payments to *(a)* the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and *(b)* the Council for Education in World Citizenship; and in which countries each organisation operates.

Mr. Baldry: *(a)* The Westminster Foundation for Democracy received a grant in aid of £2.2 million for the current financial year. The foundation will receive £2.5 million for the financial year 1995–96. The foundation exists to promote democratic development worldwide. The majority of its income is spent in central and eastern Europe, former Soviet Union and anglophone Africa.

(b) The Council for Education in World Citizenship is an independent charity operating throughout the United Kingdom, which currently receives funding from the Department for Education, the Scottish Education Department and the Department of Education, Northern Ireland. In 1994–95, the DFE grant amounted to £110,000. In 1995–96, the DFE proposes to provide CEWC with funds totalling £85,000.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what public representations were made to the Indonesian delegation to the consultative group on Indonesia in July 1994 in respect of the violent suppression of a peaceful demonstration in Jakarta and the suppression of three publications; and if he will explain the phrase in the margins of the July

meeting as used in his answer to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, column 752.

Mr. Goodlad: None. We raised our concerns about the banning of the three journals in the margins—outside the formal sessions—of the July meeting of the consultative group for Indonesia, in bilateral representations to the Indonesian delegation.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the cost of Britain's diplomatic presence in Indonesia for each year since 1979.

Mr. Goodlad: The total annual costs of Britain's diplomatic presence in Indonesia since the financial year 1983–84 are given. Figures for earlier years are not available.

Year	*£*
1983–84	1,437,785
1984–85	1,810,622
1985–86	1,925,507
1986–87	1,745,757
1987–88	1,798,299
1988–89	1,935,654
1989–90	2,206,047
1990–91	2,766,434
1991–92	3,003,996
1992–93	3,394,306
1993–94	3,512,444

Mrs Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many diplomatic staff have been stationed in Indonesia in each year since 1979.

Mr. Goodlad: The number of United Kingdom-based staff stationed in Indonesia—at the British embassy, Jakarta—for each year since 1982 are listed. The figures include representatives from other Government Departments and agencies. Figures for earlier years are not available.

Year	*Number*
1982	30
1983	30
1984	30
1985	31
1986	31
1987	30
1988	31
1989	33
1990	33
1991	33
1992	33
1993	33
1994	32
1995	30

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last raised the question of Indonesia's illegal occupation of East Timor at meetings of the Group of Seven.

Mr. Goodlad: As far as we are aware, the subject has not been addressed at G7 meetings.

DEFENCE

Military Training (Colombia)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many military personnel visited Colombia in 1994 to train military students;

(2) when military personnel were first dispatched to Colombia to assist in the training of military students; and if he will make a statement;

(3) from which regiments military personnel are dispatched to Colombia to train military students.

Mr. Soames: British military personnel have been providing training to the Colombian authorities to help counter the illicit production and trafficking of drugs since 1989. Details of the assistance provided are confidential between the two Governments.

Low Flying

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reported incidents of low flying there were in each year since 1990.

Mr. Soames: The numbers of inquiries and complaints received by my Department about military low flying in the United Kingdom in each year since 1990 are as follows:

1990: 7,130
1991: 4,846
1992: 6,295
1993: 5,738
1994: 5,778

Ex-service Men's Organisations

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what recent discussions he has had with his colleagues in Government regarding a single ministry for ex-service men's organisations;

(2) what discussions he has had with ex-service men's associations regarding a single Ministry to work with ex-service men's associations.

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence met the Minister of State for Social Security and Disabled People together with representatives of the Royal British Legion and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 23 November 1994.

Nerve Agents

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the provisions in health and safety laws and regulations from which the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down is exempt, providing an explanation of why the exemption has been allowed in each case;

(2) what research has been carried out on the nerve agent GB at the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down since the closure of the nerve agent plant at Nancekuke; what quantity of the nerve agent GB has been used in this research at Porton Down; with which country the results of the research have been exchanged; and under which defence agreements these results were exchanged;

(3) how many service volunteers were involved in studies with the nerve agent pre-treatment set tablets at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down; in which years these studies took place; what was the nature and purpose of these studies; what was the conclusion of the studies; what are the side-effects of NAPS; and under which defence agreement the results of these studies were exchanged with other countries;

(4) what was the purpose of research on the nerve agent GE at the nerve agent plant at Nancekuke, Cornwall; what quantities of nerve agent GE were used in this research; with which other countries the results of this research were shared; and under which defence agreements these results were exchanged;

(5) what is the purpose of the contract from the Directorate of Science (Ballistic Missile Defence) which is being carried out at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down; when this contract started; when it will end; and what is its value;

(6) how many service volunteers were involved in studies with the S10 respirator at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down; in which years these studies took place; what was the nature and purpose of these studies; what was the conclusion of these studies; and under which defence agreement the results of these studies were exchanged with other countries.

Mr. Soames: These are matters for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 3 February 1995:

Question 11, Order Paper 26 January 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if he will list the provisions in health and safety laws and regulations from which the Chemical and Biological Defence Establish at Porton Down is exempt, providing an explanation of why the exemption has been allowed in each case has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The Ministry of Defence is bound by the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 except where the Secretary of State chooses to exercise his powers to exempt the MOD on grounds of National Security. To date the Secretary of State has not exercised this.

4. The Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is a Defence Executive Agency and as such is subject to regulation by the Health and Safety Executive on the same basis as any other MOD establishment. Safety is of paramount importance at CBDE and is a delegated line management responsibility as all members of staff are responsible for their own safety and that of others. Line management carry out six monthly safety inspections and are supported by an independent safety section. These regular inspections are complemented by periodic safety audits carried out by the Safety Services Organisation of the Ministry of Defence and by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 3 February 1995:

Question 14, Order Paper 26 January 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what research has been carried out on the nerve agent GB at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down since the closure of the nerve agent plant at Nancekuke; what quantity of the nerve agent GB has been used in this research at Porton Down; with which country the results of the research have been exchanged; and under which defence agreements these results were exchanged has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. Since the closure of the Chemical Defence Establishment at Nancekuke in 1980 research on the nerve agent GB at CBDE Porton Down has covered all aspects concerned with the provision of effective protective measures against the threat that GB might be used by an aggressor against the UK Armed Forces. This has included hazard assessment, detection and identification, physical protection contamination monitoring and management and the use of prophylactic and therapeutic medical countermeasures. Our records that the quantity of GB used in research at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment from 1985 to the present date is about 16 kg.

4. The results of this work were part of the chemical and biological defence programme and would have formed part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with our allies under the agreements covering research, development, deployment and standardisation of chemical and biological defence equipment such as those listed by the Rt Hon Archie Hamilton in his reply of 21 May 1992, Official Report, Column 255-256.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 3 February 1995:

Question 15, Order Paper 26 January 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many Service volunteers were involved in studies with the nerve agent pre-treatment set tablets at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down; in which years these studies took place; what was the nature and purpose of these studies; what was the conclusion of the studies; what are the side-effects of NAPS; and under which defence agreement the results of these studies were exchanged with other countries has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use service volunteers to:

a. assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

b. develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and

c. evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. A number of studies using Service volunteers were carried out primarily between 1970 and the early 1980s at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, RMCS Shrivenham, Dover, Bulford, Cambridge Military Hospital as well as some collaborative work with the Institution of Aviation Medicine and more recently in 1993 at the Cambridge Military Hospital. These studies were to evaluate the acceptability of using pyridostigmine bromide and whether such use had adverse side effects or was affected by the nature of the duties of the Service personnel. These studies which lasted for up to eight weeks included the assessment of the effects of NAPS on volunteers undergoing strenuous exercise and of a

thermally stressful environment. Our records indicate that a total of about 300 Service volunteers received NAPS during these studies.

4. The short term side effects attributable to the administration of NAPS include; increased frequency of bowel action but rarely overt diarrhoea, nausea and abdominal pain, increased frequency of urination and the worsening of established upper respiratory infection, runny nose and cough.

5. These studies concluded that pyridostigmine bromide in NAPS give considerable protection against all organophosphorus nerve agents with no adverse effects and did not interfere with military duties.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 3 February 1993:

Question 22, Order Paper 26 January 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what was the purpose of research on the nerve agent GE at the nerve agent plant at Nancekuke, Cornwall; what quantities of nerve agent GE were used in this research; with which other countries the results of this research were shared; and under which defence agreements these results were exchanged has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forced have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. My earlier answer to you of 11 January 1994, Official Report, 11 January 1994 (Column 163–4) indicated the approximate periods during which research into nerve agents was carried out at Nancekuke. The majority of the work relating to the nerve agent GE was carried out at the Chemical Defence Research Establishment at Sutton Oak during the late 1940s and early 1950s when GE was studied as part of a systematic approach to the process chemistry of all the nerve agents in the G series. The chemistry of GE is very similar to that of GB and both are dependent upon the intermediate phosphonous dichloride. Although GE is less toxic than GB, it was believed that it was easier to produce. Some studies were devoted to investigating this. Our records indicate that about 700 lbs of GE was produced at Sutton Oak in these studies. Although it was originally envisaged that GE would be produced at Nancekuke in the event interest in GE lapsed and little if any work on GE was carried out at Nancekuke.

4. The results of this work would have formed part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with the United States and Canada under the Tripartite Conferences on toxicological warfare.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 3 February 1995:

Question 23, Order paper 26 January 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State asking what is the purpose of the contract from the Directorate of Science (Ballistic Missile Defence) which is being carried out at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down; when this contract started; when it will end; and what is its value has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is pursuing a technology research programme into the defeat of attacks by ballistic missiles with chemical or biological warheads as part of a wider lethality technology research programme which is being funded by the US Government under the terms and conditions of the 1985 US/UK Strategic Defence Initiative Memorandum of Understanding. CBDE's involvement started in May 1992 and is planned to complete later this year, unless a further option of one year, included in the original arrangements, is taken up. The total value of the work due to complete later this year is $9.2M.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 2 February 1995:

Question 26, Order Paper 26 January 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many Service volunteers were involved in studies with the S10 respirator at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down; in which years these studies took place; what was the nature and purpose of these studies; what was the conclusion of these studies and under which defence agreement the results of these studies were exchanged with other countries has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use service volunteers to:

a. assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

b. develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and

c. evaluate the effects of very low and medically safety concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally,

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. Studies took place between August 1984 and February 1985 to gather information on facial and eye to eyepiece dimensions. These took place at various Service units and involved 1,511 Service volunteers. The conclusions led to recommendations for some minor modifications of design and similar small scale studies involving about 30 or 40 volunteers confirmed that the modified design met the requirements.

4. During the same period, laboratory faceseal leakage trials were carried out at CBDE using 249 Service volunteers to measure protection levels as laid down in the NATO Triptych. The test aerosol used in these faceseal leakage trials was sub-micron sodium chloride particles. The trials demonstrated that the respirator performance met the design specification.

5. The S10 respirator is now standard issue to all Service personnel. Consequently all studies at CBDE involving Service volunteers wearing Individual Protective Equipment (IPE) also involve the use of the S10 respirator. Our records are not maintained in a way to readily allow us to identify the number of Service personnel who have worn the S10 respirator and taken part in these studies. Volunteers wearing the S10 respirator have participated in studies to assess the protection given against chemical warfare agents using harmless stimulants such as nebulised corn oil. The S10 respirator has also been worn in studies of the effect of IPE in different climatic conditions to assess the effects on performance of standard military tasks and to assess the physiological load induced by breathing through the respirator under different exercise conditions in order to quantify the degradation in physical performance expected as a result of wearing the respirator.

6. The results of this work were part of the chemical and biological defence programme and would have formed part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with our allies under the agreements covering research, development, deployment and standardisation of chemical and biological defence equipment such as those listed by the Rt. Hon. Archie Hamilton in his reply of 21 May 1992, Official Report, Column 255–256.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which years studies with service volunteers were undertaken at RMCS Shrivenham; what was the purpose and conclusions of these studies; how many studies were carried out there; and how many service volunteers were involved in these tests.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 3 February 1995:

Question 17, Order Paper 26 January 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State asking in which years studies with Service volunteers were undertaken at RMCS Shrivenham; what was the purpose and conclusions of these studies; how many studies were carried out there; and how many Service volunteers were involved in these tests has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use service volunteers to:

a. assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures,

b. develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and

c. evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. The Nerve Agent Pretreatment Set (NAPS) was developed in response to a requirement which called for a pretreatment effective against poisoning by all known nerve agents. A number of studies were conducted by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment to identify the effective oral dose regime which used in conjunction with therapy would provide protection against nerve agent poisoning whilst producing minimal or nil side effects.

4. One of these studies took place at RMCS Shrivenham in 1980. Twenty-eight military personnel on a training course volunteered to take part and the conclusions of the study confirmed earlier findings that the side effects from the taking of NAPS were minimal and did not interfere with military duties.

Spy Recruitment

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain for his Department a copy of the article, details of which have been sent to him.

Mr. Soames: Copies of the article are held by my Department.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will commission research to investigate any possible future risk to fishermen fishing the deep waters west of the Hebrides from chemical weapons dumped in the area after the second world war; and if he will discuss with other European Governments collective ways of addressing this issue.

Mr. Soames: The potential hazards of chemical waste dump sites and whether there is a need for any remedial action have been reviewed by the Helsinki commission and the Oslo commission. The results of this work have been reported to the global London convention. The consensus of international scientific opinion is to leave CW dump sites undisturbed. Current scientific evidence indicates CW dump sites present no significant risk to human health or to the marine environment and the living resources it supports, now or in the future. Chemical warfare agents either rapidly hydrolise to non-toxic components or are rendered ineffective through dilution. Given this background and the depth of water in which the vessels were scuttled, no monitoring of the Atlantic dump sites has been undertaken or is planned.

Service Personnel (Women)

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column 2, if he will list the ranks of each of the armed services in which there are no women serving.

Mr. Soames: As at 1 October 1994, the information requested is as follows:

Royal Naval Services[1]	*Army*	*Royal Air Force*
Admiral of the Fleet	Field Marshal	Marshal of the RAF
Admiral	General	Air Chief Marshal
Vice Admiral	Lieutenant General	Air Marshal
Rear Admiral	Major General	Air Vice Marshal
		Air Commodore

[1] Women do not serve in the Royal Marines apart from the Band Service where the only ranks in which women are serving are marine (2nd class) and junior.

Advertisements

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions and in what circumstances in the last five years advertisements have been placed in newspaper or periodicals which have been described as being issued by or on behalf of Ministers in his Department rather than on behalf of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Freeman: Advertisements for land and property for sale by the Ministry of Defence are normally issued in the name of the Secretary of State for Defence. Records of the numbers of advertisements over the past five years are not kept centrally.

Remote Control Undersea Detonators

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has received on the sale of remote control undersea detonators to Iraq by Oceano Instruments UK Ltd. of Edinburgh in 1990; and whether Lord Justice Scott has asked his Department for any information held on this equipment sale.

Mr. Freeman: These matters are being investigated by Sir Richard Scott and it would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment. The question of information requested by the Scott inquiry is a matter for the inquiry and the Ministry of Defence.

Arms Sales

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is in relation to answering questions relating to details of arms sales to particular countries.

Mr. Freeman: In general, it remains Government policy not to reveal details of arms sales to particular countries. Such information is confidential between the purchaser and the supplier.

Gulf War

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration his Department has given to the report by Wing Commander Bill Coker concerning

illnesses suffered by service personnel since serving in the Gulf war; if he will publish the report; what assessment he has made of the percentage of people diagnosed as ill by Wing Commander C[illegible] and if he will now establish an independent medical inquiry.

Mr. Soames: Contrary to media speculation, no such report exists. Gulf veterans who consider that their health has been adversely affected by their service in the Gulf continue to be assessed under the Department's medical assessment programme and detailed preliminary findings will be made public at an appropriate stage when sufficient have been examined to draw provisional conclusions. Of those seen so far, approximately 25 per cent. have been diagnosed as suffering from psychological conditions, 20 per cent. from a range of serious well-recognised medical conditions unrelated to service in the Gulf, 10 per cent. from chronic fatigue syndrome and the remainder from a range of minor physical ailments. None of the conditions has been found to be peculiar to service in the Gulf. There is no single illness, major or minor, common to those he has examined and no evidence to suggest the existence of a Gulf war syndrome. Consequently, there is no reason to establish an independent inquiry.

Warships

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it remains his Department's policy to maintain around 33 warships; what consideration he has given to changing this policy; what consultations he has had with the Admiral of the Fleet on any change in the number of warships required for the Royal Navy; how many warships he estimates the United Kingdom will posses by 2000; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Royal Navy currently maintains a surface fleet of 97 commissioned vessels, including 36 destroyers and frigates. As set out in the last year's statement on the Defence Estimates, we continue to plan for a future force level of 35 destroyers and frigates from 1995.

Land Mines

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *445*, what are the other established criteria in deciding the export of land mine components.

Mr. Freeman: The other established criteria are those used in deciding whether to grant export licences for any defence equipment, and include the guidelines agreed by the permanent five members of the Security Council of the United Nations; with European Union partners; and in the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Haymes Garth

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *446*, when the conclusions of the KPMG Peat Marwick report concerning the expenditure at the residence known as Haymes Garth will be reported to the House.

Mr. Soames: As I said in my answer to the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) on 4 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *85*, we will make a full report to the House on the conclusion of the work which has been set in hand to look into expenditure on Haymes Garth and other official service residences.

Intra-departmental Facsimiles

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in the last year intra-departmental facsimile messages have been sent to the wrong destination; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: This information is not recorded.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the security implications of intra-departmental facsimile messages mistakenly sent to the wrong destination; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Should a breach of security occur, the circumstances would be investigated by my Department's security directorate or the appropriate single service security authority. Additionally, an investigation into local procedures would be undertaken by line management.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has initiated an inquiry into mistakes in his Department resulting in the sending of facsimile messages to the wrong destination; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Should a breach of security occur from the mis-dialling and transmission of a facsimile message, the appropriate departmental authority would investigate the incident.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the intra-departmental facsimile messages sent to the wrong destination in the last year have been *(a)* classified and *(b)* unclassified.

Mr. Soames: Although records would be kept when breaches of security occur, no central record of these is maintained.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the effect of the facsimile message mistakenly sent to *The News* in Plymouth in April 1994, on the career prospects of the officers who were its subject.

Mr. Soames: None.

Golf Courses

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *690*, when the hon. Member for South Shields will receive an answer to his question about golf courses.

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member shortly, and a copy of his letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Royal Army Dental Corps

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what conditions civilian students are admitted to dental hygiene courses at the Royal Army Dental Corps training unit at Aldershot; and how many such students have been admitted in each of the past five years.

Mr. Freeman: Civilian students are admitted to dental hygienist courses at RADC Aldershot on a "space available" and repayment basis. Over the last five years, two one-year courses have been run every year with a

maximum of 10 students per course. At present, only one course is being offered and this begins in March 1995. Priority is given to armed forces students, but any surplus places may be allocated to civilian students.

During the past five years, a total of 30 civilian students have been trained at RADC Aldershot as follows.

Service and civilian students admitted to dental hygienist course at RADC Aldershot

Date	*Service students*	*Civilian students*
January 1990	6	4
September 1990	7	3
January 1991	6	4
September 1991	9	1
January 1992	9	1
September 1992	6	4
January 1993	7	3
September 1993	6	4
January 1994	8	2
September 1994	6	4
Total	70	30

Noise Pollution Complaints

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints about noise pollution from each proof and experimental establishment at Shoeburyness and Pendine were received in each calendar month from January 1992 to date.

Mr. Freeman: I will write to the hon. Member.

Trident

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the percentage production outside the Trident warhead programme by value at the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Llanishen, Cardiff, in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Freeman: Figures for each of the last 10 years could not be produced without disproportionate effort. During the period 1984 to date, however, somewhat less than half the output of the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Llanishen, Cardiff has been related to the Trident programme. The balance of capacity has been allocated to other nuclear work save for 5 to 10 per cent. which consisted of work, primarily high-precision machining, undertaken on behalf of commercial customers.

Rocket Tests

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements exist with the Russian Federation and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to ensure that the Russian military or Government do not misinterpret as offensive the testing of rockets launched for scientific research with particular reference to the launch in Norway on 25 January.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

None. However, the Norwegian Government have confirmed that, in line with long-standing bilateral arrangements with Russia, the launch on 25 January was notified in advance to the Russian authorities through diplomatic channels.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Child Witnesses

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the research findings from the project currently being conducted at the university of Leicester: "Evaluation of New Provision for Child Witnesses 1991".

Mr. Maclean: We expect to publish the report in the spring.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will outline the remit of the steering group chaired by his Department on children's evidence; and if he will list the membership of the group.

Mr. Maclean: The remit of the steering group on child evidence is as follows:

(a) to monitor the implementation of relevant legislation and Government initiatives;

(b) to provide a national forum for the resolution of problems relating to child evidence;

(c) to assess what further reforms might be necessary and to assess their viability; and

(d) to keep informed of new developments in the field.

The following are represented on the group:

Home Office—chairing the Group
Department of Health
Lord Chancellor's Department
Crown Prosecution Service
Association of Chief Police Officers
Association of Directors of Social Services
Social Services Inspectorate
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary.

Police Authorities

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are issued by his Department to the new police authorities in respect of *(a)* the number of full meetings that should be held annually and *(b)* what constitutes suitable accommodation for those meetings.

Mr. Maclean: None; these are matters for the members of the new authorities.

Secure Training Centres

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made in the setting-up of secure training centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Outline planning permission has been granted in respect of the site at Cookham Wood, and a certificate of lawful use for the redevelopment of the site at Gringley. We intend to issue invitations to tender for the design, construction/refurbishment, management and finance of STCs on those sites within the next few weeks. Invitations to tender for the remaining sites will follow as soon as possible thereafter.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of asylum seekers from Bosnia who have arrived in the United Kingdom since the beginning of the civil war in Bosnia; and how many have *(a)* been given full political refugee

status, *(b)* been given exceptional leave to remain, *(c)* been rejected and *(d)* still await his decision.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information on asylum applications by nationals of the former Yugoslavia, and on decisions made, for the period 1 January 1992 to 31 December 1994, is given in the table; data for Bosnians are not separately identified in the statistics. As at 31 December 1994 an estimated 5,990 applications for asylum from former Yugoslavs were outstanding.

In addition to consideration of asylum applications, the Government have, under arrangements announced in November 1992 and June 1993, offered to receive 1,000 particularly vulnerable individuals from the former Yugoslavia and their close dependants. As at 31 January 1995, 842 particularly vulnerable individuals and 1,142 dependants had arrived under these arrangements. Prior to this, 68 sick and wounded ex-detainees from Bosnia arrived in September 1992.

Decisions[1] on applications[1] received for asylum from nationals of the former Yugoslavia in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, 1992 to 1994

Number of principal applicants

	1992	*1993*	*1994*
Asylum applications[2]	5,635	1,830	1,385
Decisions[3]	130	175	1,765
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	*	—	25
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain[4]	*	55	1,265
Refused asylum and ELR—after full consideration	—	10	375
Refused under para 180F[5]	65	80	75
Refused on safe third country grounds[6]	60	30	25

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5, with '*' = 1 or 2.
[2] Figures exclude information on applications made overseas.
[3] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same year.
[4] Usually granted for a year in the first instance, subject then to further review.
[5] For failure to provide evidence to support the asylum claim within a reasonable period, including failure to respond to invitation to interview to establish identity—para. 101 prior to 26 July 1993.
[6] Refused on the grounds that the applicant had arrived from a safe third country.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers and dependants have made applications to enter the United Kingdom since 1 January 1990; what percentage of these have made their application other than on arrival at the port of entry; how many have had their cases determined and, of these, how many have been refused and deported; and how many are awaiting determination of their cases.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information on applications, decisions, and removals, excluding dependants, by location of application, for the years 1990 to 1994 is given in table A. Table B gives the available information on applications and decisions, including dependants for the years 1990 to 1994.

At 31 December 1994—the latest date for which information is available—an estimated 55,255 applications for asylum, excluding dependants, were outstanding.

Figures for those persons and their dependants granted entry clearance abroad to seek asylum in the United Kingdom are not separately identified in the statistics.

Table A: Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, decisions[1], and removals[1] (including voluntary departures), excluding dependants, by location of application

	1990		
	Port	*In-country*	*Total*
Applications for asylum	9,005	17,200	26,205
Total decisions[2]	—	—	4,025
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	—	—	920
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain	—	—	2,400
Refused asylum and exceptional leave[3]	—	—	705
Removals (including voluntary departures)[4]	—	—	—

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[2] A breakdown of decisions into port and in-country is not available for 1990 and 1991.
[3] Includes refusals on safe third country grounds and those under para. 180F—(para. 101 prior to 26 July 1993) of the immigration rules.
[4] Removals figures for 1990 and 1991 are not available.

Table A: Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, decisions[1], and removals[1] (including voluntary departures), excluding dependants, by location of application

	1991		
	Port	*In-country*	*Total*
Applications for asylum	9,030	35,815	44,840
Total decisions[2]	—	—	6,075
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	—	—	505
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain	—	—	2,190
Refused asylum and exceptional leave[3]	—	—	3,380
Removals (including voluntary departures)[4]	—	—	—

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[2] A breakdown of decisions into port and in-country is not available for 1990 and 1991.
[3] Includes refusals on safe third country grounds and those under para. 180F—(para. 101 prior to 26 July 1993) of the immigration rules.
[4] Removals figures for 1990 and 1991 are not available.

Table A: Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, decisions[1], and removals[1] (including voluntary departures), excluding dependants, by location of application

	1992		
	Port	*In-country*	*Total*
Applications for asylum	7,675	16,930	24,605
Total decisions[2]	9,005	25,900	34,900
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	410	705	1,115
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain	7,500	7,825	15,325

Table A: Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, decisions[1], and removals[1] (including voluntary departures), excluding dependants, by location of application

	1992		
	Port	In-country	Total
Refused asylum and exceptional leave[2]	1,095	17,375	18,465
Removals (including voluntary departures)[4]	960	385	1,345

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[2] A breakdown of decisions into port and in-country is not available for 1990 and 1991.
[3] Includes refusals on safe third country grounds and those under para. 180F—(para. 101 prior to 26 July 1993) of the immigration rules.
[4] Removals figures for 1990 and 1991 are not available.

Table A: Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, decisions[1], and removals[1] (including voluntary departures), excluding dependants, by location of application

	1993		
	Port	In-country	Total
Applications for asylum	7,320	15,050	22,370
Total decisions[2]	8,315	15,090	23,405
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	330	1,260	1,590
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain	5,605	5,520	11,125
Refused asylum and exceptional leave[3]	2,375	8,310	10,690
Removals (including voluntary departures)[4]	1,235	585	1,820

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[2] A breakdown of decisions into port and in-country is not available for 1990 and 1991.
[3] Includes refusals on safe third country grounds and those under para. 180F—(para. 101 prior to 26 July 1993) of the immigration rules.
[4] Removals figures for 1990 and 1991 are not available.

Table A: Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, decisions[1], and removals[1] (including voluntary departures), excluding dependants, by location of application

	1994		
	Port	In-country	Total
Applications for asylum	10,230	22,600	32,830
Total decisions[2]	7,150	13,840	20,990
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	300	530	825
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain	1,785	1,875	3,660
Refused asylum and exceptional leave[3]	5,065	11,435	16,500
Removals (including voluntary departures)[4]	[5]1,190	790	1,985

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[2] A breakdown of decisions into port and in-country is not available for 1990 and 1991.
[3] Includes refusals on safe third country grounds and those under para. 180F—(para. 101 prior to 26 July 1993) of the immigration rules.
[4] Removals figures for 1990 and 1991 are not available.
[5] The 1994 port removal figure is provisional pending a final analysis of 1994 data.

Table B Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, and decisions[1], including dependents. 1990 to 1994

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Applications for asylum	38,195	73,400	32,300	28,000	41,100
Total Decisions[2]	6,055	9,140	59,050	36,890	28,210
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	1,590	800	1,900	2,860	1,380
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain	3,610	2,950	21,680	15,480	5,480
Refused asylum and exceptional leave[3]	855	5,390	35,480	18,550	21,350

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[2] A breakdown of decisions into port and in-country is not available for 1990 and 1991.
[3] Includes refusals on sale third country grounds and those under para. 180F—para. 101 prior to 26 July 1993—of the immigration rules.
1. Removals figures for 1990 and 1991 are not available.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost to public funds of the provision of housing, schooling, health care and social security provision in respect of asylum seekers and their dependants currently in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The average estimated cost in income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit of maintaining an asylum applicant and any dependants is around £100 per week. No recent estimates of the other costs are available.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest estimate available to him of the number of asylum-seekers currently seeking entry to the European Union.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information covering the period 1 January 1992 to 30 November 1994 is given in the table.

Applications[1] received for asylum in member countries of the European Union, including dependants, 1 January 1992 to 30 November 1994

	1992	1993	1994 (January to November)
Austria	16,200	4,400	—
Belgium	17,700	26,900	13,145
Denmark	13,900	14,400	6,150
Finland	3,600	2,000	745
France[2]	27,500	26,500	23,570
Germany	438,200	322,600	115,025
Greece	—	—	—
Ireland	250	—	—
Italy	2,500	1,100	[3]530
Luxembourg	120	—	—
Netherlands	20,300	35,400	48,410
Portugal	200	—	—
Spain[2]	11,700	12,600	9,660
Sweden	83,200	37,600	17,355
United Kingdom[4]	32,300	28,000	35,800

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[2] Application figures for France and Spain exclude dependants.
[3] Information for application figures received in Italy for 1994 are only available for the period 1 January 1994 to 31 March 1994.
[4] United Kingdom figures have been adjusted to include dependants.

Departmental Research

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish his Department's research into *(a)* intensive probation, *(b)* reconviction rates of offenders, *(c)* remand decisions and offending while on bail and *(d)* the experience of settlement among refugees.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The four research reports have now all been completed and are currently being prepared for printing or publication. I expect them to be published in March and April 1995.

Prisoners

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on the chief inspector of prisons' recommendations in respect of the use of secure accommodation to facilitate the control of category C prisoners.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. George Howarth, dated 3 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about progress on recommendations made by the Chief Inspector of Prisons in respect of the use of secure accommodation to facilitate the control of category C prisoners.

The Chief Inspector recommended that the Prison Service should develop a coherent policy towards the control of prisoners in category C prisons making better use of the secure accommodation in some establishments.

In response to the Chief Inspector's recommendations, a review of control in category C prisons has been completed. This included an analysis of the effects of the population mix on the risk to good order in category C prisons and an assessment of the control capability of each individual category C establishment. The research identified that the presence of a high proportion of certain types of category C prisoners will make serious disturbances more likely.

New allocation procedures for category C prisoners were introduced in October 1994 to take account of this analysis. All category C prisons were placed in one of four groups depending on the combination of design and architectural features affecting control capability. Guidelines on the maximum proportion of potentially disruptive prisoners have been set for each group of prisons and the population mix at each establishment is now regularly monitored.

We have also increased the provision of cellular accommodation within the category C estate at Moorland (310 places), Buckley Hall (350 places) and Guys Marsh (120 places). No new dormitory or cubicular accommodation will be commissioned for category C use. This is in line with the Chief Inspector's recommendations.

Probation Service

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average case load of probation officers in England and Wakes on *(a)* 30 June 1992, *(b)* 30 June 1993 and *(c)* 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information relating to 31 December is published annually in "Probation Statistics England and Wales"—Table 12.2 of the 1993 issue—copies of which are in the Library. The average case load, excluding community service orders, per main grade officer was 23.3 on 30 June 1992 and 21.5 on 30 June 1993; information for 1994 is not yet available. The figures for probation officers are not on the basis of whole-time equivalents of established main grade probation officers on field work duties excluding temporary and trainee officers.

Police Grants

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from chief constables with regard to the impact of the grants formula for policing on police numbers.

Mr. Maclean: Nineteen chief constables have made representations.

Prison Service

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *302*, when he plans to take the decision on whether the director general should be offered an extension of his contract.

Mr. Howard: When I am ready to do so.

WALES

Average Earnings

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the average earnings in Wales expressed as a percentage of the United Kingdom average in 1992, 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Average gross weekly earnings[1] in Wales, as a percentage of the United Kingdom average

Year	*Percentage*
1992	89.2
1993	89.0
1994	89.7

Source:
New earnings surveys, Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
Note:
[1] Data relate to full–time employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey pay period was not affected by absence.

Less-favoured Areas

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals there are to extend the area of land classed as less-favoured areas in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *713*, with regard to the running costs of non-departmental public bodies, if he will give the indicative management running costs for non-departmental public bodies expressed as a proportion of the total budget for each, in each year from 1993–94 to 1995–96.

Mr. Redwood: The figures are set out in the following table. The NDPBs listed have a wide variety of functions

and levels of programme and capital expenditure. These differences are reflected in the table.

NDPB running costs as percentage of total budget

Executive NDPB	*1993–94 (out-turn figures)*	*1994–95 (forecast out-turn figures)*	*1995–96 (Plans)*
Housing for Wales	1.8	1.5	1.7
Sports Council for Wales	—	11.2	11.6
Arts Council of Wales	—	12.7	11.7
Further Education Funding Council	1.9	1.7	1.5
Higher Education Funding Council	0.6	0.6	0.7
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	8.6	6.9	6.5
Land Authority for Wales	17.3	11.8	9.5
National Museum of Wales	58.9	80.9	74.8
National Library of Wales	64.8	48.4	41.9
Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments	97.3	88.4	88.3
Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting	77.7	83.0	97.4
Wales Youth Agency	100.0	100.0	100.0
Welsh Language Board	—	47.8	57.5
ACAC	—	20.4	15.5
Wales Tourist Board	27.9	29.0	27.9
Welsh Development Agency	10.0	8.9	8.6
Development Board of Rural Wales	13.1	11.9	15.9
Countryside Council for Wales	43.9	43.2	—[1]

[1] Under review

Health Promotion Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will place in the Library documents listing the principal points of the agreement reached with the previous chief executive by the Health Promotion Authority for Wales relating to the overpayment and underpayment of disputed travel and subsistence claims;

(2) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales in relation to *(a)* those payments for travel and subsistence to the previous chief executive classified as questionable in the district auditor's report and *(b)* the exclusion of those payments from the settlement between the authority and the previous chief executive;

(3) what representations he has received from the chairman of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales to write off sums arising from claims relating to those payments categorized as questionable in the district auditor's report in respect of travel and subsistence claims made by *(a)* the chief executive and *(b)* other officers;

(4) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales concerning the out-of-court settlement it has reached with the previous chief executive; and what arrangements he has made for the publication of the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net sums owed and repaid by the previous chief executive.

Mr. Redwood: There were various claims between Dr. Catford and the Health Promotion Authority for Wales. Following examination of these claims it was agreed that Dr. Catford owed the authority £2,100; this has now been paid. These were matters for the authority to resolve, and the chairman has not needed to consult me. I know of no proposals to write off any moneys.

Nursery Contract

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all those organisations who gave advice on the formulation and specification of the tender advertising the three-year nursery contract in 1993 eventually won by Acorn Nurseries.

Mr. Redwood: The specification was based on advice from central and local government departments concerned with child care and the organisation of nursery care. This included guidance on the establishment of nurseries from the Office of Public Service and Science; advice from the Welsh Office social service inspectorate and Cardiff city environmental health office, and the experience of other Government Departments which had established nurseries. The specifications also required that South Glamorgan county council's regulations on child care be adhered to as a minimum standard.

Planning Policy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *907*, what meetings he has held with planning inspectors; and what representations he has received from planning inspectors concerning the issuing of planning policy guidance notes equivalent to PPG9s 13, 15, 23 and 24 of the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Redwood: The issuing of planning policy guidance was one of the items discussed at my meeting with the chief planning inspector and the Welsh inspectors on 21 November 1994.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *907*, what further consideration he has given to issuing equivalent planning policy guidance notes to PPGs 9, 13, 15, 23 and 24 of the Department of the Environment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Draft reviewed guidance is being prepared at present on a number of topics.

Generic Prescribing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the average percentage level of generic prescribing for general practitioner fundholders in each family health services authority in the year immediately prior to their switch into fundholding.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the average percentage figures for generic prescribing for each family health services authority in *(a)* 1989, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* 1991.

Mr. Redwood: For each family health services authority area, the percentage of prescriptions prescribed generically is given in the following table. Data for years prior to 1991 are not readily available centrally.

Family health services authority

	Quarter ending 31 December 1991
Clywd	41
Dyfed	43
Gwent	40
Gwynedd	37
Mid Glamorgan	41
Powys	40
South Glamorgan	44
West Glamorgan	42

Whitland Bypass

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to add a second carriageway to the Whitland bypass scheme.

Mr. Redwood: There are no proposals to add a second carriageway to the Whitland bypass. The design capacity of a single carriageway two-lane highway is more than adequate to cater with the anticipated traffic flows for the foreseeable future.

Implant Research Technology

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answers of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *422*, if he will give the date on which the application for assistance under the small firms merit award for research and technology programme was received from Meditech Research, later renamed Implant Research Technology; when it was approved; what was the relevance of the professional and research qualifications of the appraisal team advising him on the application; what specialist advisers in *(a)* other Government Departments, *(b)* the research establishments and *(c)* the Patent Office were consulted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Welsh Office received an entry form for the 1992 SMART stage 1 competition from Mr. Alan Jones on 24 April 1992. The project's objective was to produce a small microchip device that could be implanted into damaged areas of the body at nerve junctions, thus offering a treatment for diseases such as muscular dystrophy and Parkinson's disease. Mr. Jones's company, Meditech, had not at that time been formed.

Because no member of the competition judging panel had formal qualifications in biotechnology, specialist professional advice was sought from the DTI's biotechnology unit, then located at the Laboratory of the Government Chemist. The Patent Office was also consulted. Both departments had SMART liaison officers through whom these requests for advice were routinely channelled.

Having considered the comments received and acknowledging the technological risks involved, my officials recommended to the Department of Trade and Industry that an award be made. This recommendation was assessed and accepted and a formal offer of support was sent from the DTI to Mr. Jones on 7 September 1992.

The purpose of the SMART competition—stage 1—is to enable individuals and small companies to undertake practical feasibility studies of innovative projects which cannot attract full private sector financial support because of the high degree of risk involved. Naturally, some feasibility studies, as in the case of Mr. Jones's implant project, demonstrate that the difficulties are greater than originally anticipated and therefore preclude immediate commercial exploitation.

Artificial Limb and Appliance Service

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the estimated value of the work carried out by the artificial limb and appliance service attributable to the *(a)* Rookwood, *(b)* Morriston and *(c)* Wrexham centres.

Mr. Redwood: The Welsh artificial limb and appliance service estimates the cost of providing services from each of their centres in 1994–95 as:

	£ million
a. Rookwood[1]	6.622
b. Morriston	1.096
c. Wrexham	2.419

[1]In addition to local services, the Rookwood centre provides a number of specialist services on an all-Wales basis.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been spent on purchasing artificial limb and appliance services from Clatterbridge hospital by purchasers in Wales in each of the past three years.

Mr. Redwood: The Welsh artificial limb and appliance service has purchased an artificial limb service from Clatterbridge hospital to the following amounts in the last three financial years:

	£
1991–92	28,000
1992–93	23,000
1993–94	16,000

Dental Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the current estimates for the numbers of *(a)* community, *(b)* salaried and *(c)* self-employed conventional contract dentists, employed in each family health services authority.

Mr. Redwood: The information is given in the following table.

Staff employed at 30 September 1994

Family Health Service Authority	*[1]Community dentists*	*[2]Salaried dentists*	*[3]General Dental Practitioners*
Clwyd	14.9	—	117
Dyfed	13.8	1	105
Gwent	13.1	—	138
Gwynedd	9.4	1	66
Mid Glamorgan	7.0	—	125
Powys	6.6	1	33
South Glamorgan	13.6	—	133
West Glamorgan	10.8	—	132
Wales	89.2	3	849

[1] Whole-time equivalents. Staff employed by NHS trusts have been included within the FHSA area in which they are situated.
[2] Numbers of staff.
[3] Numbers of principals and assistants.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales

what proposals he has for the employment of more *(a)* salaried and *(b)* community dentists in 1995–96 in each family health services authority in Wales; and what estimate he has made of the average value of the surgery premises and equipment to be provided in association with each additional dentist.

Mr. Redwood: I have made available an extra £2.5 million for dental services in the community. All health authorities in Wales have been invited to bring forward proposals to improve the quality and availability of dental services in their area.

Family health services authorities can apply, at any time, for my permission to employ salaried dentists. The costs of such appointments are met from central funds.

The value of surgery premises and equipment required for any appointment in either the community, or salaried, dental service will vary depending on the type of location of the premises and the amount of additional equipment required, if any.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the average value of the surgery accommodation and capital equipment associated with each *(a)* community, *(b)* salaried and *(c)* self-employed dentist in each family health services authority.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not available centrally.

Geriatric Care

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library an anonymised version of the independent professional review carried out on 6 October 1994 by geriatric consultants relating to the standard of geriatric care on ward B6, University hospital of Wales, Cardiff; what arrangements he has made to ensure adequate monitoring of the improvements ordered by the review team during the six-months period specified by the review; and what visits have taken place or correspondence exchanged with South Glamorgan health authority in relation to the review team's recommendation.

Mr. Redwood: No. Independent professional review reports on clinical complaints are prepared at the request of the independent medical officers for complaints—MO(C)—in Wales. The MO(C)s make their recommendations direct to the organisation concerned and to the director of public health medicine, who is required to review the implementation of any necessary changes or actions within six months.

Civil Service Creche, Gabalfa

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 10 January, *Official Report*, column *50*, what arrangements he has made for the reopening of the civil service creche at Gabalfa, Cardiff, in early February; what arrangements he has made for advertising the tender for the full three-year contract; and what decision he has made in relation to legal action.

Mr. Redwood: The civil service nursery, Gabalfa, will reopen on Monday 6 February under the management of South Glamorgan county council.,

An invitation to tender for a three-year contract will be placed in the press before the end of March 1995.

Decisions have not yet been made about legal action.

TREASURY

Capital Gains

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals had capital gains in excess of *(a)* £500,000, *(b)* £100,000, *(c)* £50,000, *(d)* £6,000 and *(e)* less than £6,000 in the latest year for which figures are available.

Sir George Young: The relevant information is given in the table for liabilities in 1991–92, the latest year for which a breakdown by size of gains is available.

Number of taxpayers

Net chargeable gains in excess of	*Individuals*	*Trustees*	*Total*
£500,000	1,100	200	1,300
£100,000	6,400	1,000	7,400
£50,000	13,000	1,700	14,700
£5,500[1]	79,200	10,800	90,000

[1] £2,750 for trustees.

I regret that precise estimates are not possible for the number of individuals with net gains below the capital gains tax annual exempt amount of £5,500 in 1991–92.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the countryside sites in Wiltshire and Hampshire for which publicity regarding public access has been given following conditional exemption from inheritance tax in the years since 1984–85.

Sir George Young: As with any matter concerning the tax affairs of the individual the normal rules of taxpayer confidentiality prevent me from giving details of individual cases where conditional exemption from inheritance tax, or its predecessor, capital transfer tax, has been granted.

However, the owner of land which is conditionally exempt from inheritance tax is required to publicise the agreed public access arrangements. The heritage advisory agencies will discuss with each owner the appropriate level of publicity. Each case is considered individually and all relevant factors, including the existing level of publicity, are taken into account. Although the extent of public access may already be widely known, for example where substantial public access is already given, the owner will generally be required to take specific steps to publicise the public access arrangements, for example by advertising the access arrangements in a local tourist office or town hall. For new designations of scenic land in England, owners are required to display at all points of entry on to their land map boards showing the agreed public access.

In addition, in England and Wales, a member of the public who wants information about public access in a specific area can contact the footpaths officer of the appropriate county council or national park authority. Details of footpaths and public access also often appear on maps and in commercial publications, particularly for major tourist areas.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the European Commission's review of the transitional VAT regime.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* The Government received the official version of the Commission's report on 30 January, and will make their views known once it has been carefully considered.

SCOTLAND

Chemical Weapons, Hebrides

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to confirm that chemical weapons dumped in the deep waters off the Hebrides after the second world war pose no potential future risk to Scottish fishermen.

Sir Hector Monro: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces.

Public Bodies

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people sit on two or more non-departmental public bodies in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current number of non-departmental public bodies operating in Scotland; and what is their combined annual budget.

Mr. Lang: A table showing the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department at 1 April 1994 will be contained in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1994", which will be published in the next few days. The information contained in that publication also shows the total expenditure of each of those bodies.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons sit on non-departmental public bodies in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1994", which will be published in the next few days, shows the number of appointments which are made to non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department as at 1 September 1994.

Crimes Against Children

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* allegations, *(b)* prosecutions, *(c)* convictions, *(d)* not proven verdicts and *(e)* not guilty verdicts there were for crimes against children such as would be relevant to section 67 of the Children (Scotland) Bill in the latest year for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available.

Elderly People

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of frail elderly people receiving care *(a)* in the community, *(b)* in NHD hospitals, *(c)* in local authority residential homes, *(d)* in voluntary sector residential or nursing homes and *(e)* in private sector residential or nursing homes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* Central Government do not make such long-term projections as to the number of people who will receive these forms of care. This is a matter for individual local authorities and health boards, and will be dependent on community care policy at a local level.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Credits Guarantees

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his reply of 31 January, what were the numbers of contracts awarded to each named company for the years concerned which were supported by export credits guarantees.

Mr. Needham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 31 January, *Official Report,* columns *612-13.*

Chemical Weapons Convention

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with representatives of British industry with the aim of facilitating Her Majesty's Government's ratification of the chemical weapons convention; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* My Department has on-going discussions with representatives of the chemicals industry on the preparations needed to enable the UK to ratify and implement the chemical weapons convention. On 31 January, a discussion document was published, to canvass the views of all industrial sectors likely to be affected by the implementation of the convention in the UK. Copies of the document have been placed in the Library of the House.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the area cost adjustment factor as a percentage of the standard spending assessment for each year from 1990–91 to 1995–96.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested is set out in the table:

Year	*Contribution of area cost adjustment factor £ million*	*Total standard spending assessment £ million*	*Area cost adjustment as percentage of total Percentage*
1990–91	837	29,805	2.8
1991–92	1,152	35,587	3.2
1992–93	1,315	37,993	3.5
1993–94	1,332	36,622	3.6

Year	Contribution of area cost adjustment factor £ million	Total standard spending assessment £ million	Area cost adjustment as percentage of total Percentage
1994–95	1,563	37,848	4.1
1995–96	1,658	38.743	4.3
(1995–96 excluding Metropolitan Police)	(1,556)		(4.0)

Notes:

[1] The apparent increase in share in 1995–96 is because the SSA for the receiver for the Metropolitan police was previously based o n his budget, as approved by the Home Secretary. This included those extra costs which, from 1995–96, are reflected in the area cost adjustment. Excluding this effects, the share fell slightly in 1995–96 from 4.1 per cent. to 4.per cent.

[2] The 1995–96 figures exclude a small element of area cost adjustment which is incorporated within the indicator "Pensions Expenditure" in the police SSA.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authorities have benefited from the area cost adjustment factor, and by how much, as *(a)* a total, *(b)* a percentage of the overall standard spending assessment and *(c)* an amount per resident in each year since 1990–91.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the change in the area cost adjustment factor compared to the overall change in standard spending assessment for each year since 1990–91.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested is set out in the table:

Year	Percentage change in contribution of area cost adjustment	Percentage change in total standard spending assessment
1990–91 to 1991–92	37.7	19.4
1991–92 to 1992–93	14.1	6.8
1992–93 to 1993–94	1.4	-3.6
1993–94 to 1994–95	15.3	3.3
1994–95 to 1995–96	7.9	2.4

Notes:

[1] Until 1995–96, the SSA for the receiver for the Metropolitan police was based on his budget, as approved by the Home Secretary. This included those extra costs which, in 1995–96, are reflected in the area cost adjustment. Excluding this effect, the contribution of the area cost adjustment factor rose by only 1.3 per cent. in 1995–96.

[2] The 1995–96 figures exclude a small element of area cost adjustment which is incorporated within the indicator "Pensions Expenditure" in the police SSA.

[3] The percentage changes have been calculated on the basis of figures unadjusted for changes of function.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the value of bids he has received from local authorities in the Isle of Wight, Cleveland, Avon, Humberside and North Yorkshire for supplementary credit approvals in 1995–96 towards the cost of local government restructuring; and if he will name the local authorities involved and set out the amount of each bid.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested is set out.

SCA bids for 1995–96

	£
Isle of Wight	
Isle of Wight County Council	2,915,000
Avon	
Avon County Council	5,540,000
Bath City Council	1,853,000
Bristol City Council	9,160,000
Northavon District Council	751,000
Kingswood Borough Council	890,000
Wansdyke District Council	872,000
Woodspring District Council	5,040,000
Cleveland	
Cleveland County Council	4,475,000
Hartlepool Borough Council	3,787,000
Langbaurgh on Tees Borough Council	12,146,000
Middlesborough Borough Council	2,717,000
Stockton on Tees Borough Council	6,440,000
North Yorkshire	
North Yorkshire County Council	1,771,000
Ryedale District Council	160,000
Selby District Council	935,000
City of York Council	1,186,000
Humberside	
Humberside County Council	11,336,000
Beverley Borough Council	1,119,000
Boothferry Borough Council	1,222,000
Cleethorpes Borough Council	796,000
East Yorkshire Borough Council	1,491,000
Glanford Borough Council	800,000
Great Grimsby Borough Council	1,332,000
Holderness Borough Council	731,000
Hull City Council	6,276,000
Scunthorpe Borough Council	928,000
Total	86,669,000

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which bodies he has consulted under section 17 of the Local Government Act 1992 on *(a)* the Cleveland (Structural Change) Order, *(b)* the draft Avon (Structural Change) Order, *(c)* the draft Humberside (Structural Change) Order, *(d)* the draft North Yorkshire District of York (Structural Change) Order and *(e)* the draft Selby District (Boundary Change) Order.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: In all cases, we have consulted:

the principal local authorities;
Association of County Councils;
Association of District Councils;
Local Government Management Board;
Local Government Staff Commission (England);
National Association of Local Councils.

We have consulted the police authorities and the Lord Lieutenants on *(a)* to *(c)* and will do so on *(d)* when the relevant articles are prepared.

The Association of Chief Police Officers was consulted on *(a)* and *(b)* but has since indicated that it no longer wishes to be consulted.

We have consulted Ordnance Survey on *(b)* where maps are needed to illustrate new ward boundaries.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received the Local Government Commission's recommendations for Humberside and for

Avon; on what date he announced his decision on these recommendations; and on what date he announced his intention to modify the recommendations to create new county areas.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Local Government Commission's recommendations for Avon and Humberside were received on 20 December 1993 and 24 January 1994 respectively. The Government's decisions were announced on 25 October 1994.

The structural change orders will make provision for county areas, coterminous with the new district areas which will have unitary district councils, in order to satisfy the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972; but those county areas will not have county councils and, with the exception of Bristol, will be deemed to be part of adjoining counties for ceremonial purposes.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has consulted the Audit Commission on the draft Humberside and Avon (Structural Change) Order.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: No.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in what circumstances during the preliminary period a transfer authority will be legally allowed to prepare any budgets or plans, or to consult any person for purposes connected with the exercise on or after the reorganisation date, of any functions transferred by a structural or boundary change order made under section 17 of the Local Government Act 1992.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The orders will remove the duties of transferor authorities where they relate to years subsequent to the reorganisation date. The orders will not prevent the authorities from continuing to work on these functions in co-operation with their successors.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what will be the entitlement of an existing minerals and waste planning authority affected by structural change under the Local Government Act 1992 to be consulted during the preliminary period by a shadow unitary authority, or by a continuing authority granted corresponding powers regarding the future of minerals and waste planning in the area of the new authority;

(2) what will be the entitlement of an existing structure planning authority affected by structural change under the Local Government Act 1992 to be consulted during the preliminary period by a shadow unitary authority, or by a continuing authority granted corresponding powers regarding the future of strategic planning in the area of the new authority;

(3) what will be the entitlement of an existing social services department affected by structural change under the Local Government Act 1992 to be consulted during the preliminary period by a shadow unitary authority, or by a continuing authority granted corresponding powers regarding the future provision of social services in the area of the new authority;

(4) what will be the entitlement of an existing local education authority affected by structural change under the Local Government Act 1992 to be consulted during the preliminary period by a shadow unitary authority, or by a continuing authority granted corresponding powers regarding the future provision of education in the area of the new authority.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Authorities which are inheriting functions will have the responsibility to prepare for the exercise of those functions. Those authorities, and the current holders of those functions, will have the duty to work and co-operate to ensure the successful transfer of functions.

Departmental Research Documents

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a list showing for each of the past five years all research documents produced by his Department for *(a)* ministerial or *(b)* other use, showing the dates on which each piece of research was commissioned and completed and indicating whether each such piece of research was made publicly available.

Mr. Gummer: It would entail disproportionate cost to provide all the information requested since it is not at present held centrally. However, the Department's research is commissioned under the presumption that the results will be published. The RESLINE database, available through the London research centre, lists over 800 research reports and publications. Details of research programmes and sources of further information are given in the Department's contribution to "The Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology" and in the Department's annual research market paper and research report which are available in the Library of the House.

Natura 2000 Network

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date he will publish the draft lists of sites to be proposed to the European Commission as the United Kingdom contributions to the Natura 2000 network; if he will give the estimated monthly average of candidate sites of special areas of conservation to be published between now and June 1995; and on what date he expects to publish the name or names of the first candidate site or list of sites.

Mr. Atkins: I will shortly publish for consultation a draft list of areas. Following consultation, proposed special areas of conservation will be submitted to the Commission, as required by the directive. The list will be published.

Outside Contractors

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a list showing for each of the past five years *(a)* all outside bodies or individuals employed by his Department, *(b)* the date on which each outside body or individual commenced working for his Department, *(c)* the date on which each outside body or individual completed working for his Department, *(d)* the total amount paid to each outside body or individual, *(e)* what work each outside body or individual was asked to carry out, including specific titles of any reports, briefings or research commissioned and *(f)* whether each outside body or individual was recruited following a competitive interview or tendering process.

Mr. Gummer: The information is not held centrally by my Department and is obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

Council Tax

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes he proposes to make to the council tax to help people who are severely mentally impaired.

Mr. Curry: We have recently issued a consultation paper on amendments to council tax liability, discounts and exemptions regulations which includes a proposal to exempt from council tax a dwelling which is only occupied by a person or people who are severely mentally impaired. Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Library of the House.

Police, Wiltshire

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations have been made to his Department by (a) Wiltshire county council or *(b)* the new Wiltshire police authority concerning the level of police grant for 1995–96.

Mr. Jones: No representations have been made to the Department of the Environment by Wiltshire county council or Wiltshire police authority concerning the level of police grant for 1995–96.

Deprivation, London

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will rank each ward in Greater London by the degree and intensity of deprivation on the basis of the 1991 census.

Mr. Gummer: I am placing this information in the Library of the House.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those successful bidders in the first round of the single regeneration budget which had not, in every case, identified matching funding for the project or projects.

Mr. Curry: All successful bidders identified sources of funding for their schemes in addition to support from the single regeneration budget. Summaries of successful bids have been placed in the Library of the House. In addition, individual bids are available for inspection at the relevant Government offices for the regions, and copies of bids are available at a charge.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful local authorities and other bodies bidding in the first round of the single regeneration budget included in their submissions existing schemes and not new ones as required by the bidding guidance.

Mr. Curry: The bidding guidance for the single regeneration budget, published in April 1994, copies of which are in the Library of the House, set out the criteria to be followed by those bidding for support from the SRB for the financial year 1995–96. There was no requirement on bidders to specify whether the whole or part of their bid consisted of existing or new schemes. Paragraph 16 and annexe A of the bidding guidance stated that bids should show how SRB resources would reinforce or enhance main programmes and other existing public or private sector initiatives in ways which help the process of regeneration and secure value for money.

Waste, Manchester

Mr. Alred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had from the Greater Manchester waste regulation and disposal authority in regard to the allocation of capital resources; what reply he is sending; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* I wrote to the hon. Member on 2 February about this matter. A copy of my letter has been placed in the Library.

EMPLOYMENT

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies in his Department, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within his Department; how many of them publish periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked the chief executive of the Employment Service to write with a detailed response on these particular matters. More generally, the record shows that, making allowance for work load changes, there has been a continuing real-terms reduction in the ES's running costs since it became an agency, while its performance levels and impact on the labour market have increased. These are clear benefits arising from its management as an agency which have been combined with a real-terms fall in the Department's own running costs.

A recent evaluation of ES concluded that the establishment of ES as an executive agency had created a performance-driven organisation, clearly focused on achievement of its key objectives. The agency's performance against targets has improved significantly since its creation. For example, annual efficiency savings have risen from £13.6 million to £21.2 million over the period 1990–94 and the proportion of long-term unemployed people placed into jobs has increased from 14.9 per cent. to 28.2 per cent. over the same period. I will send the right hon. Member a copy of the report, a copy of which is also available in the Library.

Letter from M.E.G. Fogden to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 3 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about certain specific costs incurred by the Employment Service (ES) since it was established as a Next Steps Agency.

The ES Head Office is spread across eleven small to medium buildings, utilising property previously leased to the Department of Employment (ED) or Property Services Agency/Property Holdings. Each building is occupied under a commercial lease negotiated to meet changing operational requirements. Total rental costs are

currently £3.7 million, with planned reductions of at least 10% being achieved by the end of the 1995/96 financial year.

Following the establishment of ES, support staff (security, messengers and typing services) continued to be managed by the Manpower Services Commission (now ED). In April 1991 ES took responsibility for their own Head Office support grade staff, with the exception of those based in London. This involved the pro rata transfer of 42 employees from ED. The number now employed in the support area has reduced to 36.

The ES does not publish periodical journals for external audiences.

Although the ES has no executive cars, we do have approximately 1800 vehicles which are used by individuals or groups of ES employees in order to achieve savings over alternative methods of transport.

The ES utilises the logo developed by the ED and as such does not incur any design costs. In addition, the ES does not use any specially designed corporate stationery.

In an effort to present a professional appearance and assist the public in identifying ES staff in open plan offices, a corporate tie or neck scarf is made available to employees. The cost of setting up this initiative in 1991 was £125,000. Ongoing costs relating primarily to staff turnover and wear and tear amount to £15,000 pa.

I hope this is helpful.

Incomes

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list the percentage of men in part-time employment who earn less than *(a)* £4.15 per hour, *(b)* £5.53 per hour and *(c)* £5.88 per hour; and if he will list the average weekly earnings, including and excluding overtime, for part-time workers in (i) Great Britain and (ii) Scotland for the categories (1) manual employment, (2) non-manual employment and (3) all men;

(2) if he will list the percentage of women in part-time employment who earn less than *(a)* £4.15 per hour, *(b)* £5.53 per hour and *(c)* £5.88 per hour; and if he will list average weekly earnings, including and excluding overtime, for part-time workers in (i) Great Britain, (ii) Scotland and (iii) the regions of Scotland for the categories (1) manual employment, (2) non-manual employment and (3) all women.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information on part-time employees is limited because many part-timers whose weekly earnings are below the tax threshold are excluded from the new earnings survey. I will write to the hon. Member with the information which is available, and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by the Department or agency.

Miss Widdecombe: The Employment Department and its agency, the Employment Service, have central budgets to deliver the training and development priorities set by their management boards.

In the last 12 months, ES has funded one training course costing in excess of £5,000 per capita head: certified "NetWare" engineering training, delivered by Azlan Training. The total cost was £25,000—£6,250 per trainee. Its objective is to enable the staff responsible for ES's computer network to become fully competent and qualified in installing and managing it. Evaluation is through examination and by line management.

The Department and ES have devolved authority for other training needed in individual commands to local management. Information on this is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Career Services

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many local authorities had not been informed by 30 January of the name of the successful bidder for providing career services for their area from April 1995.

Mr. Paice: No local authorities have yet been notified of the names of successful bidders because no contracts have yet been concluded. Both preferred and unsuccessful bidders in the south-east region were notified on 17 January 1995 and preferred and unsuccessful bidders in other areas were notified on 20 December 1994.

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *726*, if he will list the names of the organisations which have been awarded the contract for careers services in local authority areas where the decision has been announced.

Mr. Paice: This information is not yet available as no contracts have been awarded. Preferred bidders have been selected for post-tender negotiation and the contracts will be announced after negotiations are complete.

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many bids to provide the careers service for the metropolitan borough of Solihull had been received by the advertised closing date in the prospectus for the provision of career services from April 1995.

Mr. Paice: This information is commercial in confidence.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what facilities were available to *(a)* Government and *(b)* training providers to check the changing credit rating assessments of TECs;

(2) who offered credit rating assessments of TECs;

(3) when the Government checked the credit ratings of TECs.

Mr. Paice: The Government do not check the credit ratings of training and enterprise councils. They keep in touch with TEC's own statements of their financial position through regular scrutiny of their management accounts, which they receive on a commercial in confidence basis.

The Government TECs' annual statutory accounts, which they are required to lodge with this Department by 31 July and with Companies House by the end of the January following each financial year.

Until the date by which the statutory accounts have to be lodged at Companies House, they are commercial in confidence. But as the Department receives them, copies are placed in the Library.

Disabled People

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many disabled people were placed in work and/or training as a result of intervention by placing assessment counselling teams and disability employment advisers in the last year *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in West Yorkshire.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mrs. Alice Mahon, dated 3 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of disabled people placed in work and/or training as a result of the intervention by Placing, Assessment and Counselling Teams and Disability Employment Advisers.

In Great Britain, 13,400 disabled people were placed into jobs by Placing Assessment and Counselling Teams (PACTs) between 1 April 1993 and 31 March 1994.

West Yorkshire is covered by three PACTs. These are Leeds PACT, part of Wakefield, Barnsley and Doncaster PACT, and most of Bradford, Calderdale and Kirklees PACT. In those PACTs, 476 disabled people were placed into jobs by Disability Employment Advisers between 1 April 1993 and 31 March 1994.

9737 disabled people started vocational training between 1 April 1993 and 31 March 1994 in Great Britain following referral by PACTs. Of these, 460 were in the PACTs covering West Yorkshire.

I hope this is helpful.

Benefits (Refusal)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been refused benefit under section 28(5) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefit Act 1992, on the grounds that they have refused a job because of the rate of pay.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Ms Harriet Harman, dated 3 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of people who have been disqualified from receiving unemployment benefit on the grounds that they have refused a job because of the rate of pay.

Unfortunately we do not collect the information you have requested. We record the number of adjudication decisions for all the main entitlement questions arising on claims, including those following refusal of employment, but we do not record the reasons for the decisions.

Information on the number of adjudication officers' decisions, and disallowance rates, is contained in a published document entitled "Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions". Copies of this document are held in the Library of the House. The latest available information relates to the quarter and a half year ending 30 September 1994.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the number of people who will be refused benefit by virtue of their answer to question 18 of the draft jobsearch plan.

Miss Widdecombe: The jobsearch plan is not designed as a test of availability for work but will enable jobseekers to set out information to help them prepare for the discussions with an employment adviser about their jobseekers agreement.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to issue guidance about question 18 of the draft jobsearch plan.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will issue guidance to Employment Service staff on the use of the jobsearch plan in helping jobseekers prepare for discussions about their jobseeker's agreement.

Training

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many fewer trainees will go on to the training for work scheme following the reduction in expenditure on training for work announced in the Budget.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* In 1994–95 we expect 280,000 starts on training for work and 100,000 ex-trainees to obtain jobs. In 1995–96, we expect 225,000 to start on the programme and that 104,000 ex-trainees will get jobs.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Cash Limits

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on cash and running cost limits for the Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland departmental services, the independent living fund and certain national agricultural schemes for 1994–95.

Sir John Wheeler: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, it is proposed that the cash limit for class XVI, vote 1—the Northern Ireland Office—will be increased by £1,580,000 from £927,325,000 to £928,905,000.

The cash limit which covers Northern Ireland departmental services will be increased by £23,360,000 from £3,812,842,000 to £3,836,202,000. This increase reflects the take-up of entitlement to end-year flexibility on capital and departmental running costs and other technical changes.

The cash limit for the independent living fund will decrease by £1,554,000 to reflect a reduction in provision earlier in the year.

The cash limit covering national agricultural capital grant schemes and certain assistance for production, marketing and processing and the fishing industry will decrease by £486,000 from £10,515,000 to £10,029,000 mainly as a result of technical changes.

The combined gross running cost for the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments will be increased by £18,476,000 from £787,031,000 to £805,507,000. This reflects the take-up of £13,324,000 of end–year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *730-34*, and an increase of £5,152,000 from the Department of Social Security, in respect of agency services. Of the revised gross running cost provision, £177,699,000 is for the NIO and £627,808,000 is for NI Departments.

These changes will not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Armed Forces (Murder Charges)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the members of the armed forces charged *(a)* with murder and *(b)* with manslaughter as a result of offences committed while on duty in Northern Ireland during the last five years; and what was the outcome in each case.

Sir John Wheeler: The information is as follows:

Name of person charged	*Charge*	*Month and year charged*	*Outcome*	*Names of deceased*
Lee Clegg	Murder	July 1991	Guilty	Martin Peake and Karen Reilly
Richard Elkington	Murder	February 1992	Not Guilty	Fergal Caraher
Andrew M. Callaghan	Murder	February 1992	Not Guilty	Fergal Caraher
Mark D. Wright	Murder	September 1992	Judgement Reserved	Peter McBride
James Fisher	Murder	September 1992	Judgement Reserved	Peter McBride

Soldiers (Firearms Offences)

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many soldiers were convicted during the last 10 years in Northern Ireland *(a)* charged with and *(b)* convicted of offences involving firearms;

(2) in what format information relating to the number of soldiers *(a)* charged with and *(b)* committed with offences involving firearms in Northern Ireland in the last 10 years is available to him; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 31 January 1995]:* The available information is as follows:

Members of the armed forces charged with firearms offences in Northern Ireland 1990 to 1994

Name of person charged	*Main charge*	*Month and year charged*
Clegg[1]	Murder	July 1991
Aindow[1]	Attempted Murder	July 1991
Boustead[1]	Attempted Murder	July 1991
Elkington[1]	Murder	February 1992
Callaghan[1]	Murder	February 1992
Wright[1]	Murder	September 1992
Fisher[1]	Murder	September 1992
Clarke[1]	Attempted Murder	October 1993
Hansell	Possession of Firearms	January 1994

[1] *The above members of the armed forces were charged with firearms offences as well as murder or attempted murder.*

Members of the armed forces convicted of firearms offences in Northern Ireland 1990 to 1994

Year	*Scheduled offences*		*Non-scheduled offences*		*Number of persons receiving custodial sentence*	
	Regular Army	*UDR/RIR*	*Regular Army*	*UDR/RIR*	*Regular Army*	*UDR/RIR*
1990	1	1	0	0	1	1
1991	1	0	0	7	0	1
1992	0	1	1	0	0	0
1993	0	1	1	0	0	0
1994	0	1	0	2	0	1

Note:
These figures refer to primary offences.

Maryfield Secretariat

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the annual Christmas party was held by the Maryfield secretariat; how many members of the Northern Ireland *(a)* judiciary and *(b)* legal profession were present; and who was responsible for the invitation list.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: No annual Christmas party is held by the Anglo-Irish secretariat at Maryfield. The Irish side of the secretariat offers seasonable hospitality on its own behalf.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Training Courses

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list each training and tuition course with a total cost exceeding £5,000 paid for by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his agencies during the last 12 months, showing the title and objectives of each course, the name of the organisations engaged, the total cost of each course, a summary of the responsibilities of staff members taking part and the process for course evaluation by his Department or agency.

Mr. Waldegrave: In respect of the Department, this information can be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

In respect of the agencies, the matter has been delegated to them and I have asked the chief executives to reply direct.

Letter from Guy Stapleton to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 3 February 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your question about training and tuition courses as this is a matter within my operational responsibility. The information is as follows:

Title: Milk Quota Management—Computer Development (Phase 1A) User Training.
Objectives: To train users in a new computer system developed for the Milk Quotas Scheme.
Organisation: Triad Special Systems Limited.
Total Cost: £6,786+ VAT.
Staff: 2 managers (1 HEO and 1 EO) plus 7 clerical staff in the Agency's new Milk Quotas section. Tuition provided over a period of 18 days during January 1994.
Evaluation: This form of training is usually considered as part of the project costs of setting up a new computerised system and was paid for out of funds specifically designated for the project. Evaluation of the training will form part of the evaluation exercise for the success of the project as a whole. An initial assessment has been made by management of the ability of individual members of staff to effectively carry-out and operate the range of functions available on the computer system.
Title: Team Building.
Objectives: To provide training, using a range of simulated exercises, both in the classroom and out-of-doors, with the aim of building team-work and leadership skills. The course was tailored to the express needs of the particular team identified in a pre-course discussion. A secondary objective was to pilot this kind of training to see if it was an approach the Agency wished to use more widely.
Organisation: Group 4 Securitas Training Limited.
Total Cost: £7,460 + VAT. The course was residential (from 13 to 16 June 1994) and costs included full board and transport to and from the course by mini-bus provided by Group 4.
Staff: 4 managers (1HEO and 3 EOs), plus 8 clerical staff from Crops Division, Non-Food Set Aside Scheme Section.
Evaluation: Course assessment sheets were completed by each attendee immediately after the event and there was follow up evaluation after three months by questionnaires to attendees and their line managers. Because this was a pilot exercise, four members of the line management for this area of work, returning from a meeting in the locality, arranged to call in to observe the course in progress. A report was also made by the team leader after the event.
Title: Certified Network Engineer.
Objectives: To attain the standards required for professional certification.
Organisation: Azlan Limited.
Total Cost: £5,225 + VAT.
Staff: Assistant Manager, PC Network (responsible for supporting the Agency's networked communications systems.)
Evaluation: By external examination for a recognised qualification.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 3 February 1995:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about training and tuition courses held by the Agency over the last twelve months.

CVL has not held any course which meets the criteria set out in your question in the last twelve months.

Letter from Dr. P. T. Stanley to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 3 February 1995:

Information about training and tuition courses costing in excess of £5000

The Central Science Laboratory (CSL) has been an executive agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) since 1 April 1992. In the past twelve months the Agency has not paid for any single training or tuition course costing over £5,000. However there has been one composite training contract involving several similar courses in the area of IT.

In terms of IT, CSL took the decision to move towards using Microsoft Word for Windows as the Agency's corporate software package. The objective of the training was to bring staff up to the appropriate level of competence to use the new software. The training requires individuals having access to a workstation and therefore each course is often restricted to six delegates at a time. A commercial training company, Genysis Training, was employed for a period of three months to provide the training on-site at the Agency's Slough laboratory at a total cost of £11,456. The six courses making up the composite training package and numbers of staff participating were as follows:

Basic wordprocessing: 57
Advanced wordprocessing: 28
Basic spreadsheet: 87
Advanced spreadsheet: 46
Presentation graphics: 26
E-mail: 43

The responsibilities of staff receiving training ranged from scientists working on R & D and service contracts to business support staff from areas such as finance, personnel and marketing.

Courses were evaluated through the completion of questionnaires by the staff at the end of training courses and by interviews conducted by the CSL Training Officer.

Letter from A. M. Kerr to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 3 February 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Question about expenditure on training and tuition courses in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate.

In the last 12 months the Directorate has not run a course where the total cost exceeded £5,000.

Letter from Dr. J. M. Rutter to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 31 January 1995:

The Minister of State has asked me to reply to your question about training and tuition courses paid for by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate during the last 12 months, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

During this period there were no training or tuition courses paid for by the Directorate with a total cost exceeding £5,000.

Letter from Dr. J. M. Walsh to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 3 February 1995:

As you know, the Minister has asked that I write to you direct with the answer to your question. In 1994 there were no courses run by this Agency that had a cost in excess of £15,000. However, there were two courses exceeding a total cost of £5,000. Details are as follows:

ADAS New Entrants Conference. The objective was to welcome new staff (consultants and administrative) to ADAS and to provide them with a clear insight into the role and work of the Agency. Seventy-four staff attended and the duration of the conference was three days (including time for travel). All tuition was undertaken by ADAS staff except for one session which was organised by the company New Direction. Staff were given an evaluation sheet at the end of the training which sought views of participants relative to the detailed objectives. The total cost for this course was £12,650.

National Training Conference for Dairy Consultants. This was a conference for ADAS Consultants working in the Dairy sector. Of the twelve sessions in the conference, eight were provided by ADAS and four were undertaken by a range of outside organisations. These were the Danish Dairy Board, Reading University, Veepro, Holland, Scottish Agricultural College, the Midland Bank plc and Liverpool University. The objective was to widen the consultants' horizons into the innovative and developing areas of the UK Dairy industry. Eighty-one staff attended and the duration was two days (including travel). There was an evaluation at the end of the conference seeking delegates views relative to the detailed objectives. The total cost was £8,000.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the absenteeism rates for *(a)* the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and *(b)* the Intervention Board in 1994.

Mr. Waldegrave: Responsibility for this matter is delegated to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and Intervention Board, and I have asked the chief executives to reply to the hon. Gentleman direct.

Letter from Guy Stapleton to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 3 February 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your question about the absenteeism rate in the Intervention

Board during 1994 as this matter is within my operational responsibility.

We monitor sick absence rates in this Agency on a financial year basis to correspond with some of the other key performance measures and targets which are published in our Annual Report. The sick absence rate in the Intervention Board for the calendar year 1994, calculated as a percentage of total man years, was 5.7 per cent. The figure represents an estimate of working days lost through sick leave, which has been drawn from our payroll data, and excludes absences for maternity leave and special leave.

Letter from Dr. J. M. Rutter, to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 30 January 1995:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about the absenteeism rate in the Veterinary Medicines Directorate for 1994, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

In terms of absenteeism related to sickness, the figure was 3.1 per cent.

Pesticides (Allergies)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies his Department has carried out regarding the possible connection between the use of pesticides and allergies.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 2 February 1995]:* None. However, we require companies to submit data in support of the approval of pesticides including those relating to potential allergic effects of those pesticides. These data are thoroughly evaluated.

PRIME MINISTER

Act of Union

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Prime Minister if the treaty as well as the Act of Union with Scotland 1707 remains in full force in all its provisions, with particular reference to the Church of Scotland, the legal system for Scotland, the Scottish universities and Scottish banking together with the Union with England and for England, the Church of England, and the Union with Scotland.

The Prime Minister: The Acts of Union of 1706 and 1707 which ratified the treaty of Union remain in force as a basic legal framework for the Union of Scotland and England. Within that framework the distinctiveness of the various areas mentioned has been preserved and developed in the light of changing circumstances.

TRANSPORT

A564

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the concrete overlay surface on the A564 Foston-Hatton-Hilton bypass.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. However, I did make a site visit on the 11 November to see the concrete overlay surface. I understand that construction of the concrete overlay has now been completed and that a testing programme to assess the concrete will be undertaken over the next few months.

Nuclear Waste

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to inspect the ship safety standards in respect of the imminent shipment of high-level radioactive waste from the United Kingdom to customer countries; and what plans he has to inform countries along the route of the ship's journey from France to Japan.

Mr. Norris: There are no imminent shipments of high-level radioactive waste from the United Kingdom. It would be for the French authorities to take appropriate steps about shipments from France.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contingency plans his Department has drawn up for possible accidents involving high-level radioactive waste during transport.

Mr. Norris: Contingency plans for accidents during the carriage of high-level radioactive and irradiated fuels have been drawn up by the United Kingdom operators concerned. The Department is satisfied that those plans are adequate.

Transport Research Laboratory

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans the Transport Research Laboratory has to recruit staff during 1995; at what grade and discipline; what are the costs of recruitment exercises planned; and whether they will be undertaken by the private sector.

Mr. Norris: The Transport Research Laboratory is preparing its business plan for 1995–96 and, as part of this process, is reviewing the skills and resources required to meet the demands of its customers.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff by grade and discipline were given early retirement in 1994 by the Transport Research Laboratory; what was the total costs of these early retirement measures; and what is his estimate of the number and costs of early retirement planned for 1995.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is given in the following table.

Discipline	*Grade*	*Number*
Scientific staff	Assistant Scientific Officer	2
	Scientific Officer	5
	Higher Scientific Officer	8
	Senior Scientific Officer	10
	Grade 7 (Principal Scientific Officer)	6
	Grade 6	3
Total Scientific staff		34
Technical staff	Professional and Technical Officer	2
	Higher Professional and Technical Officer	2
	Librarian	1
	Photographer	1
Total Technical staff		6
Administrative staff	Telephonist	1
	Administrative Officer	8

Discipline	*Grade*	*Number*
	Personal Secretary	
	Executive Officer	6
	Higher Executive Officer	2
		2
Total Administrative staff		21
Industrial staff	Craft	20
	Non-craft	28
Total Industrial staff		48
Total staff		109

The total cost of these early retirements which are being made in 1994–95 is £3.8 million. The Transport Research Laboratory has no plans for further early retirements.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated staff surplus *(a)* in his Department as a whole and *(b)* at the Transport Research Laboratory.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is not yet available.

Transport Police

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the jurisdiction of the British Transport police.

Mr. Watts: I have received a number of representations on British Transport police jurisdiction, from the chief constable of the force, the British Transport Police Federation and the Association of British Transport Police Superintendents and from 15 individual BTP officers.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of the British Transport police force has been fully trained to Home Office standards.

Mr. Watts: All members of the British Transport police force are fully trained at Home Office establishments to the same standards as Home Department police officers.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current strength of the British Transport police force.

Mr. Watts: Some 2,137 police officers and 429 civilians as at 31 December 1994.

Speed Limits

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research indications there are about the effect of a reduction of speed on the casualty and fatality rate.

Mr. Norris: International studies have indicated that a 1 mph reduction in average speed reduces accidents by 5 per cent. Recent United Kingdom work has confirmed this finding in a wide range of circumstances. Twenty mph zones have reduced casualties by 56 per cent. and child casualties by 75 per cent. Further studies have shown how the enforcement of speed limits can provide significant reductions in casualties, particularly fatalities.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in which local authority areas 20 mph speed limits are in operation.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend has granted consents to 20 mph speed limit orders in the areas covered by the local traffic authorities listed:

Avon
Barnet
Barnsley
Berkshire
Birmingham
Bradford
Cambridgeshire
Camden
Clwyd
Cumbria
Devon
Dorset
Dudley
Durham
East Sussex
Enfield
Essex
Gateshead
Gloucestershire
Hammersmith and Fulham
Hampshire
Haringey
Hertfordshire
Hillingdon
Hounslow
Humberside
Kent
Kingston Upon Thames
Knowsley
Lancashire
Leeds
Lincolnshire
Manchester
Merton
Norfolk
North Yorkshire
Northamptonshire
Northumberland
Nottinghamshire
Oxfordshire
Richmond Upon Thames
Rotherham
Sandwell
Sefton
Sheffield
Shropshire
Solihull
Somerset
South Humberside
Southwark
Staffordshire
Suffolk
Sunderland
Surrey
Sutton
Tower Hamlets
Walsall
Warwickshire
West Sussex
Wolverhampton

Air Algerie

Mr. Morely: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *98*, when he expects his Department to

announce the results of the inquiry being conducted into flights by Air Algerie aircraft from Coventry airport in November and December 1994.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* My Department expects to complete its inquiry as soon as possible.

Shipping Casualties

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the occasions when he has ordered a formal investigation into a shipping casualty under sections 55 and 56 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1970 when no casualties or loss of life has occurred as provided for in section 32 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1979;

(2) if he will provide a reference for a comprehensive list of, or list in the *Official Report*, the occasions since 1979 when he or his predecessors have ordered a formal investigation into shipping casualties as provided for in sections 55 and 56 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1970, stating in each case any loss of life arising from the incident.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* From January 1979, formal investigations were ordered on the following occasions:

Commencement Date	*Vessel(s) Name(s)*	*Type of Casualty*
June 1979	MV Hero	Loss of vessel with loss of one life
July 1979	MVF Boston Sea Ranger	Loss of vessel with loss of five lives
December 1979	MVF Do It Again	Loss of vessel with loss of two lives
November 1980	MV Pool Fisher	Loss of vessel with loss of 13 lives
January 1981	MV Kurdistan	Breaking in two of vessel; no loss of life
March 1983	RNLB Solomon Browne and MV Union Star	Loss of both vessels with loss of 16 lives
July 1983	MV Grainville	Loss of vessel with loss of three lives
November 1983	MV European Gateway MV Speedlink Vanguard	Collision resulting in loss of one vessel with loss of six lives
October 1985	Auxiliary Barque Marques	Loss of vessel with loss of 19 lives
April 1987	MV Herald of Free Enterprise	Capsizing of vessel with loss of 188 lives
October 1987	MV Derbyshire	Loss of vessel with loss of 44 lives
March 1990	MFV Boy Andrew	Stranding and loss of vessel. No loss of life.

Gibraltar Airport

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration has been given to according Gibraltar airport the status of a regional airport.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* Gibraltar airport is regarded as a regional United Kingdom domestic airport.

Mayday Call (Olympic Airways)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport over what districts of London Olympic Airways Boeing 737 Flight 265 from Athens travelled on 17 January from the moment of its Mayday call until its touchdown at Heathrow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 30 January 1995]:* The Mayday call was made by Olympic Airways flight OA265 while it was in a holding "stack" at 18,000 ft over East Sussex. The aircraft entered the London area travelling north-east from Reigate to the Hither Green area where it turned to a westerly heading for the approach to Heathrow. This route was necessary to enable the aircraft to descend for landing.

Cash Limits

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to change his Department's cash limits and running costs limits; and what proposals there are to change the cash limit and running costs limit of passenger rail services and the Office of the Rail Regulator for 1994–95.

Dr. Mawhinney: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

(i) The cash limit for class VI, vote 1—Highways Agency—will be increased by £243,000 from £2,142,659,000 to £2,142,902,000. The increase in the cash limit arises from adjustments in funding relating to the formation of the Highways Agency between this vote and class VI, vote 2.

(ii) The cash limit for class VI, vote 2—administration and transport services—is reduced by £1,733,000 from £251,045,000 to £249,312,000. The reduction is made up of transfers to class VI, vote 1, £243,000, and to class VI vote 7, £1,670,000, offset by a transfer from class 1, vote 1, £180,000, for bounty payments to the Merchant Navy reserve.

(iii) The cash limit on class VI, vote 4—Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency—is reduced by £4,000,000 from £179,003,000 to £175,003,000, made up of transfers of £2,461,000 to class VI, vote 7 and £1,539,000 to class VI, vote 8 for consultancies.

(iv) The cash limit for class VI, vote 5—local roads and transport—is reduced by £2,150,000 by from £592,573,000 to £590,423,000. This reflects a reduction in the cash limit to this vote of £3,625,000 offset by the take up of end year flexibility entitlement as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *729-34*.

(v) The cash limit for class VI, vote 7—passenger rail services—will be increased by £52,131,000 by transfers from class VI, vote 2, £1,670,000, class VI, vote 4, £2,461,000, and from non–voted expenditure from £1,747,500,000 to £1,799,631,000. The additional provision is required for sums due to British Railways Board in respect of public service obligations and for costs of administrative and miscellaneous services.

(vi) The cash limit for class VI, vote 8—Office of the Rail Regulator—will be increased by £1,539,000 from £7,712,000 to £9,251,000. The additional provision is made up of a transfer from class VI, vote 4 for consultancies offset by additional appropriations in aid.

(vii) The Department of Transport local authority capital cash limit has been increased by £3,732,000 from £297,358,000 to £301,090,000. This reflects the take up of end year flexibility entitlement as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *729-34*.

(viii) The Department of Transport running costs limits has been reduced by £3,755,000 from £417,993,000 to £414,238,000 and the Office of the Rail Regulator running

costs limit has been increased by £1,514,000 from £6,170,000 to £7,684,000.

The overall increases will be offset by transfers or charged to the reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Coaches

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *483*, how he proposes to judge the effect of the experiment intended to reduce risk and to cut casualties by banning coaches in the right-hand lane of carriageways with more than two lanes.

Mr. Norris: The effects will be judged by examining any changes in the accident data over a two-year period with respect to the historical accident patterns, and in particular the manoeuvres that vehicles were making prior to collision and the proportions of coach accidents involving other vehicles of various classes, including heavy lorries.

M18

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the concrete overlay surface between junctions 5 and 6 of the M18.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Tim Devlin, dated 3 February 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the concrete overlay surface between junctions 5 and 6 of the M18.

A number of trial concrete surfacings were constructed as part of the concrete overlay section of the M18.

The preliminary assessment being undertaken by the Transport Research Laboratory is giving encouraging results. A Report on the full assessment is due to be published later this year.

Stoke-Derby Link Road

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much money has been expended on the Stoke-Derby link road to date; and when he expects it to be completed;

(2) how much money has been spent on the public inquiries that have been held in to the whole route for the Stoke-Derby link road;

(3) what assessment he has made as to whether the Doveridge bypass is necessary to complete the Stoke-Derby link road;

(4) if the Stoke-Derby link road forms an integral part of the roads programme;

(5) how much money has been spent in the preparation for the Doveridge bypass as part of the Stoke-Derby link road.

Mr. Watts: Schemes forming the Stoke-Derby link road, including Doveridge bypass, are an important part of the roads programme and we intend to complete the link road as funds permit. To date, £110.4 million, excluding VAT and land compensation payments, has been spent on preparing and building the link road. It is not possible to disaggregate the cost of public inquiries included in that total without disproportionate effort; but of the total, £3.5 million excluding VAT has so far been spent in preparing Doveridge bypass for construction. We are giving urgent consideration to the possibility of taking forward the Doveridge bypass as a design, build, finance and operate scheme.

Buses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he proposes to take in respect of monopolies in the bus industry and reduced competition among bus companies.

Mr. Norris: It is for the Director General of Fair Trading to initiate any such action.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 253**

SESSION 1994–95

23rd January—3rd February 1995

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This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

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Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

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Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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